



### **The Diasporic Intimacy and Transindividuality of Artists Himan Sök (1914–2003) and Jun Ch’ae (1926– )**

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#### **Abstract**

This article examines diaspora in the context of intimacy in order to focus on individual conditions of art-making, taking into account global conceptions of diaspora that have appealed to celebratory, emancipatory, pessimistic, or desirous formulations about diaspora and art. Through a discussion of paintings by Himan Sök, a Chinese Korean (*Chosŏnjok*), and Jun Ch’ae, a Japanese Korean (*Zainichi*), the author proposes that diasporic art can be analyzed in terms of the transpersonal relations that surround the intimate vicinity of the artwork in three ways. First, these works of art are neither structured from above nor resistant from below. Second, they express an idea of doubleness bound at once to a larger organizing collective and to the individual experience. These artists imbue their paintings with ethnos and nation *and* the personal and intimate, and a comparison of their works reveals social relations that form around the objects and evolve as art is produced, exhibited, written about, and discussed. Third, transpersonal relations surrounding the artists and artwork underscore a two-tiered idea of who transindividuals are to others and to themselves, a concept of identity that is especially pertinent to diasporic artists who are postcolonial subjects, as it allows for differing “selves” according to context-specific settings. The transindividual is, thus, shown to be a critical concept of integration in understanding identity.

Keywords: *Chosŏnjok*, *Zainichi*, diaspora, art, intimacy, transindividuality

The claim of the identity of the object *speaks*, whether the sciences hear it or not, whether they throw to the winds what they have heard or let themselves be strongly affected by it. —Martin Heidegger (1969, 27)

#### **Introduction**

This article examines diaspora in the context of intimacy and transindividuality in order to focus both on the individual and affective conditions of art-making and on the collective and social reckoning of art. The integrative concept of transindividuality opens up a discussion about identity that recognizes differing “selves” according to context-specific settings. It focuses less on the global appeal of

diaspora that has formulated certain readings of diaspora and art, whether celebratory (Boym 2001; Suh 2005, 2014), emancipatory (Said 2000), desirous (Demos 2003), or pessimistic (Ryang 2001). Diasporic art shares a history of trauma, suffering, and displacement—a history oftentimes reconstructed affectively or reimagined nostalgically. This kind of art can be analyzed as a function of institutional and collective associations, constituted by transnational and transpersonal relations that surround the intimate vicinity of the artwork in three ways.

First, the artworks of the diasporic artists Himan Sök and Jun Ch'ae, though embedded in the histories of Chinese Koreans or Japanese Koreans, are neither structured from above nor resistant from below. The artwork and cultural production of these artists relate to the construction of identity and daily life in what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih conceptualize as “minor transnationalism,” allowing for “micropractices” of cultural expressions produced as “networks of minoritized cultures within and across national boundaries” (Lionnet and Shih 2005, 7). The term “micropractice,” in the case of an artist, can be defined in contrast to “macropractice.”<sup>1</sup> The context of “artistic macropractice” may refer to those who are internationally recognized or institutionally sanctioned (represented by major galleries, graduates of renowned university art programs, or both). For the micropractice of an artist, however, context is neither theorized nor textually learned. Rather, there is a sense of the unsanctioned, improvisational, or even provisional context, unrecognized by global markets. Another way to think about this micropractice is to consider that while the audiences of Sök and Ch'ae are constantly changing—even today, as their work circulates abroad—ultimately, the audience will not grow in the sense of art markets and accessibility. Although their works can be viewed, discussed, and written about as part of, for example, artwork of Korean diaspora (as in this article), they will always be minor, even if they are global or transnational—an interesting conundrum of “minor transnational” artists. Yet another way to think about this irony is that whereas these two names are virtually unknown in the world, they are remarkable in their own institutions and communities.

The second level of analysis takes an intimate examination of the idea of doubleness bound at once to national community and to individual experience. This is the condition that Svetlana Boym described as “diasporic intimacy” (Boym 2001, 251–258). From the standpoint of the artwork, I suggest that diasporic intimacy is a trope that embeds the meaning of both *ethnos* and *nation* *and* the personal and intimate. Furthermore, relations form around the objects and evolve as the art is produced, exhibited, written about, donated, bought, and, in some instances, destroyed. In his lifetime, Sök traversed Korean, Chinese, and Japanese borders for education, marriage, and work, and his artwork similarly traveled throughout these countries for exhibition, purchase, and study. Thus, the transnational context of his art production is evident.

Ch'ae's case differs. In 2002, he donated most of his paintings and cartoon drawings to the Gyeongnam Art Museum, a provincial museum in the city of

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<sup>1</sup> “Micropractice” is not defined in Lionnet and Shih (2005).

Ch'angwon, his birthplace. The museum held Ch'ae's first and only South Korean solo exhibition in 2007 (Yi 2011). Both Ch'ae and Sök were included in the 2004 Gwangju Biennale's exhibition *There: Sites of the Korean Diaspora* (Son 2012). Further, Ch'ae's work was part of an exhibition titled *Art of Prayer Evidence+Prayers+Happiness*, which showcased 156 artworks by forty-eight Japanese Korean artists. Displaying a special assemblage of Japanese Korean art owned by collector Jung-woong Ha, the exhibition toured eight art museums in Seoul, Busan, Gwangju, Jeonbuk, Jeju, Daegu, and elsewhere from June 2013 through the end of 2014. Thus, even though Ch'ae himself is difficult to contact and visit in his old age, his work continues to be featured in transnational shows focused on Japanese Korean history and culture.<sup>2</sup> The micropractices of Sök and Ch'ae continue to have an impact on the art world in their own minor and transnational, and thus diasporic, ways.

Third, within this minor transnational context, the transpersonal relations that surround the artists and their artworks underscore a two-tiered idea of the transindividual identity—that is, who one is to oneself and to others depending on the social context. As is evident in both artists' experiences during the Pacific War (1931–1945), Sök and Ch'ae chose to maintain differing “selves” or “faces” in changing contexts and specific settings. In discussing identity in their cases, the idea of the “transindividual” is helpful as a concept of integration, rather than of separation or demarcation. “Integrative transindividuality” considers the making of the individual as a process that extends over a long duration of time and works to configure an identity as a unified and whole personhood (Balibar 1997, 8–13). It is a Heideggerian recognition of the fact that in one being and one body, difference—or many selves—exists in sameness or the same body (Heidegger 1969).

