RESEARCH ARTICLE

Memories of Struggles: Translocal Lives in Okinawan Anti-Base Activism

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Abstract

One of the key characteristics of recent Japanese grassroots civic activism is the number of individual citizens who began to go out on the streets to participate in public demonstrations. In many places around Japan, people who used to be seen as 'apolitical,' such as youth, office workers (so-called salary-men and salary-women) and other individuals, now join and lead public demonstrations that address a range of pressing social issues and problems, including nuclear energy, workplace harassment and constitutional change. Today the 'progressiveness' of activism is born from, and reinforced by, participants' own everyday concerns. By associating larger social injustices with personalized forms of concern, today's progressive movements enable what perhaps used to be overlooked as private issues to become inspiration for collective actions. Therefore, these civic movements encompass a mixture of different personal and social narratives, symbols, styles and objectives; they are not homogenous about 'who we are' and 'what we want.' By highlighting two case studies that shed light on the Okinawan decolonization movement, I argue that the translocal participation of different social actors in creating a particular sense of 'locality,' or place-based identity, is essential in understanding the complexity of collective representation. The Okinawan decolonization movement, primarily represented in the form of the Okinawan anti-US base struggle, is particularly important because it demonstrates how place-based identity maintains rootedness and boundedness of locality while maintaining inclusivity to extra-locality. Okinawa's case can be an important contribution to the field that enables us to extend our geo-social imagination over the new forms of contentious politics and collectivity in today's world.

Keywords:

One of the key characteristics of recent Japanese grassroots civic activism is the number of individual citizens who began to go out on the streets to participate in public demonstrations. In many places around Japan, people who used to be seen as 'apolitical,' such as youth, office workers (so-called salary-men and salary-women) and other individuals, now join and lead public demonstrations that address a range of pressing social issues and problems, including nuclear energy, workplace harassment and constitutional change. From an arcade street in a rural city to the overcrowded *Hachikō-mae* plaza in Shibuya, Tokyo, an iconic zone for Japanese consumeristic culture, today non-partisan, self-motivated, individually organized activism has become an ever more important social force in Japan. In this social environment, the assemblage of activist individuals is a new representation of collective action. In the past Japanese social movements were formed around cohesive ideological principles pertaining to progressive, most typically Marxist, agendas. Today the 'progressiveness' of activism is born from, and reinforced by, the participants' own everyday concerns. By associating larger social injustices with personalized forms of concern, today's progressive movements enable what perhaps used to be overlooked as private issues to become inspiration for collective actions. Therefore, these civic movements encompass a mixture of different personal and social narratives, symbols, styles and objectives; they are not homogenous about 'who we are' and 'what we want.'

How do individuals organize collective identity in contemporary Japanese social activism? Taking a constructivist approach, this article examines how different social actors weave their personal narratives into a collective identity. By highlighting two case studies that shed light on the Okinawan decolonization movement, I argue that the translocal participation of different social actors in creating a particular sense of 'locality,' or place-based identity, is essential in understanding the complexity of collective representation. I emphasize the usefulness of personal narratives to understand the formation of collective identity from a grounded perspective as opposed to a deductive perspective. While the deductive approach tends to assume the core collective value as *a priori* and regards the individual narratives as conciliatory with it, the importance of personal narratives is that they can show the processes that create shared values among different actors. As I discuss below, the Okinawan decolonization movement, primarily represented in the form of the Okinawan anti-US base struggle, is particularly important because it demonstrates how place-based identity maintains rootedness and boundedness of locality while maintaining inclusivity to extra-locality. Although the mainstream literature on social movements still tends to draw on the framework of western contexts, most typically western Europe and North America, Okinawa's case can be an important contribution to the field that enables us to extend our geo-social imagination over the new forms of contentious politics and collectivity in today's world.

Creating Collective Identity

While a multifaceted collectivity is steadily replacing a homogenous mode of social formation, one of the remaining questions facing protest communities is the state of connectivity, or how to examine and evaluate complex representations of 'us'? This is not a new question. In fact, the form and meaning of connectivity has been discussed since the emergence of New

Social Movements (NSMs) in the 1970s (Touraine 1981). One of the great legacies of NSMs is their emphasis on social action both as the object of research and a constructive force in re-imagining social collectivity in the post-industrial era. In this regard, I am indebted to Arberto Melucci's seminal text *Nomads of the Present* (1989). In it, Melucci discusses how the mobilization of popular movements is possible in what he calls 'complex society.' By highlighting the heterogenous nature of contemporary society, Melucci discovers the importance of everyday life as a foundation upon which the representation of social collectivity can be constituted in heterogeneous settings. From a different perspective, another source of inspiration is American sociologist John Brown Childs and his concept of 'transcommunality.' Brown-Childs, who is an activist of the civil rights movement as well as a scholar, highlights social action at the core of his analysis. Based on his commitment to the local Santa Cruz community movement and other grassroots activities, he examines the processes of multi-ethnic coordination for community actions. His notion of transcommunality sheds light on how cross-cultural collaboration is a transformative experience for community participants that allows them to see themselves in a reflexive manner and eventually to try to establish a common ground, instead of insisting on identity boundaries (Brown Childs 2003).

