

**Fight for the Right to Live:  
Kim Tal-su's Novels and the "Third Country National" Discourse**

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When the Empire of Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces in August of 1945, the Korean nation was finally liberated from 35 years of Japanese colonial rule. It was then reported that there were approximately 2.2 million Korean residents in Japan. Among them, 1.3 million returned to their homeland prior to the founding of the Japanese government's "repatriation program" for Koreans.<sup>1</sup> This program ran under the instruction of the occupation army, which consisted mainly of the Eighth United States Army known as the GHQ/SCAP (the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers). Many of the remaining Koreans wanted to return too; however, once the repatriation program began, only around 80,000 utilized the program. One of the factors which made them hesitant about returning was the GHQ's set of restrictions regarding money and goods that were allowed to be carried during departure. Thus, repatriation became a difficult choice for people who had lived in Japan for a long time and possessed assets. In addition, once the remaining Koreans learned of the political instability and economic crisis in the Korean Peninsula, their decision process was further complicated.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, many of them had to postpone their return, and the total number of those who remained in Japan became about 560,000.

As a result, the resident Koreans established the League of Koreans in Japan (在日本朝鮮人連盟), in short, *Choren* (朝連), and developed an independent movement. One of *Choren's* most important initiatives was the formation of an ethnic education based on language education. Korean language schools were launched in almost all the areas where

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<sup>1</sup> NISHINARITA, Yutaka, *Zainichi Chosenjin no 'Sekai' to 'Teikoku' Kokka*, Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan, 1997, p.334.

<sup>2</sup> MOON, Gyong-su, *Zainichi Chosenjin Mondai no Kigen*, Kurein, 2007, p.88.

Koreans resided after the “liberation.” These language schools were founded by *Choren*, which soon led to elementary schools, junior high schools, and normal schools being opened the following year. It was confirmed in *Choren*’s third national meeting of 1946 that more than 500,000 Koreans would remain in Japan, which caused the reorganization of the ethnic education into a more permanent educational system.<sup>3</sup>

This paper discusses one of the civil rights struggles of the resident Koreans that took place in such a situation. I will elaborate at a later juncture, but as the tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union increased, the political pressure against the resident Koreans in Japan tightened as well. This was so especially since the Koreans’ life-threatening campaign for ethnic education from 1948 can be considered as their response towards such suppression.

The novels around this time by Kim Tal-su, who is known as one of the pioneers of resident Korean literature, depict this struggle. I will focus on two motifs, viz., “Aunties” and “home-brewing” that appear frequently in those novels. This paper will discuss how the struggle can be linked to these motifs and thereupon, consider the problem of how minorities can secure their place to live in the colonial setting that remains after the collapse of the empire and amongst the wild waves of renewed international politics.

### **Hanshin Educational Struggle**

In October of 1947, the American occupation army suddenly released a notice that prohibited the Korean schools in Japan from teaching ethnic education, which included Korean language as a regular subject. This was peculiar considering the Japanese Ministry of Education had no problem approving *Choren*’s Korean school as a legitimate educational institution in April the same year. Due to the GHQ’s notice, the Japanese government changed its attitude towards Korean ethnic education, and began to regard it as an “indoctrination,” which was restricted by the newly-introduced Fundamentals of Education Act; one of the “democratic” reforms led by the GHQ.

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<sup>3</sup> YANG, Yong-hu, ‘Kaihougo, Minzoku Kyoiku no Keisei,’ *Sanzenri*, Sep. 1986.