All three ideas considered here—minor transnationalism, diasporic intimacy, and transindividuality—contribute to this effort to constitute the diasporic artist as grounded in the process of individuation, which requires separation from one's society. As an individual comes into being, she or he goes through ontogenesis as a process or development of an individual from the earliest stages to maturity, a durational aspect of transindividuality. In other words, when discussing doubleness within diasporic intimacy, I am not referring to a split sense of a modern self, or the hybrid, heterogeneous, multiply-situated, interstitial sense of a postmodern self. The distinct faces or parts of the self as understood by self and by others are realized through a continual separation from one's social conditions, and all of these parts or faces are, and have always been, part of a whole, which the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon called the pre-individual or metastable self (Combes 2012). The latter metastable self is the grounding basis upon which the transindividuality functions foremost as an integrative concept. In sum, minor transindividuals such as

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<sup>2</sup> Ch'ae has been unreachable since his 2002 donation to the Gyeongnam Art Museum, as his health has been deteriorating. Fung-sok Ro—head of the now-defunct Areum, a national *Zainichi* artist collective, and coordinator of Japanese Korean artists for Yong Soon Min, former Professor of Art at UC Irvine Department of Art and curator of the *There* exhibition, during her research trips—informs me that Ch'ae donated his remaining works to the museum and fell very ill sometime in the late 2000s, and Ro is unaware of Ch'ae's current status (Ro 2018).

Sök and Ch'ae and their artworks and art-centered activities present the affective emotional sensibilities whose bases constitute both collectivity and individuality (Read 2016, 114).

### The Artists Himan Sök and Jun Ch'ae

Himan Sök (石熙滿; 1914–2003) was born on August 20, 1914 in Musan, Northern Hamgyöng Province, the second of Mr. and Mrs. T'aejun Sök's six children. Sök's life can be generally categorized into six phases: childhood in Northern Hamgyöng Province (1914–1931), migration to Manchuria when he developed an interest in art (1931–1935), studies abroad majoring in Western Art at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (1935–1938),<sup>3</sup> art-related activities and teaching in China before the Cultural Revolution (1939–1965), banishment in a work camp during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and post-Cultural Revolution art-making and teaching activities (1978–2003). Although my analysis takes into account Sök's early years of cultural production, studies abroad, and life and art-making upon return to Manchuria in 1938 until the end of the Japanese colonial rule in 1945 and the Republican Era in 1949, I focus mostly on Sök's later artwork produced when he was an art professor at Yanbian University in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. This choice is largely determined by the fact that his entire body of work before 1966 was confiscated and assumed destroyed before he was sent off to a work camp in the countryside for ten years during the Cultural Revolution (Ri 2006, 18–22; Jeon 1993, 59).

Jun Ch'ae (蔡峻; b. 1926–) was born in Sangam Village of Ch'angwön City in South Kyöngsang Province, on the opposite end of the peninsula from Sök's birthplace. For several reasons, Ch'ae's background is more difficult to access than Sök's. First, Ch'ae left Korea indefinitely at the age of two with his parents, who were tenant farmers in Ch'angwön (Busan Museum of Art, n.d.), so he has little to no recollection of his homeland. And, unlike Sök, Ch'ae never returned to South Korea until the age of 81, when he held a solo survey exhibition at the Gyeongnam Art Museum, a show that came to fruition after he had donated some forty-nine paintings and more than fifty cartoons to the museum (Chöng 2004e; Yi 2011; Gyeongnam Art Museum site visit, July 3, 2018). Third, his father sold everything before leaving their homeland for Japan in 1928. Thus, there was nothing to return to in Korea during the colonial period and the difficult economic times his family faced after the colonial period (Chöng 2004a; Yi 2011). Furthermore, Ch'ae became a member of the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan established in 1955 (K. *Chae Ilbon Chosönin ch'öngryönhaphoe*, J. *Zainihon Chösenjin sörengökai*; hereafter, Ch'öngryön), the North Korean-affiliated *Zainichi* community, and worked as a cartoonist for Ch'öngryön's newspaper *Chosön shinbo* (Chosön daily) for some fifty years (see figures 1 and 2), and visited North Korea twice—all of which aligned him with North Korean political ideology. In other words, both Japan and South

<sup>3</sup> The Tokyo School of Fine Arts (*Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō*) and Tokyo Music School (*Tōkyō Ongaku Gakkō*), both founded in 1887, merged in 1949 to create the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music (*Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku*), known today as Tokyo University of the Arts.

Korea deemed Ch'ae dangerous (Chöng 2004b; 2004c; 2004d). Ch'ae received a passport as a South Korean national and traveled back to his birthplace only in the twenty-first century, during the "Sunshine Policy" era, which brought about a thawing of Cold War rhetoric and a warming of relations between the two Koreas.<sup>4</sup>

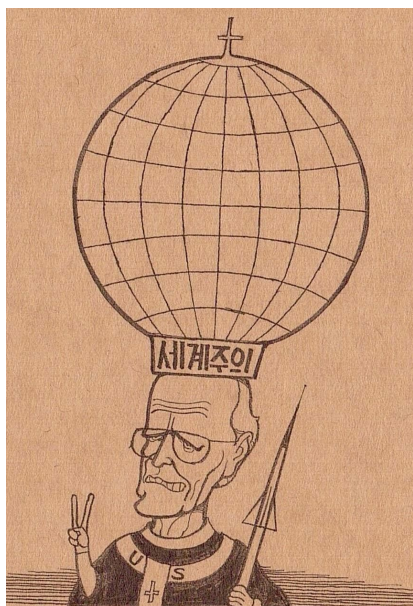


Figure 1. Jun Ch'ae, *I Am King (Naega wang i ta)*, date unknown. Ink on paper, 14 cm x 13.6 cm. Source: Gyeongnam Art Museum.



Figure 2. Jun Ch'ae, *Prison Life (Kamok saenghwal)*, date unknown. Ink on paper, 14 cm x 12.8 cm. Source: Gyeongnam Art Museum.

Geographical proximity was one of the major factors that determined where the Sök and Ch'ae families migrated during economically and politically charged times. Sök's family moved in 1934 to Manchuria; Ch'ae's family moved in 1928 to Japan. Himan Sök was born into a family that was fairly stable financially, but due to his father's and elder brother's mismanagement of the finances, the family was forced to move in 1934 to Yongjōng (C. *Longjing*) in Heilongjiang Province, where Sök continued painting and drawing (Ri 2006; Jeon 1993, 59). One ironic blessing occurred in 1921, on his seventh birthday, when he broke his right elbow. Because the family could not afford to take him to the hospital, the injury left him handicapped in his right arm, which allowed him, at the advice of his schoolteacher, to contemplate drawing in order to lead a "normal" life. As luck would have it, he was born left-handed; thus, the inability to use his right arm did not affect his deft art practice (Ri 2006; Jeon 1993, 58).

