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# The avant-garde and resident Korean film-making: Kim Sujin and the Shinjuku Ryozanpaku

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## Abstract

*The plays and films of Kim Sujin (1954– ) and his company Shinjuku Ryozanpaku attest to the variety of styles employed in recent works by resident Korean artists in Japanese literature and theatre. The appearance of his plays and films is connected to the changing identities of resident Koreans, especially since the 1980s. Kim makes use of political theatre performances of the earlier period to magnify and to remake into art the experiences of resident Koreans in Japan. As such, his works mobilize the legacy of his antecedents in Japanese theatre as well as the past experiences of resident Koreans. Instead of enacting an essential Korean ethnicity or culture onstage or through films, Kim inclines toward denoting migration, hybridity and being situated as betwixt and between. By doing so, his works depict the distinct niche occupied by resident Koreans in Japan, which distinguishes them from both the Koreans on the mainland and the Japanese.*

## Keywords

Koreans in Japan  
Japanese cinema  
Japanese theatre  
Kim Sujin  
Shinjuku Ryozanpaku

Numerous styles of film are employed by resident Korean (*zainichi kankokujin/chōsenjin*) film-makers in contemporary Japan. Kim Sujin (1954– ) and Chong Wi Shin (1957– ), for example, use both realistic and non-realistic styles, and their films are thus quite innovative and groundbreaking.<sup>1</sup> Both Kim and Chong began their careers in theatres and were largely influenced by the Japanese and non-Japanese counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. Especially significant to them were antecedents such as Kara Juro, Satoh Makoto and Terayama Shūji, who, as David Desser (1988: 173) argues, rejected ‘realism as a theatrical mode, and the ideology which underlies it’. As such, their works have an affinity with avant-garde theatre, which is understood by Peter Eckersall (2006: xiv) as an ‘attack on the status of art as autonomous in the bourgeois society’. The avant-garde theatre, according to Eckersall, also has the following general characteristics:

- An interest in everydayness and making the world into art
- Corporeality and a concern with the body and flesh
- The use of materials and forms essential to artistic practice; it reveals or displays those forms as art
- A privileging of experience and communal acts of participation
- It is systematic and manifesto-like, but also spontaneous (Eckersall 2006: xiv–xv)

1. I have, as is customary, put Korean and Japanese family names first in this article.

2. See the Ryozanpaku website, <http://www5a.biglobe.ne.jp/~s-ryo/> (accessed 19 December 2007). This aspect of Ryozanpaku was also emphasized by actress and staff member Watarai Kumiko in my interview with her on 31 August 2007.

Kim Sujin and his theatre company, Shinjuku Ryozanpaku, also carry the self-proclaimed mission of 'reviving the story/the romantic' (*monogatari/roman no fukken*), and their works carry a strong sense of romanticism and pathos.<sup>2</sup> This is also why Chong Wi Shin, Kim's one-time collaborator, is able to write avant-garde and more realistic screenplays. Kara, Satoh, Kim, and Chong also share an outlook that views critically Japan's pre-war colonialism and post-war racial discrimination. Kim's works are not meant to legitimize the two Koreas, nor are they a mere extension of political activism carried out by resident Koreans. His works, while frequently ambiguous, are in part oriented toward discovering and making claim to the innocence, beauty and vulnerability as well as the complex identity formation and history of the resident Koreans. In this, these plays and films become, using Lisa Yoneyama's words on other memory formations in post-war Japan, 'a site where contestatory representations of Japan's colonial history could be enunciated, thereby providing [...] the possibility of forging new alliances, questions, and visions that might exceed the boundaries of ethnicity and nationality' (Yoneyama 1999: 154). Kim and Chong make use of political theatre performances of the earlier period as a means through which to magnify and to remake into films the resident Korean experiences in Japan. As such, they reject a conflation of resident Koreans with the Koreans in Korea or with the Japanese as well as a totalizing national identity. As I will discuss in my article, the discarding of a singular national identity and seeing themselves as hybrids of different national cultures has been especially marked in the resident Korean culture of the 1980s and since. Resident Koreans' works in theatre and films was a harbinger of this new identity formation by resident Koreans during the last few decades. The characters we encounter in their works make manifest the historical trauma and memory not of Koreans in general, but of resident Koreans in Japan. Resident Koreans were victimized by Japanese colonialism during the pre-war years and then through the discrimination that persisted after World War II, and their works are a testimony to those experiences. These two resident Korean artists, moreover, emphasize the aesthetic experiences that are connected to everyday life. In order to carry this out, they mobilize the legacy of their antecedents in Japanese theatre as well as the experiences of past generations of Koreans in Japan.

### **Shinjuku Ryozanpaku**

Shinjuku Ryozanpaku, a theatre company in Tokyo, made the news in the summer of 2007 when it was sued by its former playwright, Chong Wi Shin, when the group tried to perform *The Summer Since* (*Sorekara no natsu*), a play written by Chong in 1992. Ryozanpaku had to cancel the play but hit back when it in turn sued Chong, claiming that although Chong is named as the author of the company's plays, the plays were in fact collaboratively created by all the members of Ryozanpaku. This schism is unfortunate, for Chong has had a long-lasting and profound relationship with the avant-garde theatrical troupe. Kim Sujin, born and raised in Tokyo, founded Ryozanpaku together with Chong in 1986. Shinjuku Ryozanpaku takes its name from 'Shinjuku', an area in downtown Tokyo, and 'Ryozanpaku', meaning 'Robber's Den', from the Chinese classic

*The Marshes of Mount Liang* (aka *Water Margin, Outlaws of the Marsh* (*Shuǐhǔ Zhuàn*)). Shinjuku Ryozanpaku is not widely known in Japan, but it is one of the major *angura* (underground theatre) companies currently active in the theatre world there. Being a small *angura* company, it has no administrative staff; rather, its actors run the company from their small office above their studio Sky Full of Stars, the Theatre Fortress (Shibai Toride Mantenboshi), in central Tokyo.