However, neither of these theorists deal in any detail with the significance of space in understanding collective identity of social movements. To be fair, the question of space has become more important since the end of the Cold War when globalism arose as an alternative civic norm. The increasing influence of transnational social movement organizations inevitably directed scholars and others to question the conventionally understood political and social domains and practices bounded by national territories (see Smith et al. 1997; Tarrow 2005, 2011; Della Porta & Tarrow 2005). Nonetheless, in many cases, locality was not seen as a space of contention or dynamics but as a discourse that defines one's cultural 'origin.' In this respect, while a fixed notion of locality was seen as a source for creating dynamic transnational activisms, yet it does not mean the locality itself is the product of dynamic socio-cultural relations. However, due to the active involvement of social and cultural geographers as well as sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists, this view on locality is changing, and it is increasingly considered as a social space where dynamic politics of territorialization, de-territorialization and re-territorialization take place.

The recent shift of critical attention to locality is a key to understanding how various forms of place-based social movements are participating in making globalism from below. Central to this perspective is the different agencies involved in the representation of 'locality' and how they articulate, or disarticulate, global norms in producing their local space. For these reasons, Colin MacFarlane's notion of 'translocal assemblage' (2009) allows me to consider collectivity from different spatial scales. That is, place-based social movements are not solely a local phenomenon but stand somewhere between the local and global spheres, and play a role in transforming different levels of political space. MacFarlane differentiates between three 'orientations.' First, translocal assemblage explains the exchanges of material and immaterial resources and practices across sites. Second, translocal assemblage indicates a deeper meaning to these sites than a mere 'node' with a highlight on histories and the labour required to produce these sites. Third, translocal assemblage signifies practices such as 'doing, events and performance,' as well as spaces that emerge as a result of practices (MacFarlane 2009: 562). The usefulness of this concept is that it enables us to analyse how social movements are shaped by a particular context beyond the fixed representation of locality or a simple local-global binary. Through the lens of translocal assemblage, we can highlight the agents and agencies involved in producing social spaces that can be both local and global.

Yet, given the fact that a multiplicity of social actors and their contexts is a foundation of today's social formations, how could this assemblage be operative as a collective movement across borders? In other words, the question becomes, how are 'extra-' or 'non-' locality involved in making place-based social movements a propelling force for 'globalization from below' (Appadurai 2000; 2002)? Also, how can translocal perspectives allow us to analyse and understand place-based social movements without us being trapped by the simple local-global binary? Here, I examine the anti-US base activism in Okinawa as a site for two case studies, drawing on the personal accounts of two individuals who founded or have been involved in a group called Okinawa-Korea People's Solidarity based in Naha.

Regionalized Locality

While Tokyo's dynamic and heterogenous public demonstrations draw scholarly and popular attention, regional areas offer insights into a deep, and often overlooked, layer of modern Japanese social politics. Borderlands such as Okinawa are particularly important for considering the ambiguous or precarious state of citizenship in historically marginalized areas. Once an indigenous maritime nation in the East China Sea, Okinawa (or Ryūkyūs or Ryūkyū Kingdom) lost its semi-autonomous diplomatic relations, and territorial sovereignty, after the Japanese Empire completed incorporating the area in 1879. After that incorporation, Okinawa was seen and used as a stepping stone for Japan's southward expansion first to Taiwan, then China, then to the Pacific. After Okinawa was ravaged in the war between Japan and the Allied nations, in the latter half of the twentieth century its location in the north-western Pacific made it one of the USA's offshore strategic outposts vis-a-vis the Chinese state, the Korean peninsula, Vietnam, and the northern Pacific. In this sense, the geopolitical position of Okinawa shaped its modern experiences throughout the twentieth century and today.