The various back-and-forth movements of Sök's family (and later his own solo travels) across the Manchurian border differed from Ch'ae's family migration.

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<sup>4</sup> President Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003), the first South Korean president to travel to P'yöngyang, held an inter-Korean summit in 2000 with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, a diplomatic effort for which the president won the Nobel Peace Prize in the same year.

Sök was able to recount and record his life story in an autobiography that he penned ten years before his death in 2003. Additionally, his pupil from Yanbian University, Sŭng-ryŏng Ri, studied in South Korea and published a dissertation devoted to his teacher's life, work, and teachings (Jeon 1993; Sök 1993; Ri 2006).<sup>5</sup> According to these accounts, Sök's family returned to his hometown on several occasions (for instance, during the difficult economic year of 1940), and he even worked in the northern part of Korea during some parts of the post-1945 interim period.



Figure 3. Himan Sök's Self-Portrait, 1997. Pastel on paper, size unknown. *Source*: Yanbian University.

Sök's self-portrait (figure 3) hangs on the wall of Yanbian University's art department, a fairly small office. When I visited in 2012, the artist's portrait of his second wife (like his first wife, a Japanese woman) hung opposite his self-portrait. These are the only two paintings by Sök that I have seen. On that visit, I learned from Professor of Art Ai-shun Li that Sök's widow and their two sons resided in Japan, and that some of his artwork was presumably there, since Sök went back and forth between China and Japan during his later retirement in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Yong Soon Min, curator of the 2004 exhibition *There*, went on a research trip to Yanji in 2002 and recalled visiting a large studio filled with perhaps hundreds of Sök's paintings and drawings, many of which were not dated or titled. The artist was not present. His works were in Yanji but had been left in an unorganized and disregarded state. This 2002 observation gives insight into the 2006 doctoral

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<sup>5</sup> Given Sök's highly respected status, he is also included in Jeon-ho Jeon's 1993 master's thesis from Chosŏn University in Gwangju, South Korea, depicting the status of Chosŏn art in Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture. Although the thesis is poorly cited and mostly descriptive in nature, it includes Jeon's interview with the 79-year-old Sök in his studio in the early 1990s as well as some twelve appended pages of various *Chosŏnjok* artists' paintings in black and white.

dissertation of Sŏk's student Sŭng-ryŏng Ri. The dissertation's appendix is replete with tens of color reproductions of Sŏk's paintings (some of which reappear in this article) without size descriptors or accurate dates of production. Indeed, many of the works remain untitled. Given the timing of the dissertation's publication three years after Sŏk's death and the rushed feeling of the writing, along with the very high quality of the color reproductions, I hypothesize that its very publication may have been an attempt to document Sŏk's life and the history of his artwork even though all of his art works were donated to Yanbian University's Art Department by his second wife after Sŏk's death (Ri 2018).

In this sense, whereas studies about Sŏk and his self-penned memoir provide data and images of his work, questions of access remain for both artists. In Ch'ae's case, it is a challenge to gain further understanding of his work and knowledge about his background, because his deteriorating health and seclusion from the public prevent visits. We do know that, in terms of education and schooling, Ch'ae graduated from an unidentified Japanese high school, and conversations with Kyusŏk Yi, the curator of his solo survey at the Gyeongnam Art Museum, clarify that Ch'ae did not earn a college or university degree (Yi 2011). In his youth, Ch'ae's art training was partly self-taught. He also received instruction at his high school's art research center (*misul yŏn'guso*) (Busan Museum of Art, n.d.). Most importantly, Ch'ae was trained through his mentorship with the famous cartoonist Etsurō Katō, and throughout the process of his own five-decade career as a political cartoonist (Chŏng 2004e; Sodei 2001).

Ch'ae's and Sŏk's minor transnational status positions their work in ways that incorporate and show the art along ethnic and nationalist or context-specific themes such as the 2004 Gwangju Biennale's *There* exhibition.<sup>6</sup> Most recently, the 2013–2014 *Art of Prayer* exhibition featuring forty-eight *Zainichi* artists also included Ch'ae's work. The exhibition highlighted the collection of the famous *Zainichi* art collector Jungwoong Ha, who donated his entire art collection, including thousands of artworks by fellow *Zainichi* artists to South Korean art museums (Gwangju Museum of Art, n.d.). For example, the Gwangju Museum of Art has a separate page on its website directing viewers to the Ha Jung-woong Museum of Art. Even as both artists' off-center, off-the-grid, and difficult-to-locate status remains a formidable challenge to access, the very act of donating a collection of artwork—whether Jun Ch'ae's own collection to the Gyeongnam Art Museum or the larger Jungwoong Ha collection to numerous South Korean art museums—or writing to remember and document (such as Sŭng-ryŏng Ri's and Jeon-ho Jeon's theses) fill the gaps in my knowledge with carefully gathered tidbits and layers of intimate information. In such ways, the act of finding, accessing, searching, and prodding demonstrates the relations that surround the artworks in their intimate vicinity and are themselves part and parcel of diasporic intimacy and knowledge production.

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<sup>6</sup> I first learned of these two artists through their participation at the 2002 Gwangju Biennale *Pause*.



Figure 4. Himan Sök, *Everwhite Mountain Lake Heaven (Paekdusan Ch'ŏnji)*, 1990s. Pastel on canvas, size unknown. Source: Ri (2006, appendix).

### The Diasporic Intimacy and Transindividuality of Himan Sök

Whether they are landscapes of Sök's nostalgic remembrances of his hometown Musan on the Tumen River in North Hamgyŏng Province, his recollections of majestic sites such as Everwhite Mountain (*Paekdusan*, see figure 4) with its geothermal waterfall and Heaven Lake (*Paekdusan Ch'ŏnji*), the geographical wonder on the border between China and North Korea (figure 5), or his focus on female nudes and *Chosŏnjok* portraits (including his own self-portraits), Sök's visual depictions of his Chinese home region of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of the ethnic Korean minority in China are equally monumental and forthright. Sök's motifs of monumental landscapes and famous natural wonders are representative of social realist and neoclassical painting, producing allegories and mythical narratives through genre paintings. More importantly, North Korean history textbooks have narrated Everwhite Mountain as the official birthplace of the state's founder Kim Il-sung, and many images memorialize both Everwhite Mountain and Heaven Lake in North Korean state propaganda (Rogaski 2018).<sup>7</sup> Sök equally evokes a clear sense of place in recognizing monuments and sites that are central to *Chosŏnjok* ethnonational history. There is no ambiguity, no vagueness, in the grandeur of landscapes and titling of the landscapes. Sök's training in Japan and his subsequent participation in the Japanese Government General's official annual art exhibitions determined what content was acceptable in artwork from the end of the colonial era to the early phase of the establishment of People's Republic of China and North Korea in the late 1940s (Jeon 1993, 58–62). While studying in Japan at the Tokyo

<sup>7</sup> In 1979, Everwhite Mountain was recognized as a UNESCO Nature Reserve.