Both Kim and Chong have also been active recently in film-making. Chong has, together with Sai Yōichi (Choi Yang Il), written three original screenplays and adapted two novels and one manga into screenplays, with Sai directing them all. Most famous among them are the resident Korean features *All under the Moon* (*Tsuki wa dotchi ni deteiru*, Sai Yōichi, 1993) and *Blood and Bones* (*Chi to hone*, Sai Yōichi, 2004). Chong has also adapted novels and manga into screenplays for other directors, the most highly praised in this regard being the film *Begging for Love* (*Ai o kou hito*, Hirayama Hideyoshi, 1998). Kim in turn directed his first feature film, *Through the Night* (*Yoru o kakete*, 2002), which was followed by *Dreaming of Light* (*Garasu no tsukai*, 2006). Since 1987, he has also been an active director and leader of the Shinjuku Ryozanpaku. While the two are no longer working together, they are actively engaged in both film-making and theatre production and are prolific in both regards.

The two are not the only resident Koreans who have been active in Japanese theatres. Tsuka Kōhei (1948–) has been a major playwright and director in Japan since the late 1970s. His comedies, which were commercially successful, are regarded by critic Senda Akihiko as representative of the successful Japanese theatre scene of the late 1970s and later (Senda Akihiko 1995: 160–75). Major resident Korean author Yu Miri (1968–) also began her writing career in theatre. Under the tutelage of her mentor, and boyfriend at the time, Higashi Yutaka, and his theatre company the Tokyo Kid Brothers, she wrote several successful plays. After leaving that company, she ran her own theatre company, the May-Youth Party (Seishun gogatsu tō), for several years.<sup>3</sup> Several plays and novels by Tsuka and Yu have been adapted as films, some critically acclaimed.<sup>4</sup>

Kim Sujin started his career in theatre with a short stint with Ninagawa Yukio and then spent eight years at Kara Juro's Situation Theatre (Jōkyō Gekijō). In 1986, he began his own company, the Madang Theatre Project (Engeki kikaku madang), with Chong Wi Shin, which evolved a year later into Shinjuku Ryozanpaku.<sup>5</sup> Kim has been a stage director for the company throughout, and has also acted at times, playing both small and large roles onstage. Chong, born in Osaka, was raised there by his parents, who were in the iron-scraping business. He graduated from the Tokyo Film School (Tokyo eiga gakkō), headed by the late film director Imamura Shōhei. He started his career in theatre, however, and was initially a member of the Black Tent (Kuro tento) company, led by Satoh Makoto. Both the Situation Theatre and the Black Tent are known in Japanese theatre history as early *angura* companies, producing an independent, low-budget, radical form of theatre. Kara and Satoh, two major playwrights and theatre directors who became successful in the 1960s, are still very active.<sup>6</sup> Satoh's major play, *My Beatles* (*Atashi no beatles*), makes use of the Komatsugawa Incident of 1958, in which a young resident Korean

3. Kim directed Yu's company in the production of her play *Coffin of Sun Flowers* (*Himawari no hitsugi*) in 1991.
4. There are ten film adaptations of Tsuka's works, the most notable being *Fall Guy* (*Kamata kōshinkyoku*, dir. Fukasaku Kinji, 1982), and three film adaptations of Yu's works, one being a South Korean film, *Family Cinema* (*Kazoku cinema*, dir. Park Chul-Soo, 1998).
5. 'Madang' means 'public square' in Korean.
6. On Kara's works in general and his fictional work *Letters from Sagawa* (*Sagawa-kun kara no tegami*) in particular, see Mark Morris (2007).

7. The full English translation of this play is in David G. Goodman (2003: 193–223). For Goodman's discussion of the Komatsugawa Incident as the basis of this play, see Goodman (2003: 180–87).
8. Lee Reisen recalls her life as a resident Korean, her marriage to Kara Juro, and her acting career in her memoirs (Reisen 1999). See also Tsuruki Jun's biography (2000) of Lee.
9. For Chinese reviews of their Shanghai performances, see Seto Hiroshi (1993). Lee Yun-Taek says that among the Japanese plays he saw in South Korea, Ōta Shōgo's play and *Legend of Mermaids* were the best (Nishidoh Kōjin 2005: 161).

high-school student, Li Jin Wu, killed a Japanese female student. The play is a fantastic tale in which a character based on Li meets and holds conversations with the four members of the Beatles.<sup>7</sup> Both the Situation Theatre and the Black Tent actively assigned main roles to resident Korean actors. Situation Theatre's heroine was always played by Lee Reisen, who was Kara's wife at the time, and the late actress Kim Kum-ja was a member of the Black Tent before she transferred to the Ryozanpaku with Chong.<sup>8</sup> As Peter Eckersall (2006: 38) writes, 'relating to the avant-garde formation of *angura* (in the late 1960s) was the fact that it arose as an important site of cultural displacement and political activism'.

Chong wrote seven plays for the Ryozanpaku, and he often appeared onstage in minor roles. Kim directed all of those plays. Possibly reflecting Kim's Korean background, the Ryozanpaku also worked closely with South Korean theatre companies such as Koripe, which is led by its director and playwright, Lee Yun-Taek. Chong, on his own, resumed writing plays in 1999 and also started directing them. Since then, as of 2007 he has written seven plays and directed them all. Ryozanpaku, since Chong's departure, has been staging plays by other writers, in particular relying on works by Kim's mentor, Kara Juro. The controversy of authorship notwithstanding, Kim and Chong, together and separately, have created an amazing array of works on-screen and in theatres. Their works are at times hauntingly beautiful and daring, attesting to their originality and creativity. Their works are especially significant in that they carry marks of mobility, deterritoriality and identity that reflect their authors' standing as resident Koreans creating art in Japan. This essay will address some issues in these authors' plays and connect them to themes in Kim Sujin's films.

## 1. One Thousand Years of Solitude

Kim and Chong's two major works of collaboration are *One Thousand Years of Solitude* (*Sen-nen no kodoku*) and *Legend of Mermaids* (*Ningyo densetsu*). Written by Chong and first directed onstage by Kim in 1988 and 1990, respectively, these plays have been produced by Ryozanpaku several times over the past decades. The company has performed the two plays not only in Japan but also overseas in cities such as Shanghai, Seoul and Essen in Germany, and they received rave reviews in Shanghai.<sup>9</sup> It is unfortunate that the ongoing dispute between Shinjuku Ryozanpaku and Chong is preventing the company and Chong from performing these works again onstage.