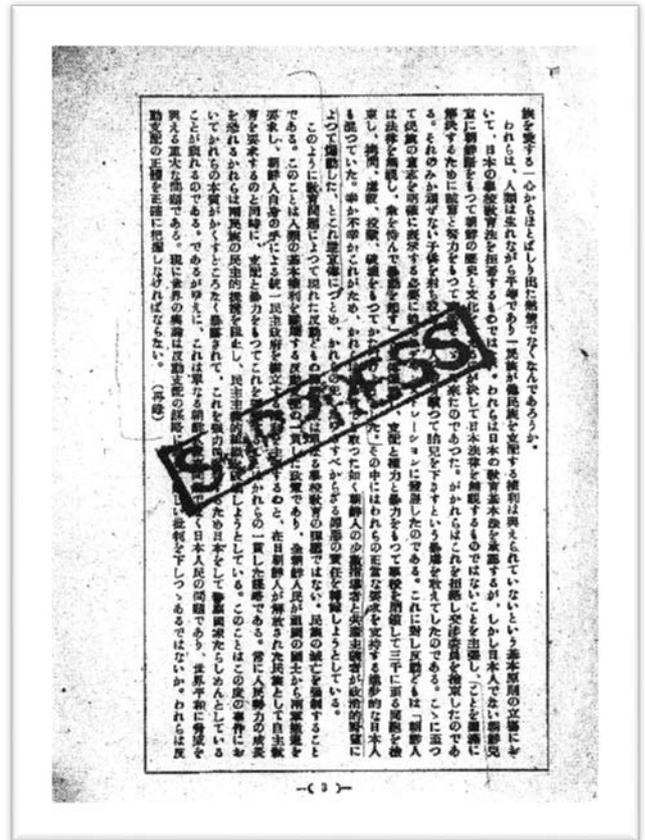
*Choren*, of course, made a strong protest against this notification and developed several rallies for its repeal. However, the local government, police, and the military government tightened the pressure and released another notice to shut down the Korean schools.

The protests from the Korean side became more active due to the Japanese government and GHQ's actions. They even held a protest meeting in which tens of thousands of people gathered in Osaka and Kobe. The GHQ declared a "state of emergency" for the first time since the beginning of the occupation, and the armed police shut the protest down. During the suppression, a police officer killed a 16 year-old boy with a gunshot through the head. After this 1948 conflict – which damaged the Korean community in a serious manner – a conclusion was arrived at, the Japanese government compromised by approving ethnic education in Korean schools and by promising to provide the compulsory education in Korean schools that was prescribed by Japan's educational law. However, the suppression continued; in the following year's September, the *Choren* was ordered to dissolve, and in October, Korean schools were shut down by compulsion.

The situation was aggravated by the media coverage on the Hanshin Educational Struggle that was strictly censored by the GHQ, which made it difficult to report the details from the resident Koreans' side. For example, a magazine *Minshu Chosen*, in which Kim Tal-su was an editor, had a special edition about the struggle, and Kim himself was present at the scene as a correspondent. However, all the articles were suppressed by the civil censorship and the magazine itself was suspended.

On the other hand, the reports by the police and major newspapers described the educational struggle as a “riot,” and the protest’s objective to protect Koreans’ ethnic education was never recognized as a fact in media discourses. Let’s take an example from an article of *Ashahi Shinbun* on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1948 that reported the following: “GHQ’s announcement to the school problem in Kobe... Illegal Koreans arrested... Never accept mob violence.” Words like “illegal Koreans” and “mob violence” openly made an unfavorable impression, portraying the mentioned as a Korean group agitating for communism to intentionally cause a political disturbance.

The picture provided above is one of the article scripts from the June 1948 issue of *Minshu Chosen* that was suppressed. This article, titled “For the Protection of Ethnic Culture,” claims that their demonstration for protecting Korean ethnic education was reported by the Japanese media as a result of communist agitation for political purposes. By such reports, the article insists, the movements of Koreans were only utilized to fuel the intensifying tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Japanese media’s article was appealing to the readers to consider the Korean struggle for educational rights as an ideological dispute.



However, while looking at the censored *Minshu Chosen* script, we can clearly spot the evidence of the censor intentionally trying to misread the article as a piece of offensive criticism against the Japanese government and the US occupation force. By highlighting the insignificant parts such as the phrase “repressive policies by the reactionaries,” the article’s original accusation is ignored.<sup>4</sup>

Kim Tal-su’s novels, especially two works “Big Barrel Granny” and “A Chapter from the Other Night,”<sup>5</sup> depict the Korean ethnic education’s suppression as a method of implication in the Cold War wave between the US and Soviet Union. Through his novels, Kim’s intention was to appeal to the public on behalf of the resident Korean perspective.

### **“Big Barrel Granny” and “A Chapter from the Other Night”**

“Big Barrel Granny” portrays the event that resulted from the notification of *Choren* and the mandatory closure of Korean schools. The protagonist “I” is a Japanese language teacher at the Korean high school in Itabashi, Tokyo. The plot is set on a day in which the police may come and close the school. When the protagonist enters the school’s staff lounge, he notices that all the teachers are silent with nervous faces and realizes no scope for a lecture exists. Later, the police notify them that the closure will be enforced after examinations. The protagonist, relieved that there are still a few days of grace, leaves the school to visit a Japanese friend and stay in his house.