School of Fine Arts, for example, he won first place for his work *Farmland* (K. *Nongch'on*) in the competition of Japanese art students at the 1937 International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life (Jeon 1993, 58–59).<sup>8</sup>

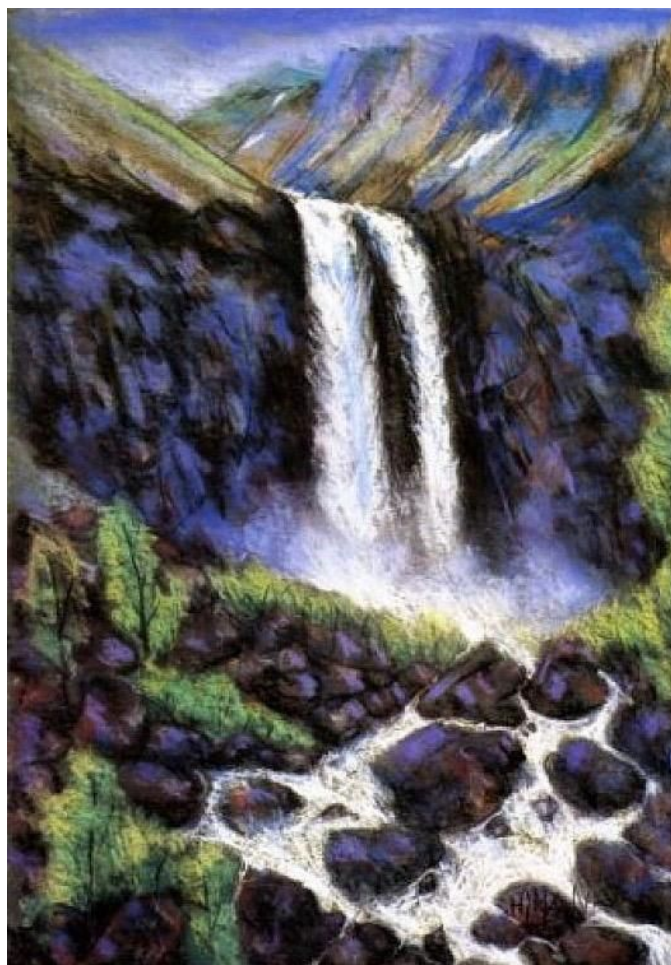


Figure 5. Himan Sŏk, *Everwhite Mountain Waterfall* (*Paekdusan p'okp'o*), date unknown. Pastel on canvas, size unknown. *Source*: Ri (2006, appendix).

Even if the titles of paintings elicit a grand narrative of mythical origins, the paintings themselves rely upon postimpressionist methods in terms of composition, color, and form. Compositionally, the paint is applied in such a manner as if to flatten the depth and grandeur of the sites. The viewer cannot locate a central point that represents the painting's subject. The ridges and apexes of mountains rest seemingly haphazardly, off-center, scattering the viewer's gaze. From the deep far perspective of Chinese classical methods, one can see the layers of space from front to back, including the fore, middle, and background, framed in this way to produce a

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<sup>8</sup> Sŏk's inclusion in this competition is unsurprising, because Japanese officials encouraged annual official art exhibitions modeled on those held in Tokyo in colonized Taiwan and Korea starting in 1922 and 1927, respectively, as part of the New Cultural Policy (Sodei 2001).

depth of field. Strangely, techniques that would typically reinforce this recession of space do not exist in *Everwhite Mountain Waterfall*. Even-toned hues of blue are used in all three levels of perspective, although coloration would normally change to produce the expected spatiality. The saturated dark hues, whose velvety mixture of dark magenta, blues, grays, and even whites imbue a melancholic heaviness that weighs down the pastels. Furthermore, the centrality of the waterfall is deadpan. Rather than following the picturesque mode of subtle asymmetry, the waterfall literally falls into two straight lines with a measured split in between. The forms lack defined edges, a result of brushstrokes that are thick. Altogether, the dispersed composition, unchanging coloration, and thick brushstrokes create an atmosphere and effect that again fall flat upon the surface. In other words, the mythical narrative and sense of great origins of a people who are central tenants of social realism and, especially, *Chosŏnhwa* (North Korean art focused on Koreanness) are not visually detectable in Sok's painting. In effect, he takes the mythic and the ethnonational and makes it local. Whether or not Sŏk's paintings represent a high-level achievement is not the question to be asked, because "the claim of the identity of the object speaks" (Heidegger 1996, 27); rather, what he decides to do with his art makes the viewer question the artistic choices. The flattened result of these paintings is incongruous with the mythical and grand narratives that their titles symbolize. His painting identifies a strong communal or ethnonational appeal yet provides access to intimate, personal, and at times contradictory feelings.

Painting landscapes, stills of flowers, and portraits help convey a sense of the everyday life of *Chosŏnjok* as utterly mundane and unremarkable. The paintings present a run-of-the mill mood circumscribing the *Chosŏnjok* condition; at the same time, history records how the ethnic Koreans in China concomitantly coexisted alongside social, political, and cultural upheaval that dramatically affected their lives, as evidenced in Sŏk's own tumultuous life. Sŏk's unique formulation of traditional landscape and surprising portraits emote strength in Korean or *Chosŏnjok* identity through his mere choice of subject: *Chosŏnjok* women and nudes (figures 6 and 7).<sup>9</sup> However, *Back of Nude Woman* (*Nudŭ yŏsŏng ŭi tŭng*) is about the constitution of not only the collectivity of ethnic Koreans or the Korean nation but also Sŏk's transindividuality as a student, teacher, and painter within the ethnic Korean minority and as an outsider to that very community with his unique training and transnational background. Thus, the paintings together constitute Sok's transindividuality.

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<sup>9</sup> The Chinese Communist Party interdicted nudes until the 1990s.