I will here discuss some aspects of the play *One Thousand Years of Solitude* (hereafter called *Solitude*) that situate the work within the postcolonial diaspora. While its dialogue is altogether quite coherent, it includes many dreamlike scenes in which it is not always clear how the characters who appear onstage relate to each other. Nevertheless, the characters are clearly drawn, and the audience can easily grasp and sympathize with their circumstances.

The performance available on VHS videocassette is largely faithful to Chong's published play. The play, as well as Kim's staging of it, emphasizes the main characters as migrants and travellers, as people whose origins lie elsewhere. In this, it is similar to *Legend of Mermaids*, a story about a resident Korean family (Chong Wi Shin 1990). The heroine of *Solitude* is a young woman named Ageha (swallowtail butterfly), and the play



includes her ex- and current boyfriends, Kakeru and Hikaru. In an early scene we see Kakeru selling his ownership of Ageha to Hikaru, an exchange that situates Ageha as their lover as well as their possession. Ageha stays in the compound of her house, where her only passion is to clean a glass case that holds her namesake, a swallowtail. In that sense, 'swallowtail' in the play is both a captivator and a captive. Ageha has a deranged mother who constantly cries 'Mansei!' (*banzai* in Korean), thereby situating the heroine as a resident Korean. In the play, frequent references are made to the place 'across the river' (*kawa mukō*); an implication is that the place is actually Korea and the 'river' refers to a strait between Japan and Korea. Kakeru tells Hikaru that he himself paid money to bring Ageha from 'across the river'. Ageha's journey across borders is emphasized not only through dialogue but also in the form of scroll lantern pictures of a butterfly crossing the sea and the land, shown twice during the play.

Despite her deprived circumstances, Ageha is nevertheless reluctant to return 'across the river'. She says that despite her present unhappiness, she will stay put, willing to wait forever for someone who will love her and polish her glass case with her; hence the title *One Thousand Years of Solitude*. With this person, she dreams of making herself a home and being greeted with the words 'Welcome home' (*okaerinasai*). Indeed, it is with that phrase that the play ends, although the words are not addressed to Ageha. As such, there is a strong emphasis in the play on passage and resettlement. Ageha's owners/lovers, Kakeru and Hikaru, are themselves strangers in this town, and they constantly talk about leaving and going somewhere else.

Also frequently appearing in the play are the characters of an old woman, an older sister and a younger brother. They are constantly scared of a tiger (another Korean reference) and of being victimized by that animal. This sister is possibly a younger Ageha, in that she has high hopes and dreams of going across the river. This young girl from the past is not the only double of Ageha, as there are four other women who appear together in the shadow of a stage and whose names are all Ageha. Sometimes in chorus and sometimes separately, the four exchange words with the heroine, creating the effect of a split, fragmented identity. The heroine, although a captive herself, is the one who desires to keep her butterfly in a glass case. Instead of breaking the case and letting the butterfly out, her sole interest is in keeping it there and polishing the case. It is up to Hikaru, who is not from 'across the river' and is therefore possibly Japanese, to express a Chekhovian hope, to try to let the butterfly fly away and have the heroine move on.

Hikaru: 'The world is supposed to shine a lot brighter than does the glass case. As long as we keep crossing that river, we don't have to hold sacred some fragile thing. We don't need a glass case, and we don't need a suitcase. Whatever it may be, we must not deprive it of freedom.'

(Chong Wi Shin 1989: 171)

Another important aspect of *One Thousand Years of Solitude* is its obvious connection with Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.<sup>10</sup> Similar to this novel, the play has a strong aspect of magical realism. And

10. The cover of Chong's book published in Japan bears the title in English as 'A Thousand Years' Lonesomeness', but the Japanese title *Sen-nen no kodoku* obviously references the Japanese translation of the Márquez novel, *Hyaku-nen no kodoku*.

11. Satoh Makoto asked Chong to write the play to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Terayama's death in 1983. Satoh himself directed the play in 1993 (Chong Wi Shin 1994: 118, 130). Terayama's final film, *Farewell to the Ark* (*Saraba hakobune*, dir. Terayama Shūji, 1984) was based on *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, but García Márquez, after viewing the film, refused to give Terayama permission to use the title of his book (Steve Clarke 2003: 123–24).
12. This opening scene, which was shown in their performances in Shanghai, China, and also in Han-gan, South Korea, was particularly noted and praised by several critics. See Seto Hiroshi (1993: 3, 17–18, 27) and Lee Yun-Taek (2007).
13. The play was a revised version of Kara's earlier work, *Shōjo toshi* (*City of Young Women*, aka *Virgin City*), written and first performed in 1969 (Senda Akihiko 2007: 234).
14. On Kara's tent theatres, see Eckersall (2006: 63).
15. Satoh Makoto (1979: 140–43) writes about his travelling experiences with his Black Tent company during the 1970s in his collection of essays, *Engeki ronshū gankyū shaburi* (*Licking the Eyeballs: Collected Essays on Theatre*). There, Satoh discusses the significance of the *sasurau* (wandering)

as with magical realism in South American literature, what is recognized here is 'the workings of the unconscious, interventions of the inner mind on the perceptions of the external conscious, the external world' (Strecher 2002: 80). In representing the fantastic and in referencing the Márquez novel, Chong was considerably influenced by Terayama Shūji, another major avant-garde playwright of the 1960s and 1970s. Chong's Kishida Drama Prize-winning work was none other than the play titled *The Terayama* (*Za terayama*), which Chong describes as a collaborative work between himself, Satoh Makoto and Terayama (Chong Wi Shin 1994: 120).<sup>11</sup> The play, while mimicking Terayama's various motifs and styles, focuses on three men and two women, all of whom plan and dream about one day going to 'the other side' (*mukō*). 'The other side' is deliberately left ambiguous, the place possibly being either Japan or Korea. Chong's *Legend of Mermaids* also focuses on a family of Koreans who migrate to Japan. Kim's directing further emphasized the arrival and departure motifs by opening that play with the protagonists arriving in Japan (and onstage) in a boat.<sup>12</sup>

