

# **Nationalism or Assimilation: The Ambivalence toward Japanization in Yang Sok-il's *Blood and Bones***

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*\*The correct pronunciation of each character's name in 5<sup>th</sup>~7<sup>th</sup> sections cannot be found anywhere in the original text of the novel. Please note that the pronunciations are written under the presenter's assumptions.*

*\*In this presentation, the paperback edition of the novel, which is divided into Volume One and Two, is analyzed.*

### **1. The Purpose of the Presentation**

The present study aims at understanding the significance of Japanization in Yang Sok-il's *Blood and Bones*. Concretely, understanding how Japanization influenced the individuation of a few characters in the novel, Kō Nobu-yoshi, Kan Masa-hito, and Kimu Shum-pei, is the purpose of this study.

In this long novel, there seem to be several elements of Japanization that influenced a few characters' identity formation, in other words, their codes of conduct. What did those first or second-generation Zainichi Korean characters think and how did they feel, standing amid an enormous binary opposition between Korean nationalism and assimilation into Japan?

They must have experienced a so-called "identity crisis." How did they face the influence of the Japanization and overcome an ambivalence or a dilemma between nationalism and assimilation so as to find out their correct *raison d'être* as a Zainichi Korean? The present study attempts to answer what the Japanization meant for them, and by extension, for this novel.

### **2. Yang Sok-il and *Blood and Bones***

Born in 1936 in Osaka, Yang Sok-il is now a second-generation Zainichi Korean novelist and poet (Author's information, *Blood and Bones* (Hardcover edition)). Some of his famous pieces are 子守の中の子守唄, 断層海流, 夜を賭けて, and Z. Among them, *Blood and Bones*, or 血と骨 / *Chi to Hone* in Japanese, the novel for which he won the 11<sup>th</sup> Yamamoto Shūgorō Literary Prize in 1998, is his representative work (ibid).

*Blood and Bones* portrays the life of Kim Shum-pei, the violent protagonist of the story, who was modeled after Yang's real father, a first-generation Zainichi Korean. Shumpei shows off his terrifying presence in both the communities of Japanese and Zainichi Koreans by solving problems in violent ways in the pre-war and post-war Kasai region. Shum-pei's lifetime is depicted in the novel, focusing on the success and failure of his various businesses, and his love-hate relationships with his friends, lovers, and families.

### 3. Japanization

The word, Japanization, in a modern historical context, basically means a policy of assimilating colonized people into the Empire of Japan, requesting their fealty toward the Japanese Emperor (遠藤, 和解学の創生). It is known as 皇民化政策 / Kōminka-Seisaku in Japanese. Japanization, apart from its historical meaning, could also mean, in general, to make or become Japanese in form, idiom, style, or character (The Free Dictionary by Farlex).

When I say that there are some elements of Japanization that influenced a few characters' identity formation in the novel, I am referring to the meaning of Japanization both as Kōminka-Seisaku and as its general meaning. That is to say, there is a case of being influenced by particular effects of Kōminka-Seisaku, and there is also a case of being affected by the general idea of becoming more like a Japanese. We will be talking about it again later, but one thing to know here is that, in the novel, both Kōminka-Seisaku, as well as the thought of making oneself more Japanese, are more or less expressed as forced ideologies on Zainichi Koreans.

### 4. Identity Crisis

In general, identity crisis has a negative meaning: a feeling that you are not sure of who you are or what you should do (Cambridge Dictionary). A sociologist at the University of Southern California, Paul Adler, as opposed to the general interpretation, mentions a positive side of identity crisis. According to him, an identity crisis caused especially by culture shock allows one to understand his or her true identity, after gaining new insights of their own in the process of the identity crisis itself whereby he or she notices and experiences various changes and mental growths (Nakamoto 428).

This study's view is that, Japanization, though it has caused some characters to have a depressing feeling of being unsure of who they really are, Japanization has, at the same time, not simply let them everlastingly stay within the plane of their identity crises. The Japanization might ultimately have

brought them what Adler calls a positive identity crisis where they have come to understand their correct significance of being or codes of conduct as a first or second-generation Zainichi Korean, which is the present study's claim. Japanization might have become a meaningful turning point for them where they decided to spend a powerful life in Japan as Zainichi Koreans.