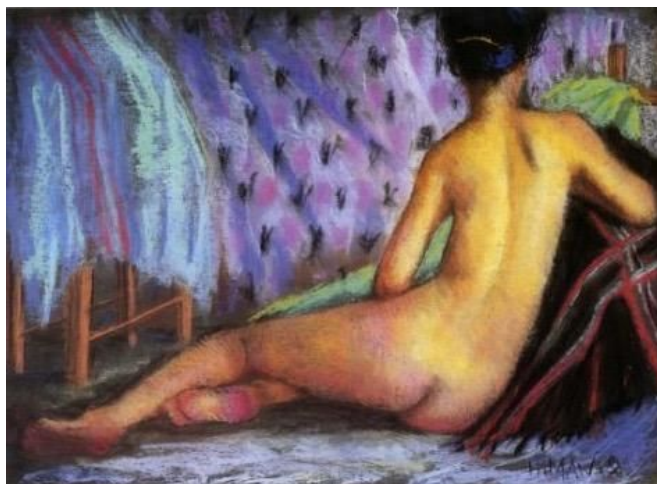


Figure 6. Himan Sŏk, *Back of Nude Woman (Nudŭ yŏsŏng ŭi tŭng)*, 1990s. Oil on canvas, 116.7 cm x 91 cm. Source: Ri (2006, appendix).

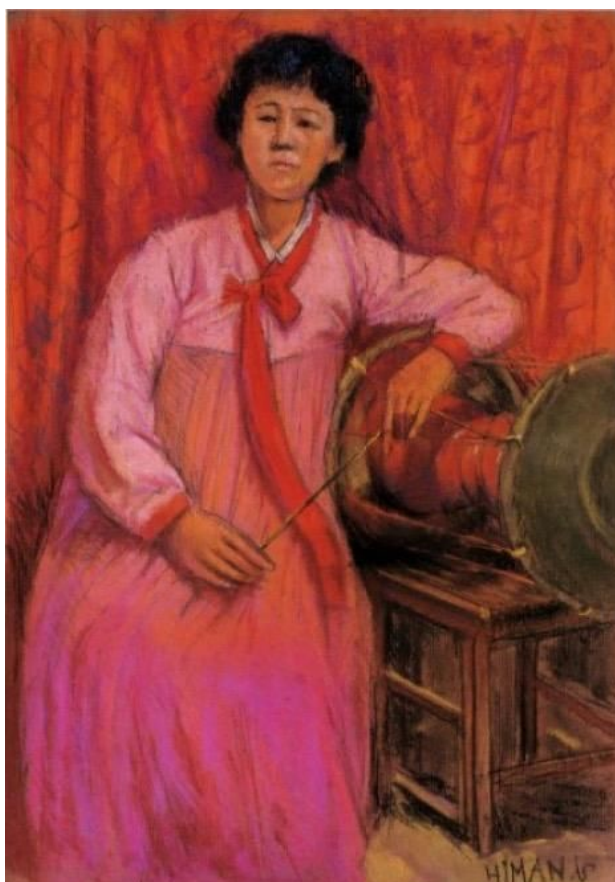


Figure 7. Himan Sŏk, *Chinese Korean Woman (Chosŏnjok yŏja)*, date unknown. Pastel on paper, size unknown. Source: Ri (2006, appendix.)

The flat, unadorned, yet monumental pastel works reflect the constant negotiation Sök had to make in a life that, at times, was full of tremendous hardship and yet, at other times, privileged and comfortable. After his graduation from Yongjŏng (Ch. *Longjing*) Tonghŭng Middle School in colonized Korea, his family once again crossed the border into Manchuria from 1931 to 1935. At this time, he further developed his art practice by teaching art to youth in Ch'angch'un (Ri 2006, 18). From 1935 to 1938, he studied abroad in Japan at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, where he also married Masako Nakamura, who became his first wife in 1936.<sup>10</sup> He returned to Manchuria with his bride and started teaching and making art. In a shrewd gesture, he also decided to take his wife's surname, and he officially became "Nakamura Himan." I say "shrewd" because his official documentation under a Japanese name later saved him from being captured by Japanese colonial officials (Ri 2006, 20–21). Of this self-imposed name change, he notes the psychic and emotional turmoil of a young ethnic Korean art student in the Japanese metropole who became an art teacher in the puppet state of Manchukuo by writing, "It [the name change] started from my trying to benefit selfishly and [was] an act that harmed my love for the *Chosŏn minjok* [Korean people] and muddled the purity of my nation" (Ri 2006, 22).

At a certain point in 1943, Sök thought about returning to Japan with his wife and brother, but decided to stay in Manchuria and take an art teaching job in Ch'angch'un in Jilin Province, China, where he started an art group called *Sŏnsimsa*, publishing journals titled *Kŏnkuk kyoyuk* (Education to build the nation) and *Manju Adong* (Manchuria in Asia) in 1944 under the aegis of their Japanese patron *Cheguk kyoyukhoe* (Imperial Education Association) (Ri 2006, 25). He recalled, "At that time, I emphasized in my teachings that all *Chosŏnjok* youth should serve the Japanese Empire, and in this way, polluted the minds of many of Chosŏn youth" (Ri 2006, 22).

Immediately after liberation, on August 17, 1945, Sök's first wife passed away due to complications from tuberculosis and appendicitis (Ri 2006, 23–24).<sup>11</sup> Her unburied body was the reason that he once again decided against repatriating after liberation, as he had not provided his wife with a proper funeral and burial. Therefore, he stayed on in Ch'angch'un, which the Kuomintang Nationalist Party's 8th Batallion Army reclaimed and then began a revenge raid of former Chosŏn subjects whom the Nationalists believed were disloyal to the Chinese (Ri 2006, 25–26).

Sök's individuation took place through his remarkable individual self-assessments that he was muddling his "pure" nation, "polluting" young Korean

<sup>10</sup> These dates are recorded in Ri (2006). However, Jeon (1993) dates Sök's studies abroad in Japan as beginning in 1932 when the artist was just 18 years old. Yi's doctoral thesis may be more accurate than Jeon's master's thesis. Jeon writes that Sök won an art student competition at the International Exposition that took place in Paris during 1937, thus fitting into Yi's periodization of Sök's studies in Japan as taking place between 1935 and 1938.

<sup>11</sup> Ri's dissertation about his teacher is, at times, questionable, as it includes accounts of Sök's life that seem historically anachronous. For example, after having reported that Sök's wife died just after liberation in August, Ri recounts how Sök secured her body in an air-raid shelter and was torn about not having given her a proper burial in the middle of winter.

minds (Ri 2006, 22), and, further, acting selfishly. First, he had married a Japanese woman, a decision Sök made for love during the thrilling and professionally privileged time he was a student at Japan's best art school. This act of individuation equally and officially disconnected the self-identity linked to his ethnic Korean self. Two sentiments were expressed in his statements: love for nation and disappointment in self. His love for nation reflected a social being connected to *Chosŏn minjok*, at once tarnished or "muddled" exactly at the point when he proclaimed self-love, interethnic romance, and self-survival. After all, the collectivity he described as a "pure nation" had been colonized by Japan for almost thirty years by the time he finished art school in 1938. He thus recognized what he had done by marrying a Japanese woman during this last, total-war phase of Japanese colonization of Korea.