Kara Juro was another instigator of the radical performances of Ryozanpaku. In 1993, Ryozanpaku for the first time performed Kara's play *Call from the City of Young Women* (*Shōjo toshi kara no yobigoe*), which had originally been written and performed in 1985.<sup>13</sup> Ryozanpaku has repeatedly performed that play since, in Canada in 1996 and in New York in 1999. Since 2003, they have also repeatedly performed Kara's *Matasaburo of the Wind*, *Kara Version* (*Kara ban kaze no matasaburō*), a work that was originally written by Kara in 1974 and performed by his Situation Theatre in that year. Kara's dreamlike plays as well as his methods of production have had a huge impact on Ryozanpaku. Situation Theatre's *angura* style was quite radical in that they performed their plays in their red tent at unconventional venues such as the Hanazono Shrine in Tokyo, a style that has been replicated by Ryozanpaku.<sup>14</sup> While Ryozanpaku has a permanent headquarters in Tokyo, the company has also frequently put up their 'purple tent' (*murasaki tento*) à la Situation Theatre's 'red tent' (*aka tento*) for their performances. Satoh Makoto's company similarly toured all over Japan as the Black Tent theatre company.<sup>15</sup> The Ryozanpaku members, as did the company members of Kara and Satoh, usually put up their own stage, take it down after performances and transport their equipment on a truck to other cities. The Situation Theatre was also radical among *angura* companies in that it performed unconventionally in countries such as South Korea, which in the 1970s was still under military dictatorship, and Bangladesh as well as in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria, countries to which earlier Japanese theatre companies had rarely travelled.<sup>16</sup> Their 1972 performance in Seoul was unauthorized, and it was carried out at the invitation of Kim Ji-ha, who opposed the military regime (Nishidoh Kōjin 2005: 19). Such overseas productions, and Kara's and Satoh's critiques on modern Japanese history and national identities in their plays, are possibly what inspired resident Koreans such as Kim and Chong to work for them at the beginning of their careers. With this being the case, Mark Morris (2007: 19) is correct in ascertaining that 'Kara's most significant cultural legacy'

exists in 'a space of cultural activity between national identities that the radical *angura* theatre [...] [has] explored since the 1960s'. I will comment now on various aspects of Kim's two films and how they are connected to plays written by Chong and by Kara.

## 2. Films by Kim Sujin

Kim's first and second films, *Through the Night* and *Dreaming of Light*, were both produced in the main by Arton, a publishing firm in Tokyo owned by a resident Korean, Kaku Chang Yang. Kim and Kaku chose to audition the actors for the first film, and they required the applicants to submit an essay explaining their motivation. This proved an interesting experience for many resident Koreans and Japanese youngsters, as they recalled in interviews with journalist Fujii Seiji (2002).<sup>17</sup> It became an opportunity for them to reflect on what it means to be a resident Korean in modern Japan.<sup>18</sup> For the successful applicants, the making of the film proved to be even more of a learning process, as they had to play a large role in the film's production. Prior to shooting the film, they all stayed at a motel in the city of Gunsan, South Korea, to build a film set that replicated a Korean ghetto of 1950s Osaka. As the documentary on the making of the film attests, the Ryozanpaku staff/actors, such as Kobiyama Yōichi, played a huge role in the production of this film.<sup>19</sup>

*Through the Night* is largely faithful to the first half of the semi-autobiographical novel by Yan Sogil (Yang Sōg-il) (1997). In 1958, a large amount of iron was found in the ruins of a bombed-out military factory in central Osaka, right next to the Korean ghetto. When the first discovery was sold for a small fortune, a fierce scramble to illegally raid the compound at night and dig for the iron began. The young Korean men and women who did this are the main characters of the story. Of particular importance is a young Korean couple, Kim Yoshio (Yamamoto Tarō), who becomes the leader of one such group, and Hatsuko (Ryoo Hyoun-Kyoung), a girl who falls in love with him.

Kim's direction focuses on the river that separates the two main stages of the film, the ghetto and the factory ruin. The river becomes the main gateway into these two stages, and the film depicts a constant going to and fro between the two. The dialogue in the play *Solitude* constantly foregrounds a river that its main characters cross. Here, in this film, the movements across the boundary waters, which are often crisis-ridden, again function as a powerful trope of the lives of resident Koreans. Yoshio one day returns to this ghetto, his birthplace, on a boat. Taking this as a cue, the Koreans decide to use boats to carry and smuggle across iron ore that they have dug up.

The scenes on the river and the riverbanks, the scenes of departures and arrivals, are clearly the key moments in the film, as these are depicted in extended sequences. In these, Kim relies on close-ups and travelling shots to clearly show the faces of those on the boat and those who are left behind or waiting. He carefully shoots the faces of the crowd, baring the painful anticipation of those who are concerned as to whether their family members have returned safely or if the scavenging was successful. Such scenes are connected to the resident Koreans' experience of moving between Korea and Japan, a journey on which the fate or survival of whole

concept, an emphasis later made also by Chong Wi Shin as he underlines the concept as the main theme of his plays. See Chong Wi Shin (1995: 1–26).

16. Based on Kara's and Satoh's interests in other parts of Asia and Japanese colonialism, Nishidoh Kōjin situates their works as postcolonial. See Nishidoh Kōjin (2006: 62–63).
17. The process of making *Through the Night* is discussed by Kim, the novelist Yan Sogil, the screenwriter Maruyama Shōichi, and others in Maruyama Shōichi and *Through the Night* Production Committee (2002).
18. Kim had the support of other resident Koreans such as the author Yan and producer Kaku. In this, he was similar to Sai Yōichi when Sai made his first feature film on resident Koreans, *All under the Moon*, which was also based on an original novel by Yan Sogil. The producer in that instance was Lee Bongou. See Lee Bongou (1994). Lee's memoirs describe the making of this film. In it, he describes Kim Sujin and the Ryozanpaku as being at the centre of 'resident Korean culture' (*zainichi karuchā*) in Tokyo during the early 1990s. See Lee Bongou (2007: 71–77).
19. See the documentary *Yorukake: The Film Through the Night Day by Day* (*Yorukake: Eiga yoru o kakete no hibi*).



The documentary is included in *Through the Night*, 133 min. (Tōei, 2004), available on DVD. Kobiyama, an actor and playwright for Ryozanpaku, also began his career in theatre with the Situation Theatre. See Morris (2007: 18). Kobiyama and several other Ryozanpaku actors also appeared in a fantasy film *Ruts in the Rain* (*Ame no wadachi*, dir. Itō Nobuyuki, 1993), although Kim and Chong did not take part in it.

