



# The Traumas in the Lives of Zainichi Koreans in Japan

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## Abstract

This paper scrutinizes the multiple, interfacing traumas experienced by Zainichi Koreans — ethnically Koreans resident in Japan. They trace their presence basically migration during colonial rule of Japan (1910–1945). If I draw my notice on historical records, contemporary scholarly records, news investigations, and mental-health studies, I find that Zainichi trauma is rooted in colonial violence and juridical marginalization, socially manifested through systemic discrimination, vulgar or hate speeches, and expulsion in everyday life, and accordance with intergenerational, I also get the transition within families and communities through narratives of loss, stigma, and survival). I, here, also describe major traumatic domains — specially wartime, what they had faced, forced labor and hibakusha exclusion, after war legal liminality, problem of employment, education, residential discrimination, identity erasure and social stigma, and publicly hate speech and politically scapegoating — and its evidential impact on mental-health and their coping strategies. This paper sums up with policy and community recommendations to be reviewed structurally for injustice and for healing.

## Introduction

The term 'Zainichi' means foreign residents in Japan, generally indicates to the people having Korean ethnicity who migrated during the colonial period to Japan and for their descendants. They are entangled with Japan's imperial project historically on the Korean Peninsula, mobilization and forced labor during the war, and, also during Cold War politics, and Japan's nation-building after war. Resultantly, the experiences of their lives encompass a spectrum of traumatic disclosures: from colonial eviction and during war

violence, systemic Exclusion and contemporary hate speech for decades. The accruing effect is a complex trauma that has been seen as a multi-dimensional social, psychological, political, and cultural effect.

This paper seeks the principal traumas are encountered by Zainichi Koreans, and how those traumas have been produced and maintained in society, and it also seeks the evidence that exists there and also seeks consequences about their psychological, mental and social. To find the answer, I unify historical sources and recent scholarly review and foreground the documented case studies and health related research that represent how trauma occurs across the span of individual life and communal life. Key circumstantial facts about the Zainichi people—their migration during colonialism, dropping of Japanese nationality after World War II, and long legal transitional state— give an idiosyncratic traumatic process subsequently.

### **Historical Background: Colonial Migration, Wartime Mobilization, and Liminality of Postwar:-**

During the colonial period (1910 to 1945) a large number of Koreans migrated to Japan for livelihood, labor, military assistance, and economic development. We get millions of estimated places to the Korean population in Japan at the end of World War II; most brought back but many remained. They formed other communities that became the modern Zainichi people. The San Francisco Peace Treaty (1952) and the end of the Japan empire created a juridical rupture. Many Koreans who could not go back they lost Japanese nationality and classified as foreign residents. In a few upcoming decades, special immigration categories and local policies that marked Koreans as permanently “other” and augmented practices of surveillance and exclusion made them disrespected.

The legal and administrative arrangements of Japan, entrenched social marginality behavior and left long marks to access to welfare, employment, and identity.

The division of the peninsula during the Cold War produced additional cracks among Zainichi: organizational and ideological disagreements formed around the two, pro-South (Mindan) and pro-North (Chongryon/Chōren) annexes, complicating claims for rights, compensation, and identity.

The contending claims and the political advantage of external states often understood Zainichi grievances that were mediated through geopolitical calculus rather than social jurisdictional frameworks, detaining extensive acknowledgment of suffering and intricate attempts at composite redress.

### **Domains of Trauma**

Trauma is best understood as multi-layered experienced by Zainichi Koreans. Here I would like to expose and scrutinize the major domains where it has occurred and reoccurred.

#### **1. During Colonialism and Wartime Trauma:**

Here we see the different phases of it as Forced Labor, Violence, and Hibakusha Exclusion. Under the impact of colonial rule and mobilization during wartime, many Koreans were unwillingly recruited or coerced to do work as labor in mines, factories, and the army facilities across Japan. The effect of this included exposure to risky conditions and, in many instances, direct and open abuse. An especially painful bequest concerns Korean hibakusha — After the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Korean survivors— many of them were vigorously brought to Japan as laborers and later , they suffered from radiation injuries. Unlike many native hibakusha, Korean survivors were often not given systematic recognition and the medical aids were extended to Japanese sufferers.

The bureaucratic elisions and the Cold War politics left them hibakusha destitute. They were also invisible in official records of victimhood, and have no long-term healthcare and reimbursement. This type of historical deletion compounds the exposures of original trauma.