Second, Sök had to continue this process of individuation numerous times in response to his family's decisions to repeatedly cross the border between Manchuria and Korea. The second to last migration for Sök's family in 1931 occurred at the moment when Japan colonized Manchukuo and then yet again in 1934 when his family would make its final decision to migrate and stay in China. The transindividual emerges as constitutive of the many individuals he had had to become through individuation, speaking three different languages, living in charged political times during the end of the dynastic era, then in colonized Korea and China and, later, living through the Chinese Communist Revolution (1949) and the formation of the Korean Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture (1951). This complex constitution may explain why he felt bound to title his works in keeping with the social realist trope of grandness supporting the nation, but the paintings themselves fell short of expressing such sentiments, as revealed in the analysis of colors, composition, and context earlier in this article. In effect, "Nakamura Himan" and "Sök Himan" are both flattened and still reconstituted into the transindividual that recognizes the collectivity of communal allegiance(s) and the self-loving individual, as a combination of such moments of self-recognition and its relations. The identity of the object of art also emerges through this recognition.

The constitutive relations of the individual and collective together render the transindividual. French philosopher Muriel Combes's work on transindividuality shows that the fundamental relation of the psychic to the collective is "a relation that is often manifested in the most seemingly intimate acts of perception and feeling" (Combes 2013, 33–38; Read 2016, 119). American philosopher Jason Read reminds readers that this set of relations is "not static but exist[s] at concurrent conjuncture, that which understands the long history of exploitation and oppression, especially based upon race, class and nation" (Read 2016, 98). In addition, such relations considered concurrently add new dimensions through the lens of political anthropology. That is, as *Chosŏnjok* in China or *Zainichi* in Japan, there is never a "clean break from one identity or relation to another...without residue or remainder" (Read 2016, 99). A life's history cannot simply be chronologically partitioned, periodized, organized, and segregated into a progression or development of a person's identity. French Marxist philosopher Étienne Balibar's highlights the "anthropological difference" as a type of political anthropology that refuses this division between nature and institutions (Balibar 1998, 78; Read 2016,

83). Rather than divide, separate, or hyphenate the person, transindividuality integrates the intimate, individual, psychic, and emotional remembrances with the community, nation, state, economy, and minor transnational communities such as Yanbian University for Sōk and Ch'ōnryōn for Ch'ae. The work to conceptualize, theorize, and thus understand diaspora, art, and identity takes into account the transindividual and its process of individuation through ontogenesis, questioning the putative stability or historical chronology of the individual.

### The Ontogenesis and Transindividuality of Jun Ch'ae

The theme of a multi-headed monstrosity emerges in a series of oil paintings that Jun Ch'ae undertook in the 1990s and early 2000s after retiring from his official duties as a political cartoonist for the North Korean-affiliated newspaper *Chosŏn shinbo*. Altogether, Ch'ae produced forty oil paintings that were similar in composition and theme (Yi 2011). Each of these works presents an intimate portrait of humans in turmoil: split, defaced, masked, veiled, or multiplied (figure 8). Against a dark backdrop, the motif is centered on a body or face(s), and the story is about the tortured, questioning, or muted self. Indeed, the title *Glass Marbles* (figure 9) refers to the Japanese idiom that a person who has lost her sound mind is “a person with eyes like glass marbles” (Chōng 2004e). In these works, the colors are bold, the edges are clean, and the composition is always centered on a face and body.

South Korean curator Chong-hyo Chōng believes the unique form and critical disposition that Ch'ae expresses in his paintings emanated from Ch'ae's experience as a Japanese Korean (Chōng 2004e). Chōng organized Ch'ae's solo survey exhibition in his Gallery NAW, or Net Art World (Chōng 2004a).<sup>12</sup> He was also one of the few people who not only spoke with Ch'ae about his art practice but also published the information. These reports appear in five parts in a local newspaper of Kyōngsang Province titled *Kyōngnam tomin ilbo* (Kyōngnam people's newspaper). From these articles and author interviews with curators, one discovers that Ch'ae migrated in 1928 with his parents from Ch'angwōn, Korea, to rural parts of Japan, and their poor conditions ultimately motivated Ch'ae to start life on his own in Tokyo in early 1940 at the age of 14. Even at that young age, he decided to join the Japanese Communist Party, partly swayed by an idea that his destitution was caused by capitalism, but not necessarily because he believed in Socialism itself (Chōng 2004c). He thus joined not for ideological reasons but for economic betterment. Even after he left home and attempted to become independent, he did return to his parents in the Japanese countryside from time to time because he was not able to survive on his own during the height of the Pacific War. Somehow, he was able to enroll in a school in Tokyo and start drawing in art classes (Chōng 2004c). As luck would have it, he met the famous cartoonist Etsurō Katō, from whom he learned to draw.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Chōng is the former owner of Gallery NAW in Osaka and the current Associate Curator for the Busan Museum of Art.

<sup>13</sup> Chōng's 2004a newspaper articles only briefly mention this mentorship with Katō, but this connection was a fortuitous one, considering Katō's status and fame (Sodei 2001).



Figure 8. Jun Ch'ae, *Public Opinion (Yoron)*, 2002. Oil on canvas, 90 cm x 65.5 cm. Source: Gyeongnam Art Museum.



Figure 9. Jun Ch'ae, *Glass Marbles (Yuri kusŭl)*, 2002. Acrylic on canvas, 162 cm x 130 cm.

Source: Gyeongnam Art Museum.

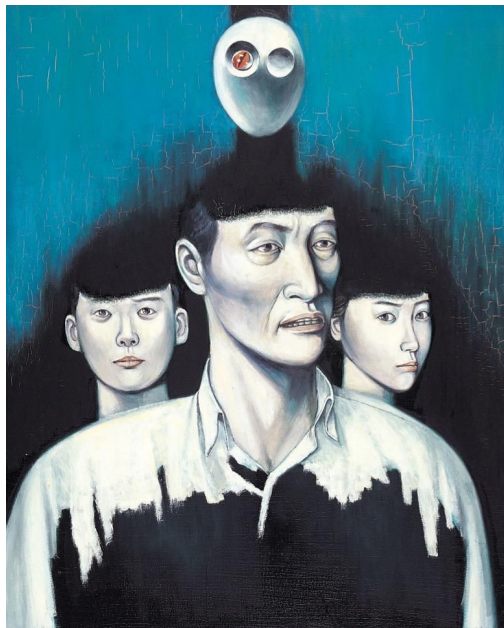


Figure 10. Jun Ch'ae, *Chaos*, 2002. Oil on canvas, 100 cm x 80.3 cm. Source: Gyeongnam Art Museum.