20. I learned this in my interview with Kim and the writer Shinotō Yuri on 29 July 2006.
21. Kim graduated from the Department of Electrical Engineering, Tō kai University, and planned eventually to make use of his practical studies and training in North Korea. On the repatriations of resident Koreans to North Korea in the twentieth century, see Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2007). A Japanese film that depicts those repatriations as the backdrop to its story is *Foundry Town* (*Kiyūpora no aru machi*, dir. Urayama Kirirō, 1962).
22. For their hardships in the 1950s, following World War II, see Kim Chang-jeon (2004: 100–03, 140–43, 151–58). The repatriation to North Korea movement became a viable option for them under these circumstances.
23. Kim Sujin also acts on television and in films, and he has appeared in three

families usually depended. Among such sequences, the sinking of one boat and the retrieval of its goods is depicted in particular detail.

The trope of moving across the river, representing a psychic movement between Korea and Japan, reflects a hope of return. Although born in Tokyo, Kim himself, when young, planned eventually to ‘repatriate’ to Korea.<sup>20</sup> For resident Koreans, their departures from Korea, as well as a repatriation movement to North Korea (*Kita chōsen kikan undō*) from 1959 onwards, were defining experiences in their pre-war and post-war history. In the repatriation movement, as many as 90,000 resident Koreans departed for North Korea. The memory of such crossings would have been especially acute to Kim, who grew up during the heyday of this movement in the 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

Several central tropes in the film come directly from the original novel *Through the Night*, written by Yan Sogil in 1994. One is clearly iron, and identification with a metal as a means of survival. The antecedents of Yan’s novel were earlier works of fiction: Kaikō Takeshi’s *Nippon Sanmon Opera* (*The Japanese Three Penny Opera*) of 1959 and Komatsu Sakyō’s sci-fi *Nippon-Appachi-zoku* (*The Japanese Apache*) of 1964, both inspired by the same historical reality of resident Koreans living on scavenged iron in Osaka during the 1950s. Yan’s novel, departing from works by Kaikō and Komatsu, resituates the scavenging as that carried out by resident Koreans and not by the Japanese poor (Kaikō) or super-humans (Komatsu). Stripped of their Japanese citizenship after the collapse of Imperial Japan in 1945, Koreans faced especially stark economic hardships in Japan during that time and for several decades that followed. They consequently had no choice but to engage in illegal activities such as those described in *Through the Night*.<sup>22</sup> Takayuki Tatsumi correctly situates the three novels, with their focus on human lives and metal, as embodiments of a cyborgian conception that belongs to a ‘genealogy of metalocentric imagination’ in Japanese popular culture, which during the 1990s was embodied in the *Tetsuo* film series by Tsukamoto Shinya.<sup>23</sup> Tatsumi, in his analysis, also underlines a conception of the North American Apache, because of the defiant posture of metal scavengers against the Japanese authorities. While the conception of an Apache does not appear in Yan’s novel, the Korean community fighting for their lives at the margins of Japanese society can indeed be conflated with images of the North American Apache in history interpreted as such (Takayuki Tatsumi 2006: 155–64). Tatsumi’s reading of the novel *Through the Night* is therefore also applicable to Kim’s film adaptation.

Not considered by Tatsumi is the historical aspect of the Koreans’ fascination with iron that is depicted in *Through the Night*. There, the Koreans are not taking part in the forging of the iron at all, an industry that became the basis of the Japanese economy as it revived after World War II, at first through the demand for military supplies for the US forces fighting the Korean War. The film shows that their work had only to do with digging up and carrying the iron. As such, their scavenging here is reminiscent of the work carried out by Koreans in post-war Japan. As it had been for Chong Wi Shin’s parents, the iron-scraping business was the main means of support for resident Koreans during the 1950s (Kim Chang-jeon 2004: 151). Moreover, another industry in which Koreans

became a main source of labour in Japan was mining, work that also consisted of digging and collecting. Koreans became the major labour source of the Japanese mining industry in the pre-war years and continued to be well into the 1950s.<sup>24</sup> It is symbolic in this regard that Kakeru, Ageha's ex-lover in the play *Solitude*, is digging for gold, the sole reason he moved to his present town.

Another significant trope in the film adaptation of *Through the Night* is the fire, another carryover from *Solitude*. At the end of the play, the heroine, Ageha, is mistakenly identified by the mob as having started a fire and is lynched and killed. Her murder is reminiscent of a massacre of Koreans in Tokyo after the great Kanto earthquake of 1923, when the Koreans were falsely blamed for arson and poisoning the wells. In the film, after showing the constant surveillance and brutal treatment of the Koreans by the police, a police collaborator sets fire to the ghetto and burns it down. This climax of the film was a highlight of Kim's film-making also, as he burned down the whole film set that had been painstakingly constructed by his staff and the volunteers. Through depicting this wanton destruction of lives and buildings, the play *Solitude* and the film both highlight human perseverance. Ageha, as she ascends to heaven, cries out that she will still continue to cross many waters. Ageha's subjectivity came to be shared by her lover Hikaru as he cried out that he would wait forever for her alone; hence the title *One Thousand Years of Solitude*. The defiant posture that Ageha takes toward boundary crossing is an expression of the resident Korean ethos as Kim and Chong understand it.

Hatsuko, the heroine of *Through the Night*, is similar to Ageha also in that she has a past of having had to work as a bar hostess and prostitute.<sup>25</sup> She stopped menstruating because she was traumatized by the experience of selling her body, and it was only after encountering Yoshio that her periods started again. With this, she became determined to start anew with Yoshio, and the film's final scenes consist of Hatsuko willfully walking alone in her Korean clothes towards the horizon and Yoshio refusing to cooperate with the police. The hero and the heroine are separated at the end of this film, but they vow nevertheless to meet again in the future. In their determination toward each other, they again resemble Ageha and Hikaru, the couple in *Solitude*.<sup>26</sup>