The Okinawan anti-US base struggle (*Okinawa hankichi tōsō*), which started as far back as the early 1950s, is in essence a social struggle that challenges the geopolitical realism of the global order. This is especially clear when it is understood that from 1945 until 1972 Okinawa was under US military administration. The anti-base struggle has its roots in US soldiers violently evicting farmers from their farms, and therefore their livelihoods, on Iejima (Ie Shima) Island in order to construct a military exercize facility. Since the quasi-local authority, the Ryūkyū government, could not fully resolve the military violence, the farmers and other villagers began non-violent actions, such as sit-ins and public demonstrations, including 'the beggars' march (*kojiki kōshin*)' in 1955. The anti-base movements have continued ever since with local people demanding justice against the US military's six-decade occupation of Okinawan land and sea territories. In this sense, the Okinawan struggle demonstrates the resilience, as well as vulnerability, of a marginalized place and its people beyond Japan.

According to Historian Moriteru Arasakai (2005), Okinawan civic activism has unsettled the US occupation of Okinawa and post-war Japan-US security system three times since 1945: in 1956; in the late 1960s; and in 1995. The first instance was when over 100,000 people organized protest meetings in different places of Okinawa Island after Washington denied the Ryūkyū Legislature's demands on land policy. This so-called 'first' island-wide protest occurred as the result of military violence, censorship, strict travel regulations, suppression of Okinawan progressive parties, including the Okinawan People's Party, and the US military administration's unfair compensation policy in regards to the forced confiscation of land. The second momentous period was in the late 1960s on the eve of Okinawa's 'return' to Japan. This mass mobilization, the so-called '*fukki undō* (reversion movement),' was underpinned by Okinawans' increasing nationalistic sentiment as Japanese citizens and received support from

mainland Japanese mainstream conservatives as well as more progressive sectors. A growing country-wide expectation that Okinawa would be returned to Japan and the malaise within the USA due to the war in Vietnam resulted in Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Satō and US President Richard Nixon signing Okinawa's reversion treaty in 1971. Subsequently, Okinawa 'reverted' to Japanese sovereignty in 1972. The third period was in 1995 when mass civic protests occurred in response to the rape of a local school girl by three US military personnel. This movement, which received unanimous support beyond political factions, provided the momentum for then Governor Masahide Ōta, a renowned progressive politician and critic of post-war US-Japan relations, to refuse the renewal of the land lease contract between the USA and Japan for the use of land for military facilities. Ōta's political challenge caused significant unease for Japanese and US political leaders in the middle of the reform of their security policy in the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific. To pacify this political unrest, the defence authorities of the two countries established a joint task force or the 'Special Action Committee on Okinawa' in November 1995. The Special Action Committee released a plan to reduce the size of US bases in Okinawa the following year.

This last island-wide struggle was remembered by some Okinawan activists as another watershed event in the recent history of Okinawan activism for a different reason. The repercussion of this mass protest campaign went beyond the existing relationships of the base politics (Okinawa, Japan, and the USA), and drew attention from civic activists around the globe, including South Korean activists. After the political and economic democratizations that progressed quickly in South Korea after the late 1980s, some local citizens became more vocal about a series of crimes committed by the US military personnel stationed there. In 1993, these concerned Korean citizens founded a civic group called the Headquarters of the National Campaign for the Eradication of Crimes by US Troops (*Juhan Migun Beomjoe Geunjeor Undong Bonbu*, or *Jumibun* in Korean). In 1996, after reading a small column about Okinawa's mass protest demonstration and its major impact at the governmental level, one Korean male activist, Kim Yong Han, visited Okinawa to observe the actual social situation first-hand. This visit was the impetus for the citizens of the two places to start an inter-regional anti-US base solidarity campaign across the sea between the two locations. Kim's visit in 1996 was followed by a visit by forty-three Korean activists, human rights lawyers and other experts' visit to Okinawa the following year. The visitors urged the Okinawans to create a group which could act as a host and a point of contact in Okinawa. This encouragement is how the *Okikan Minshūrentai* or Okinawa-Korea People's Solidarity (OKPS) group was started by five male Japanese and *Zainichi* Korean activists.

OKPS, together with the Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence, was one of the earliest groups which were dedicated to extending the local anti-base movement beyond Okinawa. Over the last two decades, despite scarce resources, the members have been actively committed to the exchanges of people and their stories of respective anti-base struggles. One of the positive measures they introduced to the local movement is that, through OKPS as a medium, the Okinawan anti-base movement could connect with similar civic activist groups in South Korea. This meant that OKPS demonstrated the possibilities, and the challenges, for other Okinawan and other Japanese civic groups in collaborating with Asian societies. As I have discussed elsewhere (Takahashi 2018), one of the major difficulties for OKPS was the problem of Japan's colonial past in the post-colonial East Asia. While Okinawa has been marginalized vis-à-vis Japan and the USA, Okinawan activists were compelled to realize their own representation as part of the Japanese colonizers for the Korean activists. Nonetheless, as a second point, local activists' ambiguous identity as Okinawan/Japanese led to a reflexive

perspective that enables them to reinterpret and reposition the meaning of their activism in the regional context. This reflexivity was the enabler for the local activism to acquire a new agency, or what I tentatively call a regionalized 'Asian-Okinawan' subjectivity, in the discourse of Okinawan identity.