The next day, he returns to his neighborhood of Yokosuka only to find that the local Korean elementary school had already been cleared out by the armed police. “I” was also told by a young student that his mother joined the resistance against the forced removal, and was injured by a Japanese policeman, who kicked her. He returns home immediately to find his mother lying on a futon. Fortunately, she only sustains a slight injury; a bruise on her

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<sup>4</sup> KOBAYASHI, Tomoko’s ‘GHQ niyoru Zainichi Chosenjin Kankou Zasshi no Kenetsu’ (*Zainichi Chosenjinshi Kenkyu*, Zainichi Chosenjinshi Kenkyukai, Sep. 1992) also mentions this case as “this year’s representative case of the censorship toward the resident Korean.”

<sup>5</sup> The translations of the two novels are referred to in Robert J. Del Greco, *KIM TAL-SU AND EARLY “ZAINICHI” LITERATURE* (A Master’s Thesis, the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures and the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Kansas, 2009) although there are some minor changes due to mistranslations.

forehead. The protagonist asks her to confirm in detail whether the bruise was an injury from being kicked. It turns out that the mother was injured from a fall, not by the policeman kicking her head. The protagonist is “relieved” and feeling calmer, sets out for the elementary school. The story ends here with “End of chapter one,” despite no chapter following it.

This is the ending of “Big Barrel Granny,” and in fact, “Big Barrel Granny” never appears in this story although it is the novel’s very title. The “Big Barrel Granny” appears in “A Chapter from the Other Night.” This tells us that “A Chapter from the Other Night” is a novel that is a reorganization of the draft “Big Barrel Granny.”

“A Chapter from the Other Night” also illustrates a struggle after the shutdown of the Korean elementary school in Yokosuka. However, the two novels’ writing style that describes this struggle is quite different from the style in Kim Tal-su’s other novels. For example, an independent struggle during the Japanese colonization depicted in novellas such as “The City of Descendants” (1946) and other short stories about Koreans’ lives during the American occupation period describes the same as a period of a nationalist movement with male intellectual elite leaders. On the other hand, these two novels place the community’s middle-aged females or “aunties” as the main agents in the ethnic movement. Of course, male characters appear too, such as the protagonist, *Choren*’s local branch leaders, and communist party members. They negotiate with the Yokosuka city government and police station, but their negotiations are never marked by any progress. Rather, the leaders do not share information and instructions from the directive board of *Choren* with other communal people, but only with the men who are “executives,” or in other words, male elites. Later in the novel, there is a scene in which these leaders’ arrogant attitudes are criticized by community members. Despite the male leaders’ exhaustion due to the fruitless negotiation, the aunties – who have continued to gather in the school every day – pressurize the negotiators to continue their fight against the local government.

### **“The Aunties” and Access to Education**

One month after the closure, the protagonist finds out that a large group of aunties (seventy or eighty in total) and a hundred students flocked to the city hall for an appeal. As a result of

the demonstration, they withdrew a Yokosuka city mayor, Horiguchi, who had not appeared until then. The demonstrators succeeded in making him promise to work harder in favor of the Koreans.

The last push was made by a large-built woman called “Big Barrel Granny.” Here, finally, “Big Barrel Granny” appears in the story and the educational struggle that “Big Barrel Granny” and “A Chapter from the Other Night” focuses on, comes to its climax when the group of aunties demonstrate at city hall.

“Big Barrel Granny” does not depict the aunties’ demonstration itself, but instead focuses on the protagonist’s mother’s injury from the protest. “I” recalls that his mother has always understood his involvement in the Korean independent movement, but has never involved herself in the activity. Therefore, “I” was moved when he heard that his mother rose against the forced and violent removal by the Japanese police.

The demonstration at city hall in “A Chapter from the Other Night” was not participated by any of the “executive men,” but was conducted independently by the “aunties.” As a result, they attained a promise from the mayor; a far better outcome than the men who had not yet gotten so far.

This role reversal existed not only in fiction, but also in the actual Korean educational struggle in which Korean women played a significant part. Song Hae Won discusses how many mothers, female teachers, and school girls who belonged to the Democratic League of Korean Women (*Jomei*) played active parts in the educational struggle.

