

Sonic Routes to an Ancestral Homeland: The Bi-polarized Timbre of *Kayagŭm* by Two *Zainichi* Virtuoso Artists in Cosmopolitan Seoul

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Among diasporic Koreans in Japan (*Zainichi*), two prominent political groups support the respective regimes of South and North Korea. This paper engages with Koo's argument regarding *Zainichi* musicians in the North Korean performance troupe in Japan, specifically addressing the idea that their political/social affiliations are transcended by their artistic practices (2019). Through an exemplary study of two *Zainichi* virtuosic artists, Bokyung Kim and Yangsook Moon, this paper investigates how the (a)political stance is intricately connected to both their musical practices and their choice of *kayagŭm* in cosmopolitan Seoul. These inbound *Zainichi* Koreans pursue the sound of home by seeking to establish their own "artistic lineage" (Koo 2021) and their navigation of professional musicianship which delineates their position-taking in two different genres. Their musical skills—represented by the twelve-stringed and twenty-five stringed *kayagŭm*—feature the contrasting timbres of these instruments and their performance techniques within two genres, specifically traditional folk/court music and contemporary compositions. The twelve-stringed *kayagŭm* is contrasted with the twenty-five stringed version, which overcomes the limitations of the twelve-stringed instrument in terms of sound elements such as loudness, pitch, and resonance. I consider that their musical behaviors projected onto *kayagŭm* remain aligned with their previous association with the politics played by the musicians' families and their ongoing efforts to maintain their "artistic lineage" in South Korea insofar as it obliterates their ethnic markers as Japanese. Ultimately, their aim is to become conciliators in promoting ancestral and traditional sound, through performing two sonically and materially disparate versions of the *kayagum*.