The new agency fostered by OKPS demonstrates how a heavily localized movement such as the Okinawan anti-base struggle could become a social actor in making regionalism, and eventually globalism, from below in the post-Cold War East Asia. In my earlier work (Takahashi 2018), I discussed the historical formation of this collectivity. Nonetheless, the question as to why OKPS could maintain such reflexive positionality was not answered. In the next section, I look at personal accounts based upon my interviews with two key OKPS members.[1] The first interviewee, Toshio Takahashi, is a social worker originally from Shikoku region. The second interviewee is a second-generation *Zainichi* Korean resident in Japan, or the so-called *Zainichi* Korean Yeongja Yu. She is a Buddhist nun based in Yomitan-son Village in Okinawa Prefecture. By examining their memories of struggles, I consider how OKPS's translocal agency was created, and how these activists were able to articulate historical reflexivity in their activism.

'Walking on Broken Glass with Bare Feet': Becoming a 'Local'

A tall, grey-haired gentleman who is always quiet with a warm smile on his face: this was my early impression of Toshio Takahashi—a calm middle-aged man. Yet, later, I learnt that in his youth he used to be a leader of one of the most militant and violent revolutionary sects in modern Japan. Although Toshio Takahashi originates from mainland Japan, he has become a highly regarded activist in the Okinawa struggle. He is one of the five founding members of OKPS and is the main coordinator of the group. Whenever people receive notices of the next meeting and minutes of the previous meeting, Takahashi is responsible for those emails. Takahashi is also one of the organizers of a protest community, *Futenma Bakuon Soshōdan* (Citizens against the Noise from Futenma Airbase). Based in Futenma in Ginowan City, Takahashi and other members are working to bring a lawsuit against the local US military and the Japanese government over the loud noise from the airbase in Futenma Town by collecting signatures from the town's residents.

Takahashi was born in Nangoku City, Kōchi Prefecture, in 1953.[2] As in many other parts of Japan, there was a large Korean community in Nangoku City. He said that the community was built in the early 1940s by Korean workers—who had been mobilized by the Japanese during the war to build local infrastructure, such as dams and airports—and their families. Takahashi's house was located near this local Korean community. He lived in Kōchi until he graduated from high school. In 1971, Takahashi became a university student at Tōhoku University in Sendai, in the north-eastern part of Honshū. He majored in mechanical engineering. When he was a first-year student, Takahashi became involved in and joined a progressive student activist group. It was not unusual for Japanese university and high-school students and young labourers to participate in progressive movements inside and outside their schools, universities

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1   The interviews were approved by the Ethics Committee of the Australian National University (protocol number 2011/539).

2   Interview with Toshio Takahashi, 24 November 2011. This interview was conducted at the office of the Citizens against the Noise from Futenma Airbase in Futenma City.

and work-places. In fact, university students who were concerned with issues related to social justice such as war, discrimination against cultural minorities, poverty and hard labour conditions, were the main actors in the movement.

While Takahashi's friends gradually abandoned activism, Takahashi's commitment became so serious that he could not continue his studies. He left Tōhoku University without graduating in the early 1980s and moved to Kanagawa Prefecture, south of Tokyo, with his wife, a move enabled by her appointment to a teaching position at a local primary school. Another reason was that there was a base of his group, the Revolutionary Workers' Association, at Kanagawa University in Yokohama City at that time. Takahashi spent a short period as the leader of that group.

Takahashi joined the student movement in the early 1970s, a decade after the height of new left student activism in Japan. The peak of Japan's new left student movement was from 1959 until 1960 when the *Bunto* (Bund), an umbrella organization, gathered in the centre of Tokyo with larger progressive groups such as the nation-wide workers' union, S*ōhyō*, to prevent then Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi from renewing the Japan-US Security Treaty. Over 300,000 people joined the public demonstration in front of the National Diet building in June 1960, in what is known as *Rokujū-nen Ampo Tōsō* (1960 Ampo Struggle against the Japan-US Security Treaty). Although the security treaty was renewed, Kishi and his cabinet had to resign. After the mass protests, the *Bunto* was dissolved, and a non-partisan progressive movement, led by former members of the Bund and Trotskyists who did not belong to the Japan Communist Party or Japan Socialist Party emerged. After the dissolution of the Bund, the student movement gradually lost its momentum and became individualized, depending on ideological differences, and went underground. Takahashi also participated in violent struggle as a leader of his group. Although he did not tell me much of his past, during the 1959–1960 period Takahashi changed his name and was known as Masaaki Izumi among his fellow activists. In order to increase the support for his group, and to avoid arrest, Takahashi kept moving from one place to another. After living in Kanagawa for a while, Takahashi moved to Okinawa in the mid-1980s to create a local branch of his group and to construct hegemony over the local anti-base movement.

