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# Voicing Zainichi in Tokyo: An Art Festival Proposal

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## Abstract

The term *Zainichi* refers to the Korean ethnic diaspora in Japan. While people from the Korean peninsula had been shaping Japanese history since surviving records, it was after 1910 that waves of ethnic Koreans settled on the Japanese mainland. The diaspora goes with naturalization and cultural citizenship, especially for North Koreans. To fill the gap in bridging Zainichi art, ethnic identity and cityscapes, the project delineates how Zainichi communities voice their identity through music and art performances. While negotiating between Japan and their homeland, North Koreans face challenges as the minority under the South Korean and Japanese discourse. By this, a public-facing art campaign based in Tokyo is envisaged to promote wide awareness of diasporic North Koreans in Japan.

**Keywords:** *Zainichi, North Koreans, Art Festival*

## Introduction

Recent years have seen flourishing research on the Korean ethnic diaspora in Japan. The term *Zainichi*, meaning “staying in Japan”, particularly captures scholarly attention. Simply put, historically there had been migrants from the Korean Peninsula immigrating to Japan. But only those who settled on Japan in the first half of last century due to warfare are counted as a largely separate group<sup>1</sup>. Since the Korean annexation in 1910, thousands of Korean nationals were in the main Japanese islands. Following that, Japan’s labor shortage in the 1920s led to the rapid expansion of the Korean population in the Japanese islands. By 1945, there were roughly two million diasporic Koreans in Japan, who were split into two camps, namely the North and South. According to a 1951 study, by 1955 there were 63% of Koreans born and bred in Japan<sup>2</sup>, which constituted the second and third immigrant generations. Thus, *Zainichi* is mainly used for long-term Korean residents who set their roots in the Japanese mainland. Over time, as some scholars have pointed out, the term no longer implies merely temporary residence but is adopted as a cultural phenomenon for the huge Korean population in Japan, whether migrated or were forced to settle there.

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<sup>1</sup> Minahan, James B. “Zainichi.” In *Ethnic Groups of North, East, and Central Asia: An Encyclopedia*, 328.

<sup>2</sup> Lie, John. “Zainichi: The Korean Diaspora in Japan.” Volume 14:2 (Fall 2009): *Asian Intercultural Contacts*, (2009): 16.

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As debates on *Zainichi* still exist to define the line between “North” and “South” Korean, the term is always subjected to various contexts. For example, *Zainichi* is cited by John Lie to encompass the whole Korean diaspora in Japan; instead, Markus Bell uses the phrase “Zainichi Koreans” to discuss the North Korean community’s transnational longing for the motherland<sup>3</sup>. Jooyeon Rhee also refers to the term as North Koreans featured in Yang Yonghi’s autobiographical films<sup>4</sup>, to name a few. Taken together, historically there has been an amalgamation of both Southern and Northern populations in Japan, so much so that the blending of birth origin and inter-community exchange became hard to trace. Also, one has to keep in mind that in contextual analysis, the highlight of South Korea often takes the lead, considering the country’s dominant cultural representations compared with North Korea in the post-cold war discourse. By all these, the North Korean diaspora in Japan still awaits further studies on its archival history as well as future envisions.

Catering *Zainichi* specifically to the North Koreans, the project begins with a case study and promotional campaign for their marginalized situation. As James Scotts reminds us, “The larger the pile of rubble you leave behind, the larger your place in the historical record.”<sup>5</sup> First, straddling between South Korean and Japanese cultures, how does the North Korean diaspora negotiate their identity, by means of enlightening art education? Within the host society of Tokyo, how does the cityscape create, or challenge their sense of belonging? With all these questions, it is believed that an art festival could finally be a solution to bring their lived experience onto the front stage and inspire further thoughts on migrant identity.

