

Cultural encounters through translation in Northeast Asia

Ilhong Ko

Translation is not merely a form of intercultural communication, it is a cultural encounter between two different worlds. The process of translation opens up an arena in which conceptual boundaries are expanded, meanings are contested, and power conflicts emerge. In this issue of *News from Northeast Asia* we examine how the act of translation can also shed light on the nature of the relationship between the countries in which the original and translated texts were produced.

The way in which translation can lead to bilateral exchange is illustrated by Kyusik Jeong of Wonkwang University in 'Asian workers' solidarity and cultural exchange'. Translation can also act to provide a common ground for engagement, as Nihei Michiaki, Professor Emeritus of Tohoku University, reminds us in 'The translation and cultural exchange of the Japanese classic *Genjimonogatari*'. Translation may

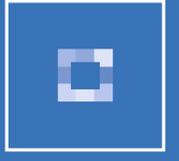
also be accompanied by active attempts to reconfigure power relations and bring about change to the status quo; this is demonstrated by Kyushu University's Tanaka Mika in 'Aspects of Japanese publication translations in *Sinmunkwan's* magazines'. However, translation may also contribute, perhaps unintentionally, to the reproduction of long-standing prejudices, as can be seen in the case of the Japanese translation of the works

of a Korean dissident presented by Kyung Hee University's Moon-seok Jang in 'Across the Korea Strait and the Yellow Sea. Kim Ji Ha in the 1970s'.

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Asian workers' solidarity and cultural exchange

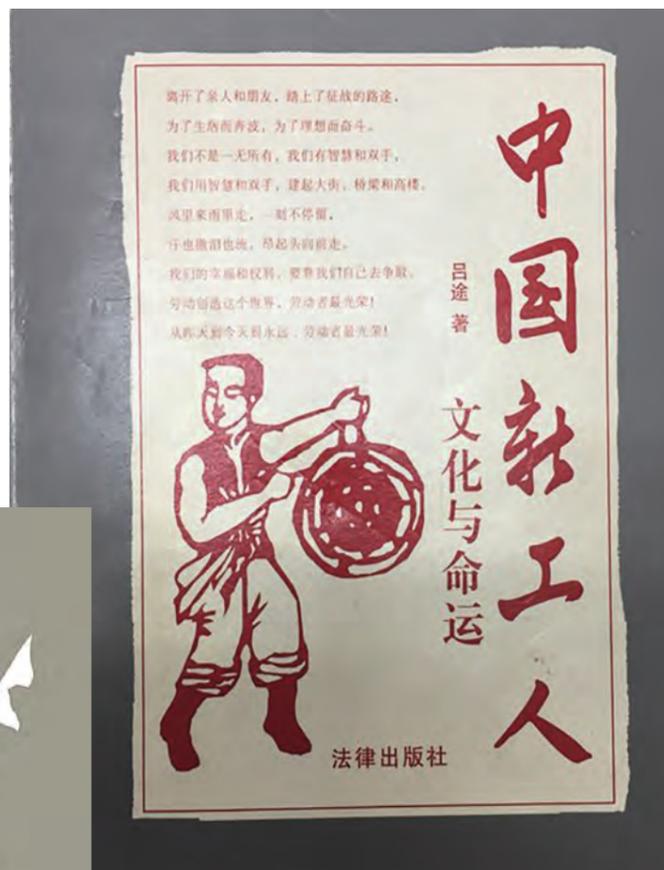
Kyusik Jeong

As Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement in 2019 gained the world's attention, reports that the citizens of Hong Kong had sung 'March for the Beloved', South Korea's representative grassroots activist song, led some to ponder upon the influence of Korea's democracy movement on these demonstrations. Yet cultural exchange and practice should not be regarded as one-way phenomena; they are lifestyles constructed and modified according to their needs by various organizations and activists over a long time of solidarity and cross-reference.¹ Indeed, 'March for the Beloved', recognized since the 1980s as a key cultural text symbolizing Korea's democracy movement, had already become Asia's 'The Internationale', transcending time and space to be sung throughout Asia, in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Cambodia, and Malaysia.