Initially, his stay in Okinawa went as he wished. Takahashi joined some of the local anti-base activist groups and developed personal connections with fellow Okinawan activists. However, it did not take long for Okinawan anti-base activists to realize Takahashi's hidden intentions. After his political agenda was revealed, some local activists began a campaign to attack Takahashi as an infiltrator who disguised his career and name in order to use Okinawans and the Okinawan struggle for his own sake. Under the principle of non-partisan civic activism, Okinawan anti-base activists often had strong distrust for mainland Japanese activists. Okinawans thought that these student activists would harm their own aspirations; they knew from experience that such Japanese activists often aimed to divide local anti-base movement for their own ideological purposes. In this environment, Takahashi could not remain engaged in local Okinawan activism. However, to return to the Japanese mainland was not an easy option because his family, including two sons, had already settled in Okinawa. Also, his group, RWA, which was targeted by the police as a subversive 'extreme left violent group' in Okinawa, was unable to support Takahashi due to financial constraints. Furthermore, many of his former colleagues had left political activism. Consequently, Takahashi's life as a revolutionary activist came to a dead end.

At that time, Takahashi turned to several people for help, including Nishio Ichirō, a pastor and a long-term activist who was also a mainland Japanese in Okinawa. In the midst

of the 'anti-Takahashi campaign,' Nishio offered Takahashi his house as a temporary haven. Meanwhile, this senior activist worked to persuade other Okinawans to pardon Takahashi's past and let him stay on the island. Through Nishio's and friends' efforts, Takahashi was allowed to remain in Okinawa on one condition: that he leave his previous career and live as 'an Okinawan.' He did not have any other option but to change his political beliefs. Remembering those days, Takahashi described this period as though he were 'walking on broken glass with bare feet.'

After he left student activism, Takahashi started working as a social worker. He gradually resumed studying Korean language and its problematic historical relations with Japan. Takahashi, who later became a Korean expert in Okinawa, visited Korea for the first time when he was a university student in May 1974. Takahashi was involved with a petition campaign to release his friend who was in jail in South Korea. That friend, a *Zainichi* Korean who studied at Tōhoku University's medical school, was arrested in Seoul on suspicion of involvement in anti-South Korean government activism when he was a visiting student at Seoul National University. The purpose of Takahashi's visit was to submit a petition to the Japanese Embassy in Seoul on behalf of civic groups working to release the Korean student. Takahashi was chosen to visit Seoul as a delegate of his group because many senior activists had records of being arrested, and Takahashi was one of the few with no such record.

In those days, the political situation in South Korea was extremely tense. After the coup d'état in May 1961, then President of South Korea Park Chung-hee introduced a hardline campaign of policing pro-Communist, Socialist and student activists. Park's regime also targeted educated *Zainichi* Koreans who visited South Korea, particularly those suspected of having relations with the *Chongryon* or *Chōsen Sōre* (General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, GAKR), which had close ties with North Korea. After the execution of Cho Young-soo—an executive member of the *Mindan* (Korean Residents Union in Japan, KPUJ)—because of his active role in establishing the newspaper *Minzoku Jihō* (*The People's Times*) in December 1961, a number of *Zainichi* Koreans were arrested by Park's government.[3] Park's regime became even more oppressive towards dissidents after he won the presidential election over Kim Dae-jung, an influential opposition leader who later became the fifteenth president of South Korea. After his narrow victory, Park declared martial law. In protest against the new government controls, South Korean university students from the Democratic Youth Student Association (DYSA) started taking political action, and nearly two hundred students were arrested, including Takahashi's friend.

Upon his arrival in Seoul with the petition, Takahashi saw first-hand the unpopularity of the Japanese government in South Korea. The stains and shells of the eggs thrown at the wall of the Japanese Embassy caused great embarrassment and shock to this young student. Also, his first experiences of life under martial law, such as the night-time curfew, exacerbated his sense of unease. He was perhaps one of the most well-informed South Korean nationals in Japan about the harsh political oppression and anti-Japanese sentiment of Park's dictatorial regime. However, his trip to Seoul in the early 1970s remained a deeply disturbing, and haunting, experience. After this visit, he avoided being directly involved with the Korean political movement until he joined OKPS.