Named “*Voicing Zainichi in Tokyo*”, the Art Festival aims to provide a channel for the *Zainichi* community to voice their feelings through art presentations. The project points out the need for the implementation of actions for *Zainichi*, especially Chōsen, the Korean domicile group, to express their long-suppressed feeling about their life in Tokyo. To achieve this, the project will undertake the following strategies:

- 1) Working on artistic collaborations of *Zainichi* ethnic tropes through the implementation of art and music performances and workshops.
- 2) Raising public awareness about *Zainichi* education right through a Street Art Program with Inside Out Project.
- 3) Establishing an online art map “Tokyo Art Map” to locate and present street art initially focusing on *Zainichi* Korean in Tokyo.

Overall, the primary outcome of the project will be a theatre performance for the public and exhibitions of *Zainichi* children’s artworks. This public appearance has two aims – to present and promote the project results and to engage the wider

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<sup>3</sup> Bell, Markus. “Reimagining the Homeland: *Zainichi* Koreans’ Transnational Longing for North Korea.” *The Asia Pacific journal of anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2019): 22.

<sup>4</sup> Rhee, Jooyeon. “Cinematic Testimony to the Repatriation of *Zainichi* Koreans to North Korea in Yang Yonghi’s Autobiographical Films.” *Asian studies review* 46, no. 3 (2022): 473.

<sup>5</sup> Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: an Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. p. 33.

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audience to proactively participate in Zainichi empowerment in the future.

### **Between Cultural Citizenship: Why Zainichi Matters**

After a brief introduction to the Zainichi history and their status quo, it still needs to emphasize why Zainichi groups particularly matter along with the significance of the project. To begin with, for any migration diaspora, the central question throughout would be “cultural citizenship”, which means citizenship as a cultural process of “subjectification” by the relationship between “self-making” and “being-made”, according to Ong Aihwa<sup>6</sup>. To be sure, for Zainichi, the North Korean diasporic groups, this process involves both themselves as migrants and Japan as a host society. It should be noted that Zainichi’s emotional ties with Japanese culture are never unchanging but in a dynamic evolution. Even within the Zainichi community, there abound different groupings and identity belongings.

The first dimension has to do with the Japanese authority. Along with Japan’s migration policies such as labor laws, assimilation and naturalization, Zainichi’s living status varies from time to time. During the wartime period, Zainichi were mostly laborers being exploited, “Between 1939 and 1945, an estimated 60, 000 ethnic Koreans in Japan died from harsh treatment, inhumane working conditions and allied bombings.” This traumatic history later shifted to Japan’s modernity and assimilation policy. “The attempted erasure of Korean cultural practices included forbidding Korean-style clothes, forcing Koreans to use Japanese names.” Policies like these did succeed till today. Cold-war political climates such as anti-communism also played a role in their national identity, as some stayed in Japan out of fear, whereas some were politically “identified with North Korea”<sup>7</sup>. With ebbs and flows, such grand history as well as collective memory deserves to be recorded in art and museum projects.

Second, the mutual support within Zainichi communities cannot be underestimated. In 1955, “Chongryun”, the general federation of Resident Koreans in Japan established<sup>8</sup>. Despite the lack of Japanese acknowledgment for a long time, the federation unleashed the potential for Zainichi to be self-governed in school education, cultural activities and so forth. With the fulfillment of resources, “Being Korean-Japanese no longer requires the possession of symbolic items of return to one of the Korean states.” Of course, the long-standing Chongryun and Zainichi’s enduring efforts also deliver a nostalgic longing for the homeland, which is intimately connected with their past, present and future.

As such, by the interplay between “being-made” and “self-making”, Zainichi groups are achieving a hybrid identity in foreign Japan. Meanwhile, as they became linguistically and culturally Japanese, Zainichi’s influence on Japan took drastic shape.

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<sup>6</sup> Bell, Markus. “Reimagining the Homeland: Zainichi Koreans’ Transnational Longing for North Korea.” *The Asia Pacific journal of anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2019): 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>8</sup> Lie, John. “Zainichi: The Korean Diaspora in Japan.” Volume 14:2 (Fall 2009): *Asian Intercultural Contacts*, (2009): 16.