## 5. Kō Nobu-yoshi / 高信義

Nobuyoshi is one of a few characters that appeared from the very beginning of the story. In the early part of the novel, he did not place himself in a right-wing or left-wing position. He had been basically disinterested in becoming more like a Japanese or having a strong pride in Korean nationalism. In the early stage, Nobuyoshi was basically paying much of his attention to helping Shumpei, as well as other Zainichi Koreans, have a good life in the Kansai region. He did not seriously think, or precisely speaking, did not have much free time to think about Japanizing himself or persisting in Korean nationalism. In the beginning, trying to simply have a good life in Japan was one big purpose of Nobuyoshi's life.

Nobuyoshi, however, after undergoing the arrest by Japanese police for being suspected of organizing a protest with some other Zainichi Korean colleagues against their company, Taihei-Sangyō (270~382, Ch.8~12, Vol. 1), he, apparently, has found out the importance of protecting his Zainichi Korean community. During the arrest, there were a number of awful interrogations, intimidations, and torturing of Nobuyoshi by Japanese police and detectives in order for him to sign a fabricated report which could faultily prove some other Zainichi Koreans guilty and could become an advantage for some Japanese people of power. He faced an enormous identity crisis at this point:

“しばらく放心状態になっていた高信義は激しい自己嫌悪に陥って泣きだし、留置場の壁に頭を叩きつけた。おれは弱い人間だ。情けない。そう思うと涙がとめどなく溢れてきた。裏切ることもしできない。かといって耐えることもできない。できることなら死んでしまいたいと思った。” (309~310, Ch.10, Vol. 1)

Not very much related to the worshipping of the Emperor, but it was a type of Japanization where a Korean was forced to assimilate into the Empire of Japan in a way he contributes, whether morally or not, to well-being of the empire. Did Nobuyoshi eventually choose the assimilation? No, he did not. He rebelled against the Japanese Empire and did not Japanize himself. Instead, he determined to put up with the pain given by Japanese police and to protect his Korean friends, in other words, protecting Korean nationalism:

“だが、高信義は一ヶ月半前の高信義ではなかった。...強迫観念にとらわれているようでもあり、強い意志を秘めているようでもある。...高信義は海老のように体を丸めて作業服姿の刑事の暴力を受け入れるのだった。...今度あの独房に入れられたら、舌噛み切って死んだる。黙秘していた高信義が低い声で呪うように言った。” (314~315, Ch.10, Vol. 1)

Over the process of dealing with dilemma between assimilation and nationalism, Nobuyoshi lost

the meaning of who he was. But this identity crisis, simultaneously, granted him a time to rethink the life of his precious Zainichi Korean community and what it means to be a genuine, or countrymen-minded, Zainichi Korean. Japanization, for Nobuyoshi, was a turning point to form his new identity where he unshakably stands on the conviction of Korean nationalism:

“「協和会」というのは、日本人への同化政策をおしすすめ、戦争遂行に必要な労働力、軍人軍属への動員に協力させ、その思想・行動を監視し民族的なるもののいっさいを抹殺・弾圧する警察行政の一翼を担った団体である。...金俊平と高信義は彼らから何度も勧誘されたが、二人は全く関心を示さなかった。無実の罪で一年以上刑務所暮らしをしてきた高信義は、その信念を貫くために頑固に拒否していた。” (416, Ch.12, Vol. 1)

## 6. Kan Masa-hito / 韓容仁

Masahito is the husband of Shumpei's adopted daughter, Harumi. Masahito is in close relation with Shumpei, as he is, in a sense, like a son to Shumpei. Probably, this character, Masahito, had been one of the most Japanese nationalistic Zainichi Koreans up until the early phase of Volume Two. An interesting piece of information about Masahito is that he graduated from a Japanese high school wherein he received a rigorous education as to being a subject of the Japanese Empire. That is, up until the early phase of Volume Two where he was still a young man, Masahito had already been thoroughly Japanized, without having any special feelings toward Korean nationalism. All he cared about at the time was trying to promote Kōminka-Seisaku, assimilating himself into the Empire of Japan:

“韓容仁も日本は戦争に勝つと信じていた。日本の高校を卒業している韓容仁は徹底的に「皇国臣民」教育を叩き込まれていたのだ。” (417, Ch.12, Vol. 1)

“日本の敗戦を予感できたはずだが、新聞を読んでいた韓容仁の脳裏には敗戦のはの字さえ浮かばなかった。いざというときは神風が吹くと韓容仁は本気で信じていた。” (432, Ch.13, Vol. 1)

Masahito who was originally embracing very strong Japanese nationalism, however, dramatically changed his belief after the surrender of the Empire of Japan in the Pacific War. He turned into advocating Korean nationalism:

“ラジオから日本の降伏を告げる天皇の声を聞いた韓容仁は腕組をし、臉を閉じて沈痛な表情をしていた。” (466, Ch.13, Vol. 1)