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3   *Mindan* (KPUJ) is one of two major organizations representing *Zainichi* Koreans in Japan. The other is GAKR. In contrast to GAKR, KPUJ is known for its support of the South Korean government.

A turning point came in the mid-1980s, when Takahashi had a chance to re-engage with Korea. He, and future OKPS founders, were introduced to Park Sunam, the *Zainichi* Korean film director who was interviewing Okinawan local islanders about the memories of Korean forced labourers and 'comfort women' in the Kerama Islands, a remote group of islands near Okinawa Island. The trip to Kerama was the impetus for Takahashi and others to consider the entangled historical relationship between Okinawa and Korea. Together with other friends who helped with Park's film making, Takahashi became involved in starting the Action Committee for Solidarity with Asia (ACSA) project, which became Okinawa Korea People's Solidarity (OKPS) in 1997. Feeling the need to learn Korean, Takahashi and other OKPS members started going to Korean language lessons. While many other learners gave up, Takahashi was one of the few students who developed fluency in both written and spoken Korean; he became proficient enough that he could simultaneously interpret from Korean into Japanese.

Complex Boundaries: Life as a *Zainichi* Korean in Okinawa

Buddhist nun, mother, and a second-generation *Zainichi* Korean, Yeongja Yu's personal journey to OKPS reveals a highly complex set of boundaries that she had to negotiate, and a complementary set of insights into Okinawan activism to those of Takahashi. Yeongja Yu is one of the very few participants in OKPS who has familial and cultural connections with Korea. Also, together with Takahashi, she is one of the few activists who has been involved in the group as a language expert. These factors make her essential for the group, especially when Okinawans host Korean delegates or when they travel to Korea. But perhaps her most important function is that her presence is regarded as neither Japanese nor Okinawan, nor indeed mainland Korean; rather she is perceived to be *kakehashi* (a bridge) between these three places.[4] Although she joined the group relatively recently, her likeable character, witty jokes and an open mind made her a central figure in the group. Her presence also highlights the strictly gendered world of OKPS and the Okinawan anti-base movement. Other OKPS members, who are either middle-aged or older men who have been involved with civic activism for decades, affectionately call her *nuna*, which means 'elder sister,' a Korean word for addressing older women by younger men, or *haha* (mother in Japanese). While they use these titles out of respect, the names also indicate something of the roles that she is expected to act in her community.

This personal characterization is not a spontaneous response to her work, but a result of the various challenges she has negotiated throughout her life. Yu was born in Hiroshima in 1951. She was the youngest child of nine siblings. Her parents moved from Korea's Jeolla Province to Japan during Korea's colonial period.[5] The family moved to Kobe when Yu was little. At the time, Kobe was one of the world's busiest industrial port cities and for this reason Kobe was known for its large international population, most typically people from Korea and other parts of Asia. As a result, the *Zainichi* Korean community in Kobe was active in the civil rights

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4   Interview with Yeongja Yu, 2 March 2012. This interview was conducted at Café Rui in Naha.

5   Jeolla Province, as well as Jeju Island and South Gyeongsan Province, the southernmost region of Korea, were the major provinces from which Koreans migrated to Japan during the 1920s and 1930s. They were traditionally known for their rich soil, and the Japanese government conducted land reform specifically in these areas to increase the production of rice during those periods. Affected by this land reform, a substantial number of peasants lost their lands and fled to Seoul to become wage labourers. In the same manner, a large number of former peasants also migrated to Japan to work in industrialized areas such as Hiroshima, Kobe, Akashi and Osaka (Moon 2005).

movement even under the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945–1952). One of the earliest and the most well-known examples was the Hanshin Education Struggle of the late 1940s. The Kobe and Osaka branches of the C*hōsenjin Renmei* (The Korean League) protested against the local Japanese police and American Occupation Forces over the right to conduct ethnic education and the protests involved physical clashes with police and the occupation forces. In Kobe, Yu went to the local *Zainichi* Korean school run by the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (GAKR or *Chōsen Sōren*) until high-school. Although her family originated in southern Korea, which was by then part of the Republic of Korea, Yu's parents, like many others in this period, sent their daughter to a school closely affiliated with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea). However, political ideology was not a major issue for her parents. Rather, they wanted Yu to be educated in a way that would maintain her Korean identity. Neither of her parents was literate, so they wanted their children to be educated in ways they were not.