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Such a story matters because it defies any essentializing assumptions but invites thinking on inclusive cultural citizenship. Accordingly, as one may ponder how such a diversified populace may be represented in public, our project does not selectively target specific citizenships but embraces all the Zainichi collective and personal feelings as diversely as possible.

### **Performing Diaspora: Zainichi Music and Art**

“Cultural memories, religious prayerfulness, and artistic sensibilities were combined in a potent mix to imagine possibilities beyond state heritage narratives and the visual field of the global city.”<sup>9</sup> The history records and migration stories shall not stay in a vacuum. Rather, they together as cultural memories invite civil society to store and speak, for which artistic creation is a crucial mediator. This section deals with existing Zainichi arts ranging from music, dance and museum art in Japan and other global cities. For one thing, it unfolds the intricacy of the Zainichi’s cultural practice beyond geopolitics; for another, performances serve as references to the inspiration as to promote Zainichi art in the changing global context.

Zainichi’s art undertaking developed plural forms in Japan. With access to a variety of music themes including traditional Korean, contemporary North and South Korean, Japanese, and Western music, Zainichi Koreans have composed music that embodies their feelings and nostalgia mindset. For instance, Kumgansan Kaguktan, established in 1955, is the North Korean performance troupe based in Tokyo that presents Korean music<sup>10</sup>. The troupe began with eighteen members trained in Western classical music but later on, they also brought North Korean instruments into play. In 1974, the troupe had a visiting performance back in Pyongyang and the performance was highly appreciated by the Chairman Kim Il-Sung. As the troupe members won acclaim across Japan with unique musical style, it reached a wider audience for both local Japanese and Zainichi Koreans, followed by the popular Zainichi musician Kim Yǒngsil. The troupe shows how Zainichi music balances the national ideology and the Japanese audiences.

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<sup>9</sup> Goh, Daniel P.S. “Walking the Global City: The Politics of Rhythm and Memory in Singapore.” *Space and culture* 17, no. 1 (2014): 26.

<sup>10</sup> Koo, Sunhee. “Zainichi Korean Identity and Performing North Korean Music in Japan.” *Korean studies* 43, no. 1 (2019): 170.



Figure 1. Kūmgangsan Kagūktan, Tokyo, Japan

Another interesting note is that Zainichi artists have been advancing their artworks into global cities. The 2008 group exhibition *ZAINICHIART* held in Shanghai's Foundry Gallery may be the first time that Zainichi art systematically brought its voice to China<sup>11</sup>. Cities like Suzhou and Hangzhou have had exhibitions featuring North Korean contemporary oil paintings as well. It is worth noting that in April 2014, Tokyo's eitoeiko gallery showcased the exhibition *Z3* (Zainichi Korean third Generation of Art)<sup>12</sup>, as a group show portraying generations of Zainichi art. But still, Zainichi art is often taken as joint exhibitions with Japanese and Korean counterparts, while its genres are limited with few installation artworks.

Despite these efforts, the scarcity of due attention on Zainichi may point back to the fundamental question: their living experiences are not without challenges. Global cities facilitate art and culture, but at the same time, inequality encroaches in each corner of the cityscape. Can Zainichi own claims to the city? Are they unbiasedly represented or not? These concerns give rise to discussions on the cause of the Zainichi identity crisis in Japan and corresponding countermeasures.

### **Critical Analysis: The Identity Crisis for North Koreans in Japan**

North Koreans living in Japan face a serious identity crisis, which means they can hardly have a sense of belonging to their motherland and Japan as well. Since both Japan and North Korea have no diplomatic ties with each other, those North Korean descendants will not have citizenship if they do not choose Japanese nationality. They are discriminated against by local people in their community and their voices can hardly be heard because of their extremely marginal status. Their identity crisis can be analyzed from different perspectives, including marginalization

<sup>11</sup> “ZAINICHIART”在日朝鲜人群展. *artlinkart*.