As Ch'ae acquired these drawing skills, several major changes occurred in his life. First, in 1945, he decided to join the newly formed Alliance for Chosŏn People Residing in Japan (Chaeil Chosŏnin Yŏnmaeng) to advocate for Chosŏn people's rights and fight against Japanese discrimination and oppression. Second, he started to earn a small amount of money for the first time, drawing cartoons for the Alliance. Third, when the Korean War began in 1950 and the Japanese government disbanded the Alliance, Ch'ae stopped making drawings for the Alliance, because of the war as well as his inability to speak the Korean language (a fact that made him feel distanced and ostracized from the Alliance) (Chŏng 2004c). Fourth, when he finally did start making a living as a cartoonist, he still maintained strained relations with the resident Korean Japanese community because he had married a Japanese woman and sent their child to a Japanese school, rather than a Ch'ŏngryŏng North Korean-affiliated school. He expressed that he was living in constant fear of being ousted from the community and thus losing his livelihood, being branded as a toady and considered a traitor. He found having to follow the strict code of cultural production based on a nationalist brand of social realism equally distasteful. For Ch'ae, the rules for painting as *Zainichi* affiliated with North Korea did not even truly represent social realism. That is, his world was a unique one that supported the Ch'ŏngryŏng *Zainichi* community, positing images and paintings pictures that best represented the Chosŏn community, which supported a North Korean position (Chŏng 2004b; 2004c). Given this tortured existence, a reading of Ch'ae's artwork may identify the political torment, social oppression, dire economic straits, and, ultimately, in the case of *Chaos* (figure 10), the ruinous ends met by many ethnic Koreans in Japan as the underlying inspirations for the work.

### Being *Zainichi*

Scholars Kyung-sik Suh, Sonia Ryang, and John Lie underscore the problematic of identity consciousness and the Korean diaspora from the Japanese Korean historical perspective. Kyung-sik Suh's definition of diaspora in his opening remarks at the 2004 Korean Diaspora and Art Symposium at Tokyo Keizei University is unmitigated: diaspora is being part of a community that exists as a result of cultural, economic, and political domination and control of one group of people by another (Suh 2004). The historical and sociopolitical causes of people's movement outside Korea determine subsequent *minjok* 民族 (ethnonational) issues (Suh 2005). Suh's understanding of *minjok* does not equate it with *minjoksöng* 民族性 (ethnicity), the shared blood, culture, and spirit of the people espoused by nationalist scholars. Rather, he defines *minjok* as a group-community that shares a history of suffering and forwards a goal of liberation/emancipation from this suffering through solidarity with others (Suh 2006, 10–11). In effect, Suh formulates an argument for a "quasi-diaspora," or *chaein*, a subject between a refugee and a citizen.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, *Zainichi* lived for almost half a century as refugees, without rights and protections. On the other hand, 650,000 Japanese Koreans still make up the largest minority group in Japan and continue to reside and make their livelihoods there. Thus, their lives have become an undeniable presence in Japanese society and culture; *Zainichi* no longer live as transients holding onto a hope for a future return to the homeland (Suh 2006).

In terms of diaspora and art, Suh argues that one of the major functions of diasporic art is to change the mediums of expression, and thus communication, from speech and language to art and visual culture. He is hopeful that this shift will help make it possible for Japanese Koreans to extricate themselves from their imbroglio: namely, the *impossibility* of communicating through language (Suh 2005). As Suh states, "Our [Japanese Korean] experience is inexpressible through language," and it is precisely for this reason that artists turn toward figurative paintings and visual affect to express the regret, pain, violence, nostalgia, and the history of exile (Suh 2005).

Whereas Suh postulates the concept of the quasi-diaspora and celebrates diasporic art, Sonia Ryang questions the very condition of personhood in which Japanese Koreans reside. She suggests that the very "*unzainichi*" reality, that of being *outside* and not *inside* Japanese society, means that "they are not subhuman but merely and nakedly human, lacking the protections that full national incorporation provide. Furthermore, to argue that they are treated like second-class citizens would be missing the point, since they are not citizens of Japan in any

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<sup>14</sup> *Chaein* is the short form for *Chaeil Chosön Hangugin* 在日朝鮮韓國人, the Alliance for Chosön People Residing in Japan. The term includes both Chosön and Hanguk to represent those Koreans who arrived in Japan during the colonial era and those who came after the war. Rather than using familiar "Resident Koreans in Japan" (*chaeil tongp'o* 在日同胞, or *kyop'o* 僑胞), Suh makes a strategic political move to focus the naming of Japanese Koreans away from the Japaneseness (*il* 日) and replace it with personhood (*in* 人).

capacity whatsoever” (Ryang 2001, 69; 2009, 16). Ryang’s pessimism also is expressed in her introduction to *Diaspora without Homeland: Being Korean in Japan*. She defines people without homeland as

forever in exile, wandering, in search of home, land, and security. Death is near, or at least so it feels, for they do not know who they are and where to live and die—by speaking more than one language depending on the need, they exist as sojourners, foreigners, outsiders, outlanders, and therefore intruders, polluters, unwanted guests, unrecorded populations, people without papers, people who do not belong in the dominant political order. (Ryang 2009, 15)

Again, contrary to Suh’s formulations, Ryang argues that the Korean diaspora in Japan lost a community when they became truly diasporic in 1965, when the Republic of Korea and Japan normalized diplomatic relations and the diaspora thus gained nationality of their home country. For Ryang, though, this was also the point when Koreans in Japan became *unzainichi*. Ryang consequently understands Korean diaspora in the Japanese case as immobile, a condition closer to exile and more aptly described as confinement against one’s will or beyond one’s control (Ryang 2009). She contends that the unique historical condition of Japanese Koreans created their isolation, as well as their peculiar form of self-image, diminishing any connection to a cultural identity as Koreans in Japan. Unlike the Jewish diaspora, as argued by Boyarin and Boyarin (2002) in their reading of the Pauline texts, Japanese Koreans lack an understanding of the past as a cultural source. In Japan’s case, then, for all generations there is no longer a hope of return because they remain homeless in what Ryang describes as an “inflexible and fatalistic” situation “marked with inescapabilities” (Ryang 2001, 69).