At school, Yu learnt Korean and became a '*Zainichi* Korean in Japan' or what she calls '*Chōsenjin*.' She also met her future husband who was a leader of the school's student activist groups. Although Yu was never a student activist, she was still interested in the politics around her community and had a dream to become 'a wife of a famous Korean activist.' They married after graduating from high school. Yu's husband later became an art teacher at a local Japanese high school, and Yu ran a Korean-style barbeque restaurant in Kobe while raising three children. Nonetheless, she was increasingly entering the world of Korean civil rights movement. The first instance was as a member of the protest campaign against the compulsory finger printing of foreign residents in Japan.[6] *Zainichi* Koreans, who were categorized as 'special permanent residents,' were the most affected and targeted by the introduction of this system. In 1980, an anti-finger printing movement was started by a Tokyo-based *Zainichi* Korean, Han Jong-sok. Although he risked either a penalty of one year in prison or a fine, Han chose to refuse to be finger printed, insisting that this system was against the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Japan became a signatory in 1978.

When Yu saw fellow Koreans participating in the campaign, particularly people from a similar generation to her own, she decided to join her friends. What inspired Yu most was the fact that this protest campaign was not started by the major ethnic associations such as GAKR or KPUJ or by political parties, but rather by fellow *Zainichi* Koreans and Japanese citizens who joined the campaign as concerned individuals. However, when she decided to join the campaign, her husband opposed her decision; despite his earlier involvement in Korean student activist movements, he had lost interest in political campaigns. Instead, he told Yu that the finger printing issue was a problem for Japanese society, which needed to be corrected by Japanese, not 'us.' Her other family members also gave similar advice to Yu. Yet the opposition from her family could not stop her even after her husband finally said that he would divorce if she insisted on getting involved. Remembering those days, Yu said that her answer was 'yes' to divorce. She even told him: 'Let's divorce and I won't bother your life.' She was confident and thought she would be able to live freely without him. In the end, the couple did not divorce. Instead, he and other family members decided to support her. Together with her Korean and

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6   The finger printing system was introduced in 1955 as a part of the Alien Registration Act, which was enacted three years prior in 1952 with the aim to control and monitor non-Japanese residents in Japan. When foreign nationals needed to live in Japan for more than 90 days, they were obliged to be issued with an official certificate of registration, the alien registration card, by the municipal governments in the area where they live. Until 2000, foreign nationals had to have their finger prints taken at the time of submitting their applications for the renewal of the registration certificate.

Japanese friends, her first job was to publish a community journal, *Peace People*. As a principal organizer, sitting at the table of her barbeque restaurant after business hours, she wrote many articles.

The next life-changing moment came soon after she started participating in the anti-finger printing campaign in the late 1980s. One of her friends introduced her to a local study group on World War II and colonialism in Himeji, a city not far from Kobe. The event was organized by a local Buddhist group from the Jōdo Shinshū School. At first, Yu was not interested in the event, because she was a strong atheist. But the name of Kinjō Minoru, a prominent Okinawan sculptor, writer and activist, as a guest speaker on a flyer for the event attracted her interest. This event was part of a series celebrating the Japanese Buddhist monk Shinran—the 12th–13th century founder of Jōdo Shinshū. Participants read Shinran's texts and learnt his way of thinking by discussing historical and contemporary problems in Japanese society. Until that event Yu had thought that religion dealt with morals based on strict rules in order to ensure a good life after death. her impression of the Jōdo Shinshū School, one of the largest Buddhist Schools, was also negative, given its deep historical involvement in Japanese colonial projects in East Asia and the Pacific. Promoting a mixture of syncretic Buddhism with national Shintoism, the school had played a crucial role in enforcing Japanese-style Buddhism across Korea.

However, what Yu learnt from one of the monks at the venue changed her views. Her scepticism about Buddhism was shaken when she learnt about the School's ideas of the past, present and future of human existence. For Shinran, the monk told her, Buddha does not answer the question of whether there is life after death. Instead, the monk continued, Shinran's Buddhism respects the present moment, which can be found when one realizes the calls from both past and future and their historical limits. Based on this view and on remorse about their political-religious activities during the colonial period, the monks and believers who participated in the study group were all critical of Japan's colonial history. This is how Yu became fascinated by Jōdo Shinshū and its precepts. She started attending the study group as a regular member. Yet, this attendance did not satisfy her intellectual interests. In order to know more about Shinran's thought she decided to study at Otani University, one of the Buddhist universities founded by Jōdo Shinshū, where she was granted a qualification to become a nun when she was 52 years old. There, Yu met a *Zainichi* Korean professor, Chung Cho-myo (also known as Chung Sanae), who was teaching ancient Korean history. Chung introduced Yu to studies of South Korea. Like many of the fellow *Zainichi* Koreans of her generation who were educated strictly to become, literally, 'a local delegate of General Kim Il-Sun' at the *Zainichi* Korean school, Yu did not have a positive impression of South Korea. Despite the fact that it was her parents' home country, Yu knew almost nothing about it. Chung understood Yu's suspicions so she took Yu to South Korea to show her the 'motherland' in 1999. Born in Japan as a member of an ethnic minority, Yu felt that her visit to South Korea enabled her to finally feel her ancestral roots and embrace a 'Korean' identity.