<http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/exhibition/overview/dafgtCs/geographically/shanghai/earlier>. Accessed December 8, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> “Z3(Zainichi Korean 3rd Generation of Art).” *artinasia*.

<http://www.artinasia.com/galleryDetail.php?catID=5&galleryID=1247&view=7&eventID=23819>. Accessed December 8, 2022.

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from mainstream society and culture, self-isolation of the North Korean community in Tokyo, and media hype created by western media.

### **Marginalization from Mainstream Society and Culture**

The General Association of North Korean in Japan has similar functions as an embassy even though no diplomatic relation has been established between these two countries, so this association is the only political representation of North Korean authority and the North Korean diaspora in Japan. However, the General Association of North Korean in Japan can hardly be seen on google map. A good map tells a multitude of little white lies; it suppresses truth to help the user see what needs to be seen<sup>13</sup>. The google map has to be zoomed in to a 10-meter measuring scale to see an incomplete name of the association on the map. When the google map is turned into a 100-meter measuring scale, even the incomplete name of the association becomes invisible. Compared to this, the embassy of the People’s Republic of China and the Embassy of Germany can even be seen clearly in a 200-meter measuring scale on google map. This big difference shows the extreme marginalization of North Koreans in Japanese society.

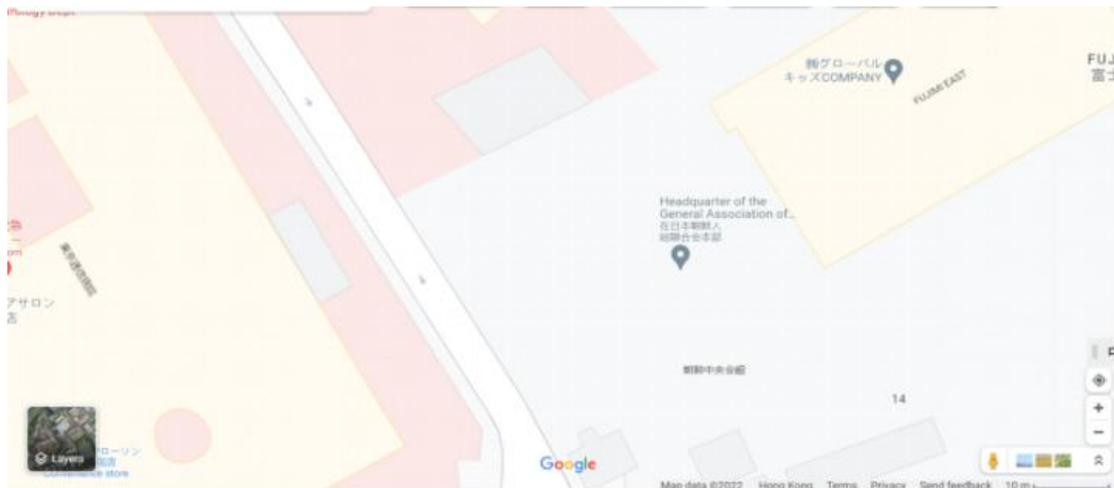


Figure 2. The General Association of North Korean in Japan on Google Map

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Monmonier, “Map Generalization: Little White Lies and Lots of Them,” *How to Lie with Maps*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 25.