**2. Legal Marginalization, Surveillance, and Stigma after Postwar:** The legal environment of postwar produced constructional trauma. A few government policies like the Alien Registration Law and practices of getting compulsory fingerprints publicly marked Koreans as foreigners. Those occurrences facilitated social stigma. Getting fingerprints exposed public identity of individuals' origins to neighbors and employers, created conditions for Zainichi's discrimination, humiliation, and chronic insecurity. The effects of law continued to exist for decades, and some unfair practices were only partially redressed. The legal exclusion, over taxed and conscription but denial of political rights and in services equally, those experiences, generated long-term institutional disbelief and a sense of judicial disloyalty that provides the deep base to intergenerational trauma.

**3. Everyday Discrimination in Education, Employment, Housing, and Social Exclusion:-** It has been seen as widespread discrimination in everyday institutions. Koreans have historically faced obstacles of employment in public sectors, hiring practices of discrimination in private firms, and social debarring in education and habitation. Having been denied to get chances in mainstream professions, they turned themselves to self-employment or ethnic economies or engaging in different tasks like restaurants, entertainment, small retailing, which turn mode of their lives became easy targets of stereotyping. Discriminatory practices like life junctures — to get higher education, to stable employment, and get housing — produce great tension that undermines Economic security and makes a zigzag path of life. Those situations could have created patterns of cumulative disadvantage and trauma across Zainichi generations.

**4. Identity Trauma:** It basically focuses – Name Changing, Concealment, and Cultural Erasure. After reading the relevant literature we got that many Zainichi had navigated painful choices about names, languages, and self-exposure in public. By hiding the real ethnicity or changing their names to Japanese forms only to avoid persecution was their survival strategy, yet these practices could cause identity conflict, shame, humiliation and internalized stigma. The pressure of incorporating themselves while being denied complete acceptance produces a situation that scholars termed it “identity trauma”. This identity had prolonged wounds to internal consistency that affects familial imparting of culture and language and produces fragmented or hyphenated ability to recognize their belonging.

## **5. Cross generational and Collective Trauma**

Trauma is not only transmitted in the first generation but also across generations to generations. Through accounts of loss, socialization patterns that introduce Zainichi to vigilance and mistrust, and systematic constraints that reproduce disadvantage. The various collective memories, as— of displacement, denied rights, and unresolved injustices — became shared wounds, shaped unruly practices among community, political mobilization, and intra-community tensions are seen as over affiliation with Mindan vs Chongryon. The ineffective remediation and improper interventions especially individual pathology without finding historical and structural roots were regarded as misdiagnosis.

**6. Hate Speech, Media Scapegoating, and Political Violence Regarding Contemporary Conditions:** It would not be wrong to say that online platforms and social media have magnified xenophobic oratory and targeted Zainichi Koreans with acrimonious hate speech more recently. It has been seen in various moments of national crisis as well as political violence sometimes incites sudden surges of scapegoating. We can take some recent examples and one of them is the atmosphere of rumor and derogatory speech after the regicide of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2022. The world has seen that the false claims circulated through online or on media platforms blaming a “Zainichi Korean” — prompted a surge of targeted abuse. It is an illustration how quickly online misinformation can transmit into real-world animosity. Such these episodes spread collective fear among Zainichi and call communities up that structural shielding against contemptuous speech and online radicalization abide incomplete.

**Mental Health, Well-being, and Traumatic Evidence:** Empirically the work links experiences of prejudice and exposure to insulting speech with unfavorable mental-health results among Koreans in Japan. An outstanding study published in an international journal that scrutinized associations among the Korean residents in Japan as the exposure to hate speech, discerning discrimination, and psychiatric symptoms. It finds statistically important relationships between prejudice and weaker mental-health indicators among the Zainichi. These types of findings align with and make a broader base to literature. It also shows that long time discrimination acts as a social causality of mental illness, enhancing risks for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and excessive distress.

This supplement work reveals how trauma is experienced subjectively. Koreans have faced shame and secret havoc to prove their identity. They have personal persistent fear of exposure and familial silence during and after wartime experiences. They have complex grief of exclusion of recognition as wartime victims or hibakusha. The various organizations and researches like Community counseling projects and youth support initiatives have done their research and documented. These studies tell that there were high levels of stress among Zainichi adolescents who defied bullying, only for the identity confusion, and intergenerational tensions. Its outcomes that point to the need for culturally sensitive physical and mental-health services.

#### Korean Hibakusha and Institutional Erasure

As we already have studied above, the case of Korean atomic-bomb survivors who have different layered trauma. The direct exposure to disastrous violence followed by decades of marginalization in society and official narratives and welfare systems of government. There are various journalists and scholars who have done multiple investigations in recent years. These studies have drawn attention to Korean hibakusha's struggles how they have obtained medical care and recognition, and their identity of existence in complicating Japan's postwar memory politics. The relevant studies show how trauma can be both physical and bureaucratic with them. Not only the original injury but also the denial of rectify and memory becomes part of the physical and mental wound.