The male activists of *Choren* were constantly attacked by the US army, the Japanese police and even by another conflicting Korean association called the Association of Young People for the Foundation of Korean Nation, so that they couldn’t be active in public. Instead, women in *Jomei* kept in contact with local people and prepared for meetings and relief movements for people who are captured as well as nation-wide fund raising and signature campaign.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> SONG, Hae Won, *‘Zainichi Chosenjin Bungaushi’ no Tameni; Koe naki Koe no Porifoni*, Iwanami Shoten, 2014, p.35.

One big reason that women joined this educational struggle was a change in the educational environment after the “liberation.” Before the liberation, the Empire of Japan developed an education system based on “the personal principle” that regulates who can access elementary education with factors such as ethnicity, class, and gender; eventually excluding Korean women from the system. The school absence of Korean girls was normalized throughout the colonial period<sup>7</sup>.

After mid-1945, as discussed above, the Korean ethnic education spread throughout Japan, and Korean women who had never attended school received the opportunity of education. However, after only four years, such an opportunity was about to be taken away from them by the GHQ and Japanese Government’s suppression of Korean ethnic education.

The “aunties” rising up for the school that were depicted in “A Chapter from the Other Night” were such women who were afraid of losing their claim to education. In the scene where Kimura, a deputy mayor of Yokosuka, yells angrily to the protesters, “Don’t you all have any manners! Manners! Try to have a little common decency, why don’t you!” Then, one of the aunties retaliates with tears in her eyes, “Who was it who made us people without manners?! You’re the ones who have been trying to make us into illiterate fools! Well, aren’t you?!” For the “aunties,” access to education is one actual gain from the liberation.

The following scene also depicts the “Big Barrel Granny” being pushed by Kimura, falling on the floor and screaming;

“Are you going to kill me? Do it then! Kill me!”

Now granny had fallen to the ground and was pounding on her own chest with both fists.

This heartrending cry became the final push to remove the mayor from office. The Granny is characterized in the novel as a vice president of the “School Mother’s Meeting” that supports the ethnic education. To her, closing down the Korean schools meant being robbed

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<sup>7</sup> KIM, Puja, *Shokuminchiki Chosen no Kyoiku to Jenda; Shugaku to Fushugaku wo meguru Kenryokukankei*, Seori Shobo, 2005, p. 274-278.

of women's gains from the liberation, their right and space for a women's independence struggle, and women's involvement in ethnic education. That, for her, is equivalent to "being killed."

Another old lady also cries out to the police;

"It's the school we bought and we built. We would rather burn it and ourselves to death than giving up to you. I won't let you take it from us!"

Here, we can see the earnest claim being made by these "aunties" that try to protect their school at the peril of their own lives. When considered that these aunties are the ones who were excluded from the education system of the Empire of Japan, the Korean school symbolizes a place to redo their lives once again as independent individuals. That's why the "mother" of "I" in "Big Barrel Granny" took action, even getting injured from the protest, which she had never done before.

Next, I will focus on the novel "A Chapter from the Other Night" as having reportage-like features that record the moment as a struggle that was actually pushed forward by the active involvement of local "aunties," which is in contrast with the male elites' incapability of negotiation. As I discussed earlier, in the media coverage of the Hanshin Educational Struggle, it was reported that the Koreans' protest was "an illegal Korean's riot agitated by the communists." The GHQ censorship also ignored the resident Koreans' specific problems and claims that were not manipulated by Communist politics, but were honest in motives to improve community members' lives. That is why this novel attributes to the male elites, who have a political background, passiveness because they are actually guided by the local people's pressure, especially from "the aunties" gathering in the school. This shows how the protest was not led by the political motivation.