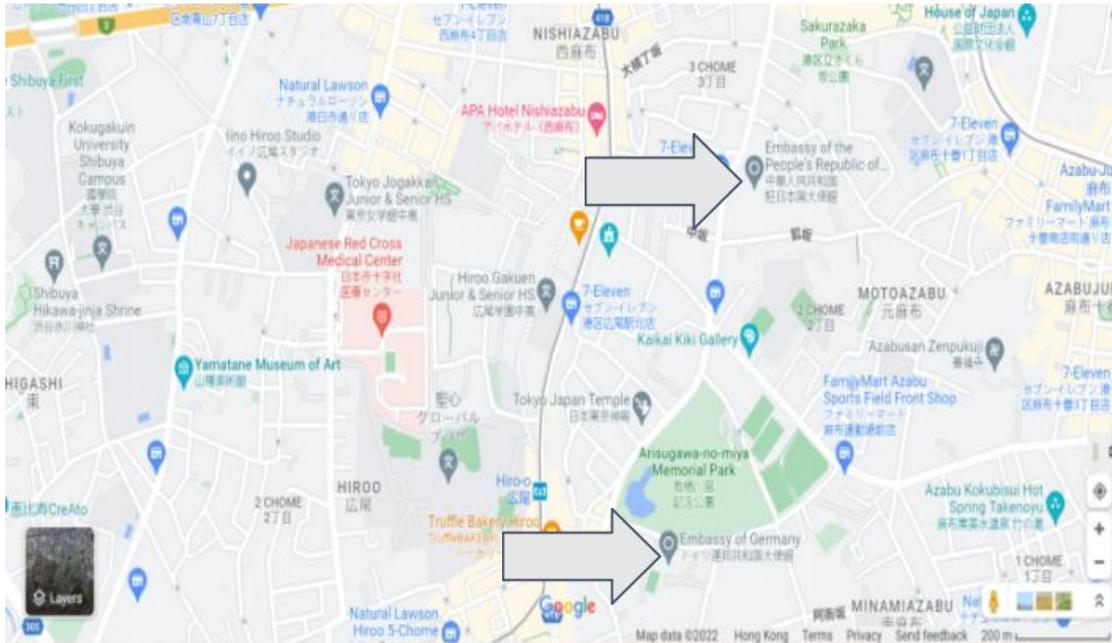


Figure 3. Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Japan (Upper one); Embassy of Germany in Japan (Lower one)

We know the world through social media, and then we generate and conceive the knowledge<sup>14</sup>, so social media plays an important part of experiencing the world and getting acquainted with other people from different cultural backgrounds. However, the marginalization of the North Korean community in Tokyo is also reflected in google search and Instagram. A sharp contrast can be seen when searching the North Korean community and South Korean community in Tokyo on google search. There are many lively and wonderful festivals in the South Korean community in Tokyo, but in the North Korean community, there are only some photos of North Korean students in North Korean schools in Tokyo. People can hardly know about the lifestyle of those ordinary people in the North Korean community in Tokyo through social media.

In conclusion, the North Korean diaspora in Tokyo is marginalized and invisible in locative and social media.

**Self-isolation of the North Korean Community in Tokyo**

Tokyo, as a global city, is a home to diverse cultures where different ethnic groups live. As David Harvey cautions that in cities “any idea of local autonomy is raised, some kind of enclosure is demanded”<sup>15</sup>, this is how the North Korean diaspora shows the features of self-isolation. North Koreans have their own teaching system from primary school to university in Tokyo. They are mainly taught in Korean in their

<sup>14</sup> Nadav Hochman and Lev Manovich, “Zooming into an Instagram City: Reading the Local through Social Media,” *First Monday* 18 (2013).  
<sup>15</sup> Harvey, David. *Rebel Cities : from the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso, 2012. p. 71.

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school and told to support their leader, Kim Jong-un, just like how the people in North Korea admire Kim Jong-un. The photos of their leader are put on the walls of the classrooms in North Korean schools, so people can hardly believe it is a school in Tokyo. North Korean schools in Tokyo can better preserve their traditions but it works as a political propaganda for North Korean authority at the same time, which isolates the North Korean community from Japanese society and let local people have more serious stereotypes towards North Koreans in Japan and in its origin.