In China, the socialist state that has turned into 'the world's factory', the active movements of the New Workers group are said to have referenced the culture and experience of South Korea's labor activism. A prime example of this can be found in the Beijing Migrant Workers' Home located in Picun, a village outside Beijing where a high concentration of workers reside. This organization, which began in 2002, aims to build a commune that seeks "the construction of New Workers group culture, various educational activities, and the possibilities of community economy and solidarity". Members have been developing an alternative cultural movement based on the realistic lives and needs of workers, under the following recognition: "Without our culture, our history is lost, and without our history, our future is lost". This organization is headed by Sun Heng, also the leader of the New Workers Art Troupe, who first heard 'March for the Beloved' in 2005 and was so impressed that he adapted it into 'Song of Praise for Workers (劳动者赞歌)', which addresses the lives and struggles of Chinese workers. The song gained popularity during the 'New Workers Culture and Arts Festival' celebrating the new year in 2012 and subsequently became the most popular

song among Chinese labor activism organizations and activists.

Another legacy of Korean political and labor activism that spread throughout Asia is the *Biography of Chun Tae-il* (written by Cho Youngrae in 1983). Recording the life and struggle of Chun Tae-il, an icon and martyr of the Korean labor movement who self-immolated in 1970 for the improvement of the poor working conditions, crying "Workers are not machines" and "Abide by the Labor Standards Act", this book was translated into English in 2003 as *A Single Spark*. It has since come to be read in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Mongolia. It became a must-read text for Chinese labor organizations and activists following the publication in 2012 of the Chinese translation by Liu Jianzhou, *A Single Spark: Biography of Chun Tae-il* [星星之火: 全泰壹评传].



Above: *The New Workers of China: Culture and Destiny*, written by Lü Tu and published by Legal Publishing House in 2015, presents an analysis of the social structure that the 'New Workers' of China face, as well as a vivid account of their life stories. It was translated into Korean as *The Future of Chinese New Workers* (left) and published in 2018 by Nareum Books. Images provided by the author who participated in the volume's Korean translation.

Lü Tu, an expert in developmental sociology who studied at Wageningen University in the Netherlands, was once a university professor in China, and now lives with workers at the Beijing Migrant Workers' Home carrying out research, education and community activities, confesses that she felt an indescribable range of emotions after reading the biography. As she says, in the lives and struggles of Chinese New Workers, it is possible to observe that the 'Spirit of Chun Tae-il' lives on, beyond borders and language barriers, in the hearts of people who respect the value of life.

It should be noted that the experience and culture of Korean labor activism has not stopped at merely being accepted in China but, through the Chinese New Workers, has evolved and become disseminated within Korea. All three books of Lü Tu on the Chinese New Workers have been translated into

Korean. Among those, *The Formation of Chinese New Workers* and *The Future of Chinese New Workers*, for which the author of this piece served as the main translator, calls for the establishment of subjectivity in the New Workers as both individuals and groups through the analysis of the social structure that those workers are situated in, as well as their 'life stories'. Moreover, *We Are Justified* (the Korean translation published in 2020) presents a detailed examination of the lives, work, and struggles of Chinese female workers. The fact that this book was published as part of the 'Joint Publication Project Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Chun Tae-il's Death', which was planned by the Chun Tae-il Foundation and eleven Korean publishing companies for the continuation of Chun Tae-il's spirit in the present age, is significant indeed.

In this sense, translation does not stop at the transferring of print from one country to another, but rather is a kind of cultural struggle that calls for the exchange of thoughts and experiences as a mediator of conversations and encounters. Thus the encounter of Chun Tae-il and Chinese New Workers through translation becomes a sign that promotes the solidarity and cultural exchange of Asian workers, transcending industry types, regions, genders, generations, and borders. This would be the true meaning of what Lü Tu said to this author during her visit to Korea in 2015: "Your paying attention to the realities and future of Chinese New Workers is paying attention to the fate of the world's workers, and that is the reason why I am interested in the life and death of Chun Tae-il".

The encounter of Chun Tae-il and the Chinese New Workers continues strong into the present day. In 2020, Sun Heng and Lü Tu came together to compose the song 'Brilliant Spark: In commemoration of Chun Tae-il', a video of which² was screened during the closing ceremony of East Asia People Theater Festival, held in 2020 in Korea to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Chun Tae-il's death.

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Notes

- 1 See, for example, Raymond Williams' assertion that culture is "a whole way of life", in: Williams, R. 1958. *Work and Society*, Chatto & Windus.
- 2 <https://tinyurl.com/BrilliantSpark-ChunTai-Il>

The translation and cultural exchange of the Japanese classic *Genjimonogatari*