**Trauma of Unemployment, Discrimination and Legal Battles:** The lower as well as high-profile legal struggles for the litigation over discriminatory malpractice have revealed the institutional bias in corporate Japan with interval. These cases often involve long legal clash that re-traumatize litigant and their communities even as they occasionally became the cause to produce policy changes.

They played an important role because their spotlight structural mechanisms for recruitment networks, internal hiring cultures, and biased testing's that reproduce exclusion.

**Online Hate and Moral Anxiety:** Social media also played a pivotal role in spreading false rumors and hate speech rapidly. The various social media platforms were spreading hypocritical dogma but the responsible institutions and authorities' slow and inadequate responses— have created new forms of insecurity among the Zainichi. The appropriate example of Shinzo Abe's assassination shows how conspiracy and xenophobia could get success to form a large online group rapidly and this made a real cause to harm minority communities in Japan.

**Coping, Resistance, and Healing for the Community:** In spite of structural hindrances, the marginalized Zainichi communities have evolved multiple coping and resistance master plans.

**Organizational life:** Different community organizations like Mindan, Chongryon, local civic groups have provided reciprocal assistance and few cultural institutions like schools, media and political groups advocated for their welfare. During this period factionalism has divided the community and these organizations also kept them alive their culture and supporting cobwebs.

**Legal activism:** The advocacy of human rights, the proper litigations and anti-discrimination crusades, have gradually reduced away at exclusionary practices like annihilation of compulsory fingerprinting and these social welfare societies also advocated some gains of equity in employment.

**Cultural production:** Zainichi authors have exposed experiences of trauma and identity in their literature. Multiple literature and films have been produced raging their voices and creating public evidence that contests erasure.

**Mental-health Resourcefulness:** The responsible organizations have done the grassroots counseling such as anti-bullying based programs in schools and colleges and collaborations with mental-health professionals adapt services to cultural needs.

These forms of agencies were important for immediate relief and for buildup long-term social changes in the down-trodden society that is a prototype of structural sources of trauma.

Implications and Recommendations of Policies:

If we want to address Zainichi trauma that specially requires be reviewing and combining with the structural policy reforms, socio-cultural works, and aimed support services, we must conclude the key recommendations.

The Japanese government passed legal protections and anti-discrimination act to control over the malpractices spread in the society. The laws enforced comprehensive anti-discrimination laws. These laws rotate and cover employment, housing, education, and have birds eye on online platforms to monitor them. The stronger made legal tools gradually decrease multiple layers of trauma spread in society.

The government has recognized and redressed the historical injustices. The government has acknowledged and took therapeutic measures for groups who specially belong to Korean hibakusha. It has come as long-standing institutional deletion and provides them both material and symbolic justice to live respectfully in the society.

The facilities of competent mental-health services are to be provided culturally. The arrangement of needed funds are to be made and community-based mental-health programs should be run through scaling that arrangements should be made linguistically and culturally to Zainichi families and youth for the awareness of integrating historical trauma.

Further, there is another important need for education and public memory reform. The inclusion of the histories of colonialism should be in school curricula and public commemoration. Intercultural understanding has counter denial and fosters that to be forced labor, and postwar exclusive impact.

For the restriction of hate speeches it should be platform accountability and hate-speech regulation. Strengthening norms to stop these misdemeanors and enforcement mechanisms is also required to prevent the rapid spread of targeted hate that are harmful to the real world on online platforms.

It also requires the support for civil society and responsible institutions. Governing bodies should ensure continuous funding for Zainichi cultural and civic groups that provide social assistance and advocacy.

### **Conclusion**

There are various traumas experienced by Zainichi Koreans. Therefore we can summarize them as historical and contemporary trauma, structural and interpersonal trauma, individual and collective trauma. These traumas arose from colonial dispossession and wartime brutality. They were established in postwar legal reigns and social practices. They are renewed nowadays through discrimination and online hate speeches. The different institutions and researches regarding traumas with Zainichi Koreans such as historical scholarship, journalistic investigation, and mental-health research give evidence and show a consistent pattern. The exclusionary policies and social marginalization fabricate quantifiable harm to wellbeing and maintain intergenerational trauma. It would not be wrong to say that healing requires more than clinical care.

It requires structural reform, open public acknowledgment of historical injustice done with them, and community strengthening. It is not only talking about Zainichi trauma as a moral imperative for Japanese society but also an experiential case for how post-royal societies can confront painful bequests and build their up inclusive futures.

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