Kim's second film, *Dreaming of Light*, is based on a novella and screenplay by Kara Juro.<sup>27</sup> This film, on the whole a quieter and more fantastic story than *Through the Night*, depicts a small glass factory on the brink of financial ruin. In focusing on this setting, the work manifests Kara's recent interest in depicting the world of blue-collar workers (see Horikiri Naoto 2007: 247–56). Trying to save his factory, the young owner, Yōjirō (Inari Takuo), borrows money from loan sharks, which leads to his factory's further collapse. Kara Juro plays the hero Ikeya, an artisan who specializes in polishing glass. He comes to form a strange friendship with a young woman, Yōko (Satō Megumi), Yōjirō's sweetheart during his adolescence. Yōko's father used to own a glass factory like Yōjirō's, but he committed suicide when his factory went bankrupt. Like Ikeya, Yōko also has the ability to polish glass. This film is similar to the play *Solitude* in that it too centres on a woman whose main obsession in life is to polish glass. The glass as such embodies the purity and innocence of liminal

films directed by Tsukamoto Shinya, playing the protagonist's father in *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer* (Tetsuo: bodii hammer, 1992). Kim writes of his liking of Tsukamoto's style in theatre and films and finds they share a similar fascination with human bodies and violence (Kim Sujin 2003: 32–35). Tom Mes writes that Tsukamoto was working in experimental theatre at the beginning of his career and was also greatly influenced by Kara Juro (Mes 2005: 31–34, 36, 83).

24. The Japanese coal-mining industry actively recruited Koreans as labourers beginning in the early twentieth century. By 1944, over 60 per cent of all the miners in Hokkaido were Koreans (Lie 2001: 92–93). The Korean peasants, who lost land due to the Japanese colonial system, responded positively to the offer of jobs in the mines and began arriving in Japan en masse (Kim Chang-jeon 2004: 23–26). Kim Chang-jeon writes that later, in the 1930s, many Korean workers were brought to work in the Japanese mining industry as 'forced labour' (*kyōsei renkō*) (Kim Chang-jeon 2004: 73–75). An important film about resident Koreans in the mining industry is *Nianchan* (*My Second Brother*, dir. Imamura Shōhei, 1959), which depicts four orphaned siblings in a mining town in Kyushu. The film is an adaptation of the 1958 best seller written by resident

Korean author Yasumoto Sueko (2003), *Nianchan: Jyussai no shōjo no nikki (My Second Brother: The Diaries of a Ten-Year-Old)*, Fukuoka: Nishinihon shinbunsha.

25. Chong's other plays and screenplays also abound with figures of bar hostesses and prostitutes. Among his plays, such characters appear in *Tomorrow with Gelsomina (Ashita, Gelsomina to)* and *Legend of Mermaids*, and among his screenplays, they are found in *All under the Moon, Tokyo Delux (Heisei musekinin ikka: Tokyo delux, dir. Sai Yōichi, 1995)*, and *Dog Race (Inu, hashiru: Dog race, dir. Sai Yōichi, 1998)*.
26. The second half of Yan's original novel focuses on the romance between Yoshio, held at the Ōmura Detention Camp for illegal Korean immigrants in Nagasaki, and Hatsuko. When I interviewed Kim on 29 July 2006, he was preparing to adapt this second half as a film.
27. The novella *Dreaming of Light (Garasu no tsukai)* is included in Kara Juro (2005: 5–106). According to a press release for the film, Kara wrote the novella and the screenplay for Kim's second film.
28. Kara Juro was fascinated with inanimate objects in the mid-1980s, and he wrote a play, *The Vinyl Castle (Bynyl no shiro)*, in 1985, the same year in

characters themselves. Midway into the narrative, Ikeya has a car accident while trying to save Yōjirō. While Ikeya is in a coma, Yōko has no recourse but to continue the glass polishing on her own. Her only means for that is the sand at a rural primary school that is now submerged under a lake. She dives into the lake for the sand and, while underwater, plays an old organ that unleashes a beautiful melody, which travels up to the surface. Through this sequence, shot in slow motion, and other sequences that include close-ups of glass reflecting light, the film focuses on the significance of beauty and aesthetic living in the mundane, everyday life of the working class. The coexistence of beauty and the mundane, or even vulgarity, is emphasized in the opening scene, in which Ikeya uses his naked buttocks to end-polish his glass work. No matter the means, the characters are obsessed with polishing and thereby bringing out the beauty of glass, which, like the music that the heroine discovers underwater, are hidden treasures found only by those who sense their presence and make efforts.

At the same time, the film attests to some negative implications of glass. The glass becomes a more ambivalent trope in that it is also used as a means of torture by the loan sharks to hurt Yojirō. In the process, Yōko also comes to be burned by a glass. The fascination with glass as a metaphor is also found in Kara's play that was performed by the Ryozanpaku, *Call from the City of Young Women* (hereafter called *City of Young Women*). Kara has been an extremely prolific playwright, writing and directing numerous works since beginning his career in the 1960s. The fascination with the inanimate carried by this play, however, is one reason that *City of Young Women* was revived by Kim and the Ryozanpaku nine years after Kara's original production. *City of Young Women* is a fantastic story, narrated in the main by Taguchi, a man who wanders into a strange city in search of his long-lost sister Yukiko. He finds that his sister has become a mistress of a dictator of the city, Dr Franken, who is played by Kim Sujin in the video version of the play. Dr Franken is obsessed by glass and is trying to remake Yukiko into a figure of glass. As a start, he has already replaced her womb with one of glass. In this instance, the glass represents not only beauty but also inhumanity that can pervade the human body and mind.<sup>28</sup> Dr Franken is also a former soldier of the Kwantung Army (the Japanese Manchurian Army) of the 1930s and World War II, the main military body that oversaw Japan's invasion and territorial expansion into northern China. He is haunted by his wartime memories of his regimental commander, and also by his sense of being the sole survivor in his regiment. His present utopian project of a 'City of Young Women' is therefore directly connected to pre-war Japanese colonialism on the Asian continent.<sup>29</sup> Manchuria, to which the Japanese facilitated the migration of Koreans, was part of Imperial Japan, and in this, *City of Young Women* again cross-references twentieth-century colonial history as experienced by Koreans. In the final scene of *City of Young Women*, Kim literally floods the stage with 'glass' objects that resemble *pachinko* balls coming out when someone hits the jackpot. This is yet another show of the beauty of glass, as well as another use of resident Koreans' history, with their post-war connections to the Japanese *pachinko* industry.<sup>30</sup>