Figure 4. North Korean school in Tokyo

### **Media Hype Created by Western Media**

BBC, CNN and many western media are interested in reporting the news in North Korea. However, most of their media releases are about Kim Jong-un, the political propaganda in North Korea, the refugee issue, and the military movements, which create media hype, so people in Japan and western countries do not have positive impressions of North Korea and its citizens. Whenever people are talking about North Korea, they think North Koreans are poor, undernourished, and brainwashed by political propaganda. These negative impressions may lead to a series of undesirable outcomes, for example, their identity crisis will be exacerbated, and more seriously, North Korean immigrants may lose their confidence and be self-hatred because of stereotype threat. Stereotype is the power of the negative, and these strong negative societal views can be internalized by the target group<sup>16</sup>. In this case, media hype not only affects how Japanese see the North Korean diaspora but also how North Korean immigrants perceive themselves.

### **Voicing Zainichi: Art Can Be A Solution**

Based on the above, the goal of the project is to raise awareness about the unfair treatment of Zainichi which concerns human rights and to promote awareness in

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<sup>16</sup> Barker, Chris, and Emma A. Jane. *Cultural Studies : Theory and Practice*. Fifth edition. Washington, D.C: SAGE Publications Ltd, (2016): 314.

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Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)'s exclusion of Chōsen schools from the Tuition Waiver Program in 2013. At the same time, the project will indicate that Zainichi Koreans have always been contributing to society both culturally and economically as well as every other local citizen in Japan.

### **Specific Goal of the Project**

The intended Art exhibitions, Music Workshops, Action of Inside Out Project, and creation of a Zainichi Art Map, provide participants with an opportunity to understand both the history of Zainichi Korean since WWII and the recent generation of Zainichi Culture.

Music and Art are two of the most universal ways of expression and communication for humankind and are present in the everyday lives of people of all ages and from all cultures around the world<sup>17</sup>.

Artists are trained to express ideas through the creation of art. Through paintings, photos, and art installations, Zainichi Koreans artists are invited to express their concerns about the Zainichi identity through their art creations. Besides the visual elements, participants of the festival are invited to enroll in the drumming workshop with Zainichi Korean musicians to drum on the same beat. It signals a shared will to make a better future in Japan with diversity. Every participant is invited to learn traditional Korean music with the changgo drum. The final performance of the changgo drum show will take place in a public space.

“Can art change the world? Maybe ... we should change the question: Can art change people's lives<sup>18</sup>?” (JR)

The project will apply to an action of the Inside Out Project, which was created by JR, a TED-Price winner in 2011. Over the past decade, the Inside Out Project has reached 148 countries and territories where nearly 500,000 large-scale black and white portraits were prepared to be displayed. The Inside Out Project also engaged with issues such as diversity, community, racism, education, and children's rights. The project aims to raise awareness about the equality of the recent generation of Zainichi and the exclusion of Chōsen schools from the Tuition Waiver Program. The project invites everyone who was affected by the MEXT's decision and people who support equality to upload their portrait to the Inside Out Project which will print in a large-scale black and white portrait to be displayed on the wall of Chōsen schools in Tokyo where education right of Zainichi Chōsen children has been discriminated.

“[A] map is a medium between spatial reality and human, of both cartographer and user, to help human beings perceive such space without the need of direct

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<sup>17</sup> Mehr, A., Singh, M., Knox, D., Ketter, D. M., Pickens-Jones, D., Atwood, S., et al. (2019).

<sup>18</sup> “Artist.” JR. Accessed December 4, 2022. <https://www.jr-art.net/about>.

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experience.” (Thongchai Winichakul)

“Ghost maps preserve the visibility of older, prior shapes beneath those that have taken their place in later times<sup>19</sup>.”