### ***Tak-ju* Brewing**

Let's look at other novels by Kim Tal-su around this time to see his intentions in the portrayal of "the aunties" more clearly. In his novels during the occupation period, there often

appears home-brewing *Tak-ju* as work that “the aunties” are engaged in. *Tak-ju*, or also known as *Makgeoli*, is an unrefined sake since it is home-brewed. The best example for such a depiction is in the novel “A *Tak-ju* Toast” (*Shiso*, Sep. 1948). This novel is set before the “liberation,” but the protagonist is the same as in *An Tongsun* (安東淳) from “A Chapter from the Other Night.” In the story, there is one military policeman called Koyama (黄山) who comes to a Korean slum for observation, but actually this Koyama is Korean and his real name is Hwang (黃). That means Koyama is a Korean collaborator with the Japanese colonizer. Because Koyama understands Korean, he discovers that the aunties in the slum are engaged in illegal home-brewing, and he makes them promise not to do it again. Several days later, Koyama returns to the slum to look for a Korean political criminal. There, one of the local men serves Koyama a plate of roasted giblets together with *Tak-ju*. First, Koyama hesitates to drink *Tak-ju*, but eating the roasted giblets makes *Tak-ju* irresistible for Koyama. Then, finally Koyama gives up the search for the political criminal by saying, “Now the guy is lost for good.”

Although the protagonist, An Tongsu, first thought of killing Koyama before he enters the slum, such violence never occurs. Instead, the *Tak-ju* made by the aunties solves the problem. An Tongsun considers the aunties’ *Tak-ju* making as “Koreans’ wits for surviving” and thinks that this is their way of fighting against the oppressor. A Korean military policeman drinking illegal *Tak-ju* means that the people in the slum coax him successfully to their side without relying on violence; a true protest against the violent colonization. The livelihood of Koreans includes such a fight, the protagonist utters.

Another novel, “A Village without Address” (*Sekai Hyoron*, Mar. 1949) also has *Tak-ju* brewing as a significant theme. Within the novel, the main character *Eun Chomji*, an ignorant old man, feels an immense joy for life for the first time after liberation. This is caused by the discussions and singing he hears from the next door local branch of *Choren*, giving him feelings of “liberation” and “independence,” although he does not understand their meanings. Due to these strong feelings, he realizes that he can now live his own life, but also what gives meaning to his life is his work in helping the local aunties with their home-brewing.

“The aunties” who are engaged in *Tak-ju* brewing is a motif that repeatedly appears in Kim’s novels of this period. I would like to elaborate on its historical background in order to analyze why it appears so frequently.

The situation awaiting the liberated Koreans after Japan’s defeat was not the prosperous independence of their homeland, but severe poverty. Many people who worked in munitions factories were discharged without means for earning their daily food, and kicked out to a foreign land. One of the very few employment options was coal mining, an occupation that was suffering from a chronic shortage of manpower to secure sufficient coal for the occupation army. Thus, many Korean men had to work continuously as coal miners during the period of forced labor during the wartime, and even after the liberation. In this condition, there was no way for the resident Koreans to support their livelihood fully, which resulted in 90% of the resident Korean population being unemployed or barely making a living in 1947.<sup>8</sup> It was much more difficult for Korean women to find a decent job; thus, they were engaged in illegal *Tak-ju* brewing business at home to support their everyday life.

On the other hand, *Yami-ichi* started to appear in every Japanese city immediately after the defeat, and poisonous alcohol, so called *Kasutori Shochu*, which was made from methyl alcohol, was distributed. There were stories of people who became blind or died because of the *Kasutori*. At first, *Kasutori* was not recognized in connection to the resident Koreans. However, after two compulsory investigations for home-brewing in Korean residential areas in March and June of 1947, whenever alcohol-related criminal incidents occurred, resident Koreans’ connections were often suspected, and the regulation against home-brewing by Koreans became even more intensified.<sup>9</sup>

This regulation on Korean home-brewing was connected to a media and political discourse called the myth of the “Third Country National,” that all the illegal activities such as black marketing and crimes were done by foreigners, Koreans, Taiwanese and Chinese, even though the majority of the black marketers were controlled and managed by the Japanese.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> PARK, Kyong-Sik, *Kaihongo Zainichi Chosenjin Undoshi*, Sanichi Shobo, 1989, p.113-114.

<sup>9</sup> LEE, Hen-ri, “Kaihou” Chokugo niokeru Zainichi Chosenjin nitaisuru Dakushu Torishimari Gyosei nitsuite, *Chosenshi Kenkyukai Ronbunshu*, Ryokuin Shobo, Oct. 2013.