Forty years after her marriage, Yu decided to live apart from her husband in Kobe, and she and one daughter moved to Okinawa in the early 2000s. The motive for that move was that she was asked to open a local study group on Shinran and Jōdo Shinshū by Minoru Kinjō, who had become a close friend. At the same time, as she drew closer to 60 years of age, Yu wanted to have new challenges. She thought that there was no better chance for her than the invitation from her friends in Okinawa. Her husband also supported her suggestion to live apart for some months each year. Yu thus started living in Yomitan Village for part of the year and Kobe for the rest of the year. She organised a study group upon her arrival in the Village,

the venue a corner of Kinjō's studio. Because of her likeable character and welcoming manner, and notwithstanding her religious background, the class soon became popular among the locals. As she had experienced in her first class in Himeji, Yu read and discussed Shinran's texts with attendees and tried to relate those works to Japanese history. Thus, she created her own critical religious practice that was anchored in her Korean background. This was demonstrated by the clothes she would wear for the class. Usually in front of her students, she wore a black Buddhist gown called *kesa*. But occasionally she came to class wearing *chima jeogori*, the traditional Korean women's dress. After her relocation to Okinawa she started participating in public gatherings on Okinawa's US-base problems and she was introduced to the founding members of OKPS.

Although Yu's active involvement with the Okinawan anti-base movement was mostly welcomed by fellow activists, it was not always the case. One significant event took place in 2010, when she attended a public gathering in front of the Okinawa Prefectural Government. Prior to this gathering, she was told by her friends that the next protest demonstration would aim to pressure the Okinawa Prefectural Government by representing the voices of all Okinawan residents who disagreed with the relocation of the US military base from Futenma to Henoko. Yu decided to attend the event in her favourite Korean dress. However, during the protest, she was surrounded by a group of local female activists, one of whom asked her why she had come in 'such a strange dress.' Yu replied that the dress represented her cultural origins and that it was a formal dress to wear at a public event. The woman responded by telling her it was inappropriate to wear that sort of dress because the protest should be a gathering for and by 'Okinawans.' After the event Yu seriously considered returning to Kobe.

Despite that encounter many of Yu's close Okinawan friends tried to dissuade her. They were frustrated that such a divisive view was prevalent within certain groups of Okinawan activists. Of those friends, Yu recalls a warm comment from Setsuko Miyagi, a highly respected senior activist. 'Okinawans needed a person like you,' Miyagi told Yu. Furthermore, her strong supporter Minoru Kinjō, who is a community leader in Yomitan Village, said that Okinawans should work together with *Zainichi* Koreans in Japan as they both share unresolved historical wounds caused by mainland Japanese. Hearing such encouragement, Yu was reassured that her decision to move to Okinawa was not the wrong choice. Yu's life in Okinawa was not always easy. Above-mentioned cases or similar ones still occur 'occasionally,' she told me. But after living in Okinawa for nearly fifteen years, Yu also found many reasons to stay. In Yomitan Village, Henoko and elsewhere, she has found welcoming communities. Inspired by Yu's life and religious views, some of her friends, including influential politicians and activists, started studying Jōdo Shinshū, and Chibana Shōichi, a local activist, later studied to become a qualified Buddhist monk.

Conclusion

The life histories of Takahashi and Yu—one a mainland Japanese, the other a *Zainichi* Korean nun—introduce us to the memories of social struggles that they experienced. The two respective stories show the moments, events, and human relations that are involved in the navigation of translocal lives in Okinawa. Nonetheless, these personal accounts touch upon a number of the social struggles that Japan has experienced since 1945. Student radicalism of the 1970s and the Korean civil rights movements are some exemplars among many stories that are involved in extra-local Okinawan anti-base activisms. While Okinawan activism and activism in the rest of Japan tend to be considered separately, Takahashi's and Yu's stories emphasize how the two places inform post-war Japanese social activism more broadly. The

translocal lives of Takahashi and Yu show how a place-based activism with decolonizing features, such as the Okinawan anti-base movement, became a movement that fosters a social re-imagination beyond local, and national, or translocal, boundaries

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