Figure 5. The cover page of the Inside Out Project’s website

A kick-off of an online map application about street art “Tokyo Art Map” aims to act as a platform to allow all people living or even visiting Tokyo to capture moments of the presence of various street art, such as the portraits of the Inside Out Project, graffiti, sculptures with a geographic record. With GPS technology, the users and uploaders of the “Tokyo Art Map” not only upload photos with their smartphones to demonstrate a specific street art, but it can also prove the existence of an art presentation. Users can categorize their captions with a self-designed hashtag. The Tokyo Art Map’s team will review and categorize photos in various categories for those who wish to visit street art with themes.

### **Project Beneficiaries**

The Art Festival aims to raise awareness of the discrimination toward Zainichi Chōsen that concerns the violation of human rights. The Festival itself is also an educational program for Japanese citizens to understand the Chōsen group better and the identity issue they have ascribed to the history between countries but the choice of life in Japan should always be respected.

For tourists, it could also be a nice place to taste Japan and Chōsen activities in Tokyo. It not only attracts tourists but also helps demonstrate the support of cultural diversity in a global city, Tokyo.

### **Possible Risks and Strategies**

- 1) Chōsen group does not want to actively take part in the Inside Out Project. Zainichi Chōsen might not be interested to collaborate on the project because

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<sup>19</sup> Phil Ethington, “Los Angeles Ghost Maps,” and Diane Favro and Chris Johanson, “Rome: Jumping over the Line,” *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities*, eds. Todd Presner, David Shepard, and Yoh Kawano (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 73.

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they have been forced to live in their own social circle because of many reasons including political ones. Therefore, having the participants have their portraits printed on very large paper and posted on the exterior walls of Chōsen schools might receive resistance. However, according to the Asia-Pacific Journal, the Supporters of Chōsen schools have held weekly demonstrations in front of the Osaka Prefectural Government building for eight years which has accumulated 420 demonstrations with banners and speeches. The project gains confidence from the high number of non-stop actions of the Chōsen schools supporting group in Osaka and sees the eagerness of hope to protect Chōsen children to receive education in Japan.



Figure 6. The 420th Tuesday Action on March 23, 2021. The supporters of Chōsen schools have held weekly demonstrations in front of the Osaka Prefectural Government building for eight years. Photo courtesy of ニヨニヨのひとりごと

2) The media are not interested in promoting the project.

Support of the media is very important for raising awareness about Zainichi Chōsen and disseminating the outcome of the campaign. To gain media support, the project will constantly inform the media in the beginning stage from the formation of ideas to every stage of the project development and send interesting facts for them to follow.

### **Duration and Sustainability of the Project**

The Art Festival is divided into three parts: Art and Music Program, Inside Out Project, and Tokyo Art Map.

- 1) The art presentation and music workshop/performance are going to take place in Eitoeiko Contemporary Art Gallery and YMCA Asia Youth Centre in Tokyo during the summer break of school (mid-July to end of August).
- 2) The Inside Out Project is proposed to take place from the last two weeks before the summer break of Chōsen schools until the start of the next academic year (July to the end of August).
- 3) Tokyo Art Map will be promoted during the implementation of the events

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and will work independently after the conclusion of the Art Festival. The online application will be acting as a tool for artists/tourists/residents in Japan to cultivate multicultural art presentations and ethnic diversity.

### **Conclusion**

It can be seen that in depicting Zainichi's history as well as their artistic creativity, Zainichi groups strive to voice their identity in a challenging situation, waiting for more opportunities to call for a change. The project stresses that North Korean identity is not merely a manifestation of ideological or political affiliation but one of migrants' agency in establishing themselves as resilient members of a diverse society.

Furthermore, through the project, references are drawn from the laid foundation of Zainichi art and performance, with both the limits and advantages to be carried forward in brand-new means such as integrated art programs, Citywalk experience and street festival in Tokyo. It is in the hope that by this project, Zainichi as an identity is no longer reduced to totalizing labels such as loss, prejudice, and exile, but as an engaging process that guides the audience to rethink the fluid Asian modernity and citizenship toward plural democracy within cities and nations.

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