<sup>10</sup> MIZUNO, Naoki, ‘The origin of “Third Country Nationals” discourse and its Impact,’ *Zainichi Chosenjinshi*

Furthermore, as the tension between the US and the Soviet Union intensified, this discourse corresponded with the Japanese government and GHQ's change of attitude towards resident Koreans, regarding them as communist elements. By considering Koreans as illegal and violent, the "Third Country National" discourse was functioning to conceal the political intention of the oppressive side. This dragged Koreans, as supposedly agitating for communism, into the Cold War structure, thus drowning out their claim for life improvement. Therefore, after the liberation, especially after 1947, *Tak-ju* meant for the Korean community both something that was indispensable to their life and something attached to the "Third Country National" image, which gave them reason to be expelled from the Japanese society.

There was actually a movement among the Korean community protesting *Tak-ju* brewing as harmful for "the dignity of the Korean race," and asking people to stop. However, the leaders of the community soon realized that they could not live without the aunties' home-brewing. Although the leaders worked hard to stabilize their fellows' livelihood, they didn't sufficiently understand what and who were supporting the resident Koreans' life. The leaders of the resident Koreans themselves were too conscious about "the dignity of the Korean race" to be dragged in the rhetoric of the "Third Country National" discourse that enclosed the resident Koreans economically, ethically, and politically. Eventually, the *Choren* leaders realized their mistake and started developing a protest against the regulation over *Tak-ju* brewing.

Here, we can find the meaning of the *Tak-ju* brewing "aunties" appearing in Kim Tal-su's novels. As in "A *Tak-ju* Toast," "the aunties' *Tak-ju*" plays a role in winning the Korean military police over to the community side while denying usage of violence. Moreover, in "A Village without Address," it is an old lady engaged with local brewing who actually secures the protagonist's own life through his feelings of liberation from *Choren*'s singing. This means that "the aunties" and *Tak-ju* in these novels function to correct and modify the people's bigoted and repressive movement led by the male elites to instead pursue its own principles and dogmas. These "aunties" indicate alternative ways to develop the fight for the better living. Such dynamism within the movement was symbolized in the motives of "the

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*Kenkyu*, Ryokuin Shobo, Zainichi Chosenjinshi Kenkyukai, Oct. 2013.

aunties” and *Tak-ju*. These women are not mothers and wives who passively support the men’s fight, but are instead active and have their own subjective agenda and practice that they are fighting for. *Tak-ju* of “the aunties” has its very own energy for the movement. That’s why the “Big Barrel Granny” has the “barrel” inside her.

### **Son who never understands his mother**

Finally, I would like to look at the conversation between the protagonist referred to as “I” and the “mother” in “Big Barrel Granny” more closely.

In the story, the protagonist “I” is responding to the question of whether or not his mother was kicked in the head by the muddy shoes of a Japanese police officer. The idea of “Mother” being kicked by the Japanese police “has even driven him to anger.” He asks her importunately if it really happened. For “I,” it is “an insult” received by him “in order to face our racial battle,” and he says to himself, “I had to be sure of my own personal rage.” However, here we can spot the differences in the consciousness between the son and mother towards the educational struggle.

“I” felt that his mother’s head being kicked was “an insult” against their race, and his “rage” is an impulse to drive him to the fight. On the other hand, for “mother,” it is not a big deal that she was injured. She laughs at her actions and those of the other old ladies by saying, “It was almost like an action scene starring wrinkled old women,” with her hand wiping her watery eyes. Then, she says to him proudly with slight embarrassment, “I’ve never done anything like that in my life.”

What she experienced for the first time is probably not what “I” thought of as “an insult against our race.” If he sublimates the mother’s experience into a HISTORICAL notion like “an insult against our race,” then her present agency is somehow obscured in the background. What she experienced is her own “action scene.” It is her fight to protect her own life and what she considers “our school” established after the liberation. The true nature of this educational struggle can be found with regard to the Korean women, whose opportunity to receive education was robbed by Japan’s colonial policies and resident Korean society’s patriarchy, leading them to protest for themselves by pushing men away with their elbows.

Here, we can find the resistance against the closure of the resident Koreans cast by the postwar society of Japan through the image of the “Third Country National,” which was associated with words such as “illegal,” “violent” and “politically agitated.” The “mother,” “Big Barrel Granny,” and other “aunties” in the community are portrayed as the main agents of the struggle. Their energy renews the indurated organization and revives the movement. Kim Tal-su’s novels illustrate such “wrinkled old women” fighting against the continuing colonialism.