“日本の勝利を信じて疑わなかった韓容仁はしばらく落ち込んでいたが、最近は朝鮮人団体の一員になり、持ち前の弁舌と臨機応変な性格で青年部の幹部になっていた。” (11, Ch.14, Vol. 2)

Although he did not know what to do or where he should move forward after Japan's defeat, he gradually noticed that it was Korean nationalism that he ought to pursue from then on. He overcame his complicated emotions emerged amid assimilation and nationalism by totally changing his perception toward Japanization, which he had been cherishing, as follows:

“韓容仁は今自分が所属している組織の青年部幹部であることを誇示し、三十六年におよぶ日本の植民地状態から解放されて朝鮮独立の道を歩みはじめたことを強調するだけでよかった。...韓容仁の言葉にはかつて日本を信じ天皇を信じて疑わなかった自分に対する苦い思いも込められていた。おれは騙されていた、という思いである。その思いが憎しみに転じていた。” (34~35, Ch.14, Vol. 2)

It is possible to see that, during Masahito's identity crisis, he went through the transformation of loyalty or love into abhorrence and rage. He began to regard the Japanization, doing a complete 180, as something evil that he should overthrow. The transformation caused by what Masahito personally calls the betrayal by Japanization, as a result, granted him an intense impetus to clearly become a Zainichi Korean, who lives for the purpose of fighting back, with the means of Korean nationalism, against the conservative Japanese ideology. It is ironic, but Japanization, both before and after the Pacific War, has had a huge influence on deciding Masahito's codes of conduct.

## 7. Kimu Shum-pei / 金俊平

First of all, we have to know that, as least, on the surface, Shumpei, throughout the whole story, is neither a Japanese nor a Korean nationalistic person:

“金俊平に国家や祖国という概念などない。生まれ故郷である済州島に対する思いはあるが、郷と国家や祖国とでは金俊平にとってまったくちがう規範であった。” (184, Ch.19, Vol. 2)

Shumpei has basically been a lone wolf who has no personal attachments toward assimilation into Japan or Korean nationalism. And also, neither Japan nor Korea, in other words, nations, could clearly and thoroughly put him under their ideological control, because he was very violent. Shumpei's violence is so big that it dissipates all kinds of outer influences given to him, which is probably one of a few reasons why he could survive in a suzerain state as a lonely person of a dependent state.

So, Shumpei is neither Japanized nor influenced by Korean nationalism? As is mentioned above, on a superficial level, or at a conscious level, he did not seem to try becoming a true Japanese or Korean; however, let us take a look at the following opinion by another Zainichi Korean novelist, Kim Sok-pom:

“かつて在日朝鮮人にとって仕事といえば、まずは土方、その他の肉体労働の他にはなかった。肉体が資本であり、力であるのは金俊平だけではない。金俊平は伝説上の怪物ではなく、れっきとした日本帝国の植民地支配の所産の破型的な象徴である。...金俊平の存在は植民地性故に、本来あるべき民族的抵抗とか労働争議とかのイデオロギーから切れている。切れた分が、巨大な凶器と化した肉体の暴力となって、帝国権力ではなく周辺、もっともいたいけな家族たちへ向かう。まさにイデオロギーの変形である。” (471, Commentary, Vol. 2)

To a certain extent, I agree with what Kim Sok-pom said here. At an unconscious level, Shumpei had been in fact invisibly controlled by the Empire of Japan in a way that the only job provided for him was becoming a manual laborer. It could be seen as an invisible yet forced assimilation of Shumpei into Japan, the purpose of which may be to let him stay ignorant of any nationalism so that he does not rebel against Japan.

It might not be the obvious Kōminka-Seisaku for Shumpei, but he got unknowingly and gradually assimilated into the Japanese Empire without manifesting any doubts toward the Japanese Emperor, by keeping on working as a manual laborer. Shumpei may think he is not influenced by the general idea of being more like a Japanese, but his continuously working as a manual laborer in Japan, without him himself noticing, might have made him become more like a Japanese in form, idiom, style, and character. Shumpei, at an unconscious level, was in fact Japanized.

Did Shumpei then encounter any identity crisis during the aforementioned Japanization? Well, people may think he did not lose the meaning of who he is, since he, in the first place, did not consciously pay much attention to either Japanization or pride as a Zainichi Korean.