The formulation of Suh’s quasi-diaspora and Ryang’s “*unzainichi*” *Zainichi* as lived experiences can be compared with Lie’s documentation of an unintentional diasporic consciousness created in the 1970s with the publication of the Japanese journal *Kikan sanzenri* (K. *Kigan samch’ŏlli*, Journal of three thousand li). Through this documentation, Lie discovers the “diasporic realization” that the return to homeland in Korea was no longer the ultimate goal of Koreans residing in Japan, and that in this discovery, creates a “third space” that lies outside the Cold War division and geopolitics. The journal was notable as the first printed forum for those Korean residents in Japan not aligned with a pro-North or pro-South organization (Lie 2000, 12, 16). Lie purports that this 1970s diasporic consciousness was a space of possibility because *Zainichi* no longer felt bound to return “home” to become full-fledged citizens and human beings.

Against the formulations that Suh’s, Ryang’s, and Lie’s works bring to light, a transindividual account considers the sight of multiplying faces and recognizes solitude, ordeal, and conflict. My argument brings forward the reemergence of a full self (a pre-individual) that is engaging the conflictual or conflicted self. Combes explains this process as the paradox of the transindividual. Quoting Simondon, she writes that the “transindividual must be discovered, and is only discovered... ‘at the end of the ordeal [that the subject has] imposed upon itself, and which is an ordeal

of isolation.' Thus a subject cannot encounter transindividuality without undergoing an ordeal, that of solitude" (Combes 2013, 35). For *Zainichi* residents of Japan such as Jun Ch'ae, the monstrous images of split heads and discombobulated beings could only appear in public after a lifetime of individuations, a process of acclimating, adjusting, and quieting his mind from personal trauma, social discrimination, and political cleavage. In other words, Ch'ae had the ability to paint such monstrosities only at the end of a career, as an act of ontogenesis.



Figure 11. Jun Ch'ae, *In-Between Self (Chasinŭi kaunde)*, 2002. Oil on canvas, 65.5 cm x 53.3 cm. Source: Gyeongnam Art Museum.

At the end of his career, Ch'ae threw these paintings out into the world and gave something audacious to the viewing audience. He created a large number of them swiftly in the 1990s and early 2000s, donating all of them to the museum by 2002 (Pak 2007). Ch'ae's figures come to life and scream out a story of confusion, anger, hatred, incredulity, and insanity—supporting Sonia Ryang's argument. Maybe because for the first time his painting career involved an intimate hand, rather than a political hand drafting political cartoons, these works come closest to the deep pathos of *Zainichi* transindividuality. The faces grab the viewer's attention with their direct, yet detailed and gut-wrenching, iterations. They ask you to slow down your stride and look into their eyes—acts that demand further exploration of *Zainichi* identity. More than anything, they make the viewer return to the artwork again and again (see figure 11).

It was only recently, in the early 2000s, by means of those interviews Ch'ae granted to curator Chong-hyo Chŏng, that some surprising information about his past came to light: Ch'ae was the fourth of five children—thus he has brothers and sisters he never met or attempted to find—and his birth name was Minho Ch'ae (Chŏng 2004a). In his series of five newspaper articles, Chŏng notes how long it has taken for him to get to know the artist Ch'ae and that even then, he “does not know Ch'ae very well, nor does Ch'ae know himself very well, nor does he want to” (Chŏng 2004a). Chŏng's contemplative statement reflects the debilitation of those who cannot go beyond the pain and loss, but a close reading of Ch'ae's paintings from a transindividual perspective, through the conceptual lens of diasporic intimacy, express sentiments previously undiscovered, often muted by the global, celebratory readings of diasporic art and literature. A reading of the artist Jun Ch'ae as a transindividual can help us see the representation, his multi-headed art work, and his actions, including his donation of his artwork to his home-place museum, as significant factors contributing to his constituted identity as a *Zainichi* diasporic artist. Characterizing the action are the activities of the individual artists who through their personal and cultural activities rehearse the relationship between the individual and the collective, as a space of public exchange and engagement (Read 2016, 112). Ch'ae's artwork and donations ultimately made this action and exchange possible.

## Conclusion

Diasporic intimacy is connected to the function of diasporic art, enabling artists to express the possibility of activating individual feelings of loss without succumbing to resentment, anguish, and suffering. Neither the art nor the transindividuality of Ch'ae and Sŏk can be considered solely liberatory, celebratory, or pessimistic. How can we read the artwork of such minor transnational individual artists—individuals who were representative of, and important in, their collective communities but minor, or even unknown, outside their immediate localities? Does the accumulation of their paintings that include things, images, books, faces, objects, and representations help us to remember the past events involving Koreans in China and Japan? One reading sees the literal realism in their work, as in the political cartoons. Whether they provide a critique of South Korea's subordination to Japanese economy, a reminder of the *Zainichi* plight and campaign against the fingerprinting of Koreans in Japan, or the larger recognition that all Asian states must succumb to the power of a “kingly” United States (see figures 1 and 2), there is a one-on-one reckoning in these cartoons with the reality of the minority status of Koreans living in diaspora. Yet, the shift from this direct, unforgiving critique of political hierarchies and social inequities to the intimate portrayal of the constituted self, offers yet another story. The story of the transindividual must take into account the history of constituted identity both of the collective, context-specific history as ethnic Koreans in China and Japan and of the intimate, self-loving self in his numerous moments of individuation and ontogenesis.

Yet another way to see these images is as a celebratory reckoning of the beauty of nature, the strength in the fullness of life, and the remembrance of an

awe-inspiring landscape. We find here in equal proportions the pessimism of life as a prisoner of consciousness, working the land in labor camps during the Cultural Revolution, and of life as a marked *Zainichi* outcast. How does a concentration of objects help to bring about the solidarity that Kyöngsik Suh calls for in order to create conditions for emancipation from the history of suffering and prison of mother tongue (Suh 2006)? Any attempt to answer these questions must address the intimate conditions of art-making and the construction of individuals and their transindividuality that function in the accumulation of works of art. This diasporic intimacy suggests the possibility of transforming the painful condition of displacement into the pleasures of exile, a release that allows a remembering without becoming the proverbial pillar of salt. More than the “emancipating” effects of cultural expression or provisional moments of emancipation and celebration, the monstrosity of the transindividual fuels diasporic art. The constituted individual renders life to beings through individuation, the process of separating oneself from one’s environment that allows the solitude for these artists to produce so much and for so long.

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