

## COMPLETION REPORT

### **Becoming Korean: A Postcolonial History of Japanese Wives in the Chōsen Sōren Community**

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For my research, I conducted multiple interviews to investigate the lives of Japanese wives within the Chōsen Sōren community. Because of the lack of relevant archival materials, I focused on collecting oral history interviews from a few surviving wives and children of Japanese wives. In addition, I interviewed zainichi Koreans about how they perceived Japanese wives in their community. I traveled to Kyusyu, Hiroshima, Tokyo, Tōhoku, Hokkaido, Osaka and Nagoya. In total, I collected 50 interviews: 6 Japanese wives, 28 children or husbands, and 16 zainichi Koreans including 3 North Korean defectors. In Tokyo, I mainly conducted archival research at Chōsen Daigaku. The most challenging task was how to find and pick the interview candidates. To avoid biased results, I tried to interview not only strong Sōren supporters, but also people who were not involved in organizational activity but simply lived in the community to raise their kids.

From the field research, the most surprising fact I found was almost 80-90 percent of mothers in Tōhoku and Hokkaido regions were Japanese. In Hokkaido, there were even Ainu mothers who sent their children to the Korean school. It was harder to find fully Korean couples from these regions. In some cases, both a person's paternal and maternal grandmother and even their own mother were all Japanese.

Although, in these cases, these individuals had more Japanese ancestry, they held strong Korean identity and belonged to Sōren community or became activists. Many children remembered their Japanese mothers wore Korean costumes on many occasions, learned Korean language, and obtained Korean names. One person even didn't know that his grandmother was Japanese until he became an adult. I also interviewed fully Korean couples, but most of them had moved from Tokyo or Kansai.

Although the discourse of monoethnic Japan and patriarchal structure in East Asian culture encouraged Koreanization of Japanese wives, there is another important dimension. Through the interviews, I learned that Japanese women whose husbands had high positions in Sōren tended to have been members of other social organizations such as Labor Union or Communist party student movement. They enthusiastically participated in the Sōren activities along with their husbands, and in some cases became more "Korean" than ethnically Korean women, because they perceived the Sōren movement as an extension of their own activist goals. They acquired Korean language and studied North Korean ideological philosophy: gender equality, Kim Il Sung's revolution, Juche etc. These studies encouraged women to join the movement for the extension of human rights. One former communist woman changed her nationality from Japan to "Chōsen" even after divorce. Another woman sent her children to Korean school after her husband passed away, although the financial burden became triple compared to sending them to Japanese school. These testimonies show us their Koreanization was situated in their activist goals.

As my project continues, in order to deepen knowledge about Japanese wives in the post-war Sōren community, in the next phase I hope to conduct further interviews of Japanese wives and their children who escaped from North Korea.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

The presentation was planned at National University of Singapore in March, but while coordinating the workshop schedule, it was canceled because of COVID-19.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Becoming Korean: Life of Japanese wives in Korean Community in Post War Japan.

\*I am still working on it

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)

A book chapter in a co-authored book on gender history of the Chōsen Sōren community. Once the larger project on the Sōren's gender history is complete, this project will be a core part of the book.