However, when Kim Sokpom mentioned as above, “金俊平の存在は植民地性故に、本来あるべき民族的抵抗とか労働争議とかのイデオロギーから切れている。切れた分が、巨大な凶器と化した肉体の暴力となって、帝国権力ではなく周辺の、もっともいたいけな家族たちへ向かう。まさにイデオロギーの変形である。,” I started to interpret the transformation of his own ideology – the transformation itself, as an identity crisis which he might have gone through.

It may sound a bit contradictory, but there might have been an unconscious loss of his identity, being unable to understand why all he can do or is allowed to do is the same type of job, the same type of act every single day in Japan.

Kim Sokpom also mentions after that sentence, “帝国主義所産の暴力がかもす肉体の爆発が本来なら日本帝国へ向けられて然るべきなのに、運命の悪意がそれをねじ曲げる。帝国への無意識の復讐が、家族へ、家族が帝国の身代わりに。.” (471-472, Commentary, Vol. 2)

In order to deal with the so-called unconscious identity crisis of Shumpei, he might have unconsciously formed a *raison d'être* of living a violent or rebelling lifestyle, after continuously experiencing his life as a manual laborer; that is, Japanization. I am not sure of whether or not Shumpei's latent violence is originally targeted specifically toward the Empire of Japan, like Kim Sokpom claims. But, to some degree, the theory that Japanization, or implied Japanization for Shumpei, is, slowly yet steadily, what individuated him into violent personality, may be affirmed.



Is being violent in personality good or bad? That would be another topic to discuss another time. But, one thing to be said here is that, in a sense, being violent is to avoid a passive life. Because of the Japanization, Shumpei, as a result, could have been respected by everyone, both Japanese and Korean. Because of the Japanization, ultimately speaking, he gained a sort of motivation to live on and never give up on his life as a genuinely tough first-generation Zainichi Korean.

If it were not for the Japanization, this novel could not have portrayed the novel's real pleasure, the undulating life of Kim Shumpei.

## 8. The Significance of Japanization in Yang Sok-il's *Blood and Bones*

In this presentation, we have looked at correlations between Japanization and the identity formation of the three characters that played important roles in the novel. What was the significance of Japanization for each character? I have made a table below which may help us answer the question:

~The Significance of Japanization for Nobuyoshi, Masahito, and Shumpei~

	<i>Nobuyoshi</i>	<i>Masahito</i>	<i>Shumpei</i>
<i>What kind of Japanization was it?</i> 	He was forced by Japanese police to assimilate into the Empire of Japan in a way that he contributes to the well-being of the empire.	Receiving a rigorous education, in Japanese high school, as to being a subject of the Japanese Empire.	Being invisibly controlled by the Empire of Japan in a way that the only job provided for him was becoming a manual laborer.
<i>What sort of identity crisis was given by Japanization?</i> 	Whether he should yield to Japanese police and Japan's state power or save his Zainichi Korean colleagues.	A sense of being betrayed by Japan which he had never thought would surrender. & Transformation of loyalty or love into abhorrence and rage.	Unconscious anxiety of being unable to truly understand why all he could do or is allowed to do is the same type of job, the same type of act every day in Japan.
<i>How did they become after experiencing Japanization?</i>	He reflected on his precious Zainichi Korean community, after which he resolved to stand on the conviction of Korean nationalism.	Gained an impetus to become a Zainichi Korean, who fights back, with Korean nationalism, against the conservative Japanese ideology.	Unconsciously formed an identity where he tries to live a violent or rebelling lifestyle (probably, in unconscious response to Japanese imperialism).

According to the table, some differences between the protagonist and the other two characters can be seen.

✓ While Nobuyoshi and Masahito went through obvious Japanization, for Shumepi it was invisible Japanization which he unconsciously went through.

✓ Both Nobuyoshi and Masahito, after experiencing Japanization, eventually found out and enhanced the importance of Korean nationalism inside themselves. Shumpei, contrary to them, did not really obtain proper awareness of Korean nationalism, through Japanization.

★ The three of them, however, all share the common point that the identity crisis caused by Japanization was quintessentially not actually a hopeless crisis, but a kind of process to form a new identity suitable for having a powerful life in Japan as Zainichi Koreans.

When people read this novel, they have to keep in mind that there is indeed an element of Japanization. Although “Japanization” would not be the most important or notable theme of the novel, by being attentive to Japanization and understanding it, we may be able to see why the three characters acted in a certain way in a certain situation. We may be able to solve some of their mysterious deeds. The influence of Japanization hidden behind their actions is something definitely worth researching. Noticing a sudden change in the important characters’ identity based on the concept or discourse of Japanization may give us a new approach to interpreting Yang Sok-il’s *Blood and Bones*.

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