What are other significances of the inanimate – glass and iron, in particular – in Kim’s works? Takayuki Tatsumi argues that the fascination with the inanimate in general is an important aspect of ‘the metallocentric imagination’. He writes, ‘The focus of twentieth-century art was moving from the vital and the organic to the geometrical and the inorganic. [...] [T]he new talents of art had come to prefer the inanimate to the animate, and minerals to animals and vegetation’ (Takayuki Tatsumi 2006: 165). An insight into glass as a metaphor is also provided by anthropologist Imafuku Ryuta as he observes glassmaking in a Japanese factory currently staffed by foreign workers:

Glass can be mixed with all other kinds of glass. In that sense, it is fluid like water. Georges Bataille has aptly described animal intelligence, which does not objectivize [*sic*] things or create cognitive boundaries between objects, as a state in which ‘water exists within water’. [...] If so, there is a strange correspondence between the dark faces of all the workers at this factory in recent years, which suggest the existence of workers from different countries, and the ontology of glass which resembles a fluid. Glass is a hard amorphous substance without crystals that is made by melting silica, limestone, and sodium carbonate at a high temperature until they fuse, whereupon the mixture is rapidly cooled. Thus glass itself is a composite of different materials. By the same token, the cultural heterogeneity now developing among the glass factory workers constitutes a hybrid chaos that rejects the formation of a solitary crystalline structure like the local culture of the workers’ homelands, such as Brazil, Thailand, Iran, China, or Peru. When these two levels are juxtaposed, it is evident that glass, figuratively speaking, possesses a privileged nature as a cultural metaphor that vividly suggests the migration, hybridity, and intermixing of countless human beings, a phenomenon that is sweeping society today.

(Imafuku Ryuta 1997)

Imafuku’s interpretation of glass as consisting of a mixture of different elements, and thus embodying migration or hybridity, is a conception that situates it as a metaphor for the resident Koreans, who are seen by many as constituting a hybrid, betwixt and between two national cultures and peoples. David Chapman, in his discussion of post-1970s resident Koreans, makes reference to Homi Bhabha’s notion of ‘the third space’, which enables hybrid identities to develop. According to Chapman, such space is ‘limitless and provides ongoing negotiation of identities and their many imbrications. It is a space where identities are not static and homogenized but fluid and constantly changing, seeking out new possibilities’. As such, the conception comes close to ideals and identities that have been sought by some resident Koreans especially since the 1970s (Chapman 2004: 39). Imafuku also associates glass with water, both malleable entities. In Kim’s directing of *City of Young Women*, he indeed juxtaposes glass with water in the climax of the play, at one point having the actors shoot out the water onstage, showing this as though their water is coming out of bottles. In the film *Dreaming of Light*, Yōko, in a sequence that was discussed earlier, dives to the bottom of a lake to retrieve sand with which to polish the glass. Kim uses special effects to highlight the water as it reflects light,

which he wrote *City of Young Women*. For a discussion of these two works, see Senda Akihiko (2007: 229–34). As Tom Mes (2005: 36) writes, it was in the same year that Tsukamoto Shinya became a professional in theatre, launching his company, the Sea Monster Theatre (Kaijū Shiata).

29. Louise Young (1999: 29–35) writes that the ‘Kwangtung Army [...] defined the nature of [the Japanese] empire in the Northeast [Asia]’.
30. Resident Koreans were turned away from holding regular jobs in Japan during the 1950s, so the *pachinko* parlours provided a second major industry for them, after the iron-scraping business (Kim Chang-jeon 2004: 151). According to Nomura Susumu (1999: 130), as many as two-thirds of Japanese *pachinko* parlours in the 1990s were said to be still owned and managed by resident Koreans and naturalized Koreans.



as seen both from underwater and also, with a crane shot, the water surface. In the film, the moulding of glass in its liquid state is also presented in medium shots and close-ups several times, thereby conflating the glass with transparent liquids such as water. Like water, the glass changes its shape in response to the pressures placed on it, and in this regard it is a representation of early resident Korean experiences in Japan: coerced into carrying out the roles determined by others but persevering by adapting to different circumstances.

Together with this use of glass as a metaphor for hybridity and malleability, Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* provides another useful reference point. *The Glass Menagerie* employs glass in the form of glass animals that Laura, the main character of the play, collects. Those glass animals are connected to her vulnerability, which comes from being physically challenged and shy. Transparency is another aspect of glass that is often understood, a transparency that is not to be conflated with non-existence. Williams's play shows Laura's lonely character in full colour, a character that Annette J. Saddik (1999: 65) argues is struggling with the social realities of a changing world and not 'immune to the alienating powers of industrial capitalism'. Vulnerability is certainly an aspect made manifest by Korean characters appearing in Kim's (and Chong's) plays and films. We may again interpret such vulnerability in part as determined by the past victimization and trauma of Koreans under Japanese rule. Recognizing them this way, they can also possibly be an internalization of stereotypes constructed by non-Korean Japanese, not essential attributes of the Koreans living in Japan. In *Solitude*, clearly identified Korean characters are Ageha and her insane grandmother, as well as Fire-rat (Hinezumi), who is in love with Ageha and is something of a trickster in the play. These characters are all variously traumatized by their pasts and by history, torn between their present locale and their past and future 'across the river'. The characters in *Dreaming of Light* are also similar to Ageha and others, in that they too are threatened or traumatized by events that have occurred in the past and that may occur again in the very near future, specifically financial bankruptcies and dispersions of families. While recognized and presented as an object of beauty, the glass, then, also bespeaks vulnerability and trauma. As does Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*, however, these Korean characters show that although they are marginalized and often disregarded by others, their narrated lives can resonate in the lives of others. The glass in Kim's works, moreover, never breaks as one of Laura's glass objects does in *The Glass Menagerie*.

## Conclusion

The plays and films by Kim Sujin, Chong Wi Shin and Ryozanpaku that I have discussed here are connected to the changing identities of resident Koreans, especially as they have developed since the 1980s. The cultural and economic policies initiated by Park Chung-Hee during the 1960s and the 1970s were successful to a degree, and South Korea has achieved considerable economic success. This, and the stagnation of the North, have destabilized the norms that existed for the majority of resident Koreans in Japan since the 1950s, namely an identification with the North and a symbiotic relationship with that homeland. The deteriorating belief in the



North and in Chongryun, the North Korean organization in Japan, has resulted since the 1980s in an increasing number of North Koreans in Japan becoming either naturalized Japanese citizens or South Korean nationals.<sup>31</sup> As of 2003, five-sixths of resident Koreans are South Korean nationals, an opposite ratio of what was the case during the 1950s. Resident Koreans' assimilation into mainstream Japanese society has also proceeded rapidly during this time (Kim Chang-jeon 2004: 192).<sup>32</sup> The social context of the works by Kim Sujin, then, is that for many resident Koreans, a total identification with 'what has been left behind' remained no longer a viable option. In this regard, the works by Kim, Chong and Ryozanpaku, while focusing on the innocence and beauty of everyday lives, also delineate a particular history and identity formation on the part of the resident Koreans. Instead of enacting an essential Korean ethnicity or culture onstage or through films, Kim and Chong incline toward denoting migration, hybridity and being situated as betwixt and between. By doing so, they depict the distinct niche occupied by resident Koreans in Japan, which distinguishes them from both the Koreans on the mainland and the Japanese. Kim and Chong make use of political theatre performances of the earlier period in Japan as a means through which to magnify and remake into their art the resident Korean experiences of the past two centuries.

31. On Chongryun, see Sonia Ryang (1997).
32. For example, it was in 1984 that the ratio of resident Koreans marrying Japanese came to be more than the number of Koreans marrying other Koreans. In the year 2000, the ratio of resident Koreans marrying fellow Koreans fell below 20 per cent (Kim Chang-jeon 2004: 185).

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### **Kim Sujin: Filmography (as a director)**

- Through the Night (Yoru o kakete, 2002).*  
*Dreaming of Light (Garasu no tsukai, 2006).*

### **Chong Wi Shin: Filmography (original screenplays and adapted screenplays)**

- Attack! The Burning Dog (Shūgeki: Burning Dog, dir. Sai Yōichi, 1991, video original), with Sai Yōichi.*
- 'All under the Moon' ('Tsuki wa dotchi ni dete iru', dir. Sai Yōichi), Episode 1 of *J-Movie Wars (J-movie wars, 1993)*, with Sai Yōichi, adapted from a novel by Yan Sogiru.
- All under the Moon (Tsuki wa dotchi ni dete iru, dir. Sai Yōichi, 1993)*, with Sai Yōichi, adapted from a novel by Yan Sogiru.
- Kaku of Osaka (Tsūten no kaku, dir. Saishu Yasushi, 1993)*, adapted from a manga by Kawabe Yū and Gō Rikiya.
- Tokyo Delux (Heisei musekinin ikka: tokyo delux, dir. Sai Yōichi, 1995)*, with Sai Yōichi.
- Boys, Be Ambitious (Kishiwada shōnen gurentai, dir. Izutsu Kazuyuki, 1996)*, adapted from a novel by Nakaba Riichi.
- Dog Race (Inu, hashiru: Dog Race, dir. Sai Yōichi, 1998)*, with Sai Yōichi, adapted from a screenplay by Maruyama Shōichi.
- Begging for Love (Ai o kou hito, dir. Hirayama Hideyoshi, 1998)*, adapted from a novel by Shimoda Harumi.
- The Pig's Revenge (Buta no mukui, dir. Sai Yōichi, 1999)*, with Sai Yōichi, adapted from a novel by Matayoshi Eiki.
- Doing Time (Keimusho no naka, dir. Sai Yōichi, 2002)*, with Sai Yōichi and Nakamura Yoshihiro, adapted from a manga by Hanawa Kazuichi.
- Out (Out, dir. Hirayama Hideyoshi, 2002)*, adapted from a story by Kirino Natsuo.
- Backdrop del Mio Papá (Otōsan no backu doroppu, dir. Lee Toshio, 2004)*, adapted from a novel by Nakajima Ramo.

*Lady Joker* (*Lady Joker*, dir. Hirayama Hideyoshi, 2004), adapted from a novel by Takamura Kaoru.

*Blood and Bones* (*Chi to hone*, dir. Sai Yōichi, 2004), with Sai Yōichi, adapted from a novel by Yan Sogiru.

**Theatre performance by Madang Theatre Project (directed by Kim Sujin, written by Chong Wi Shin)**

*Tomorrow with Gelsomina* (*Ashita, gelsomina to*, 1986).

**Selected theatre performances by Shinjuku Ryozanpaku (directed by Kim Sujin, written by Chong Wi Shin unless otherwise noted, and Ryozanpaku's first performance year)**

*Carmen Nocturne* (*Carumen yasōkyoku*, 1987).

*One Thousand Years of Solitude* (*Sen-nen no kodoku*, 1988).

*Legend of Mermaids* (*Ningyo densetsu*, 1990).

*City of Movies: Cinecitta* (*Eizō toshi: cinecitta*, 1990).

*A Japanese Doll* (*Jappu dohru*, 1991).

*Media, My Love* (*Itoshi no media*, 1992).

*A Summer Since* (*Sorekara no natsu*, 1992).

*Call from a City of Young Women* (*Shōjo toshi kara no yobigoe*, 1993), written by Kara Juro.

*Asia, Blue and Beautiful* (*Aoki utsukushiki ajia*, 1994).

*Moon of the Sixteenth Night* (*Jyuroku ya no tsuki*, 1997), written by Kobiyama Yōichi.

*A Seeing Eye Dog* (*Moudouken*, 1997), written by Kara Juro.

*The Tokyo Apache* (*Tokyo appacchi zoku*, 1999), written by Sakate Yōji.

*Beggar of Love* (*Ai no kojiki*, 2000), written by Kara Juro.

*Vampire Princess* (*Kyuketsu hime*, 2000), written by Kara Juro.

*In-Between* (*Hazama*, 2001), written by Lee Yun-Taek.

*Matasaburō of the Wind: Kara Version* (*Kara ban kaze no matasaburō*, 2003), written by Kara Juro.

*Pride of the Wind* (*Kaze no hokori*, 2005), written by Kara Juro.

*King of Yebi* (*Yebi daiō*, 2006), written by Hong Won-Ki.

**Shinjuku Ryozanpaku on videos**

*Shinjuku Ryozanpaku: One Thousand Years of Solitude* (*Shinjuku Ryozanpaku: Sen-nen no kodoku*), 60 min., JICC, 1990, VHS.

*Shinjuku Ryozanpaku: Call from the City of Young Women* (*Shinjuku Ryozanpaku: Shōjo toshikara no yobigoe*), 105 min., BMG Victor, 1994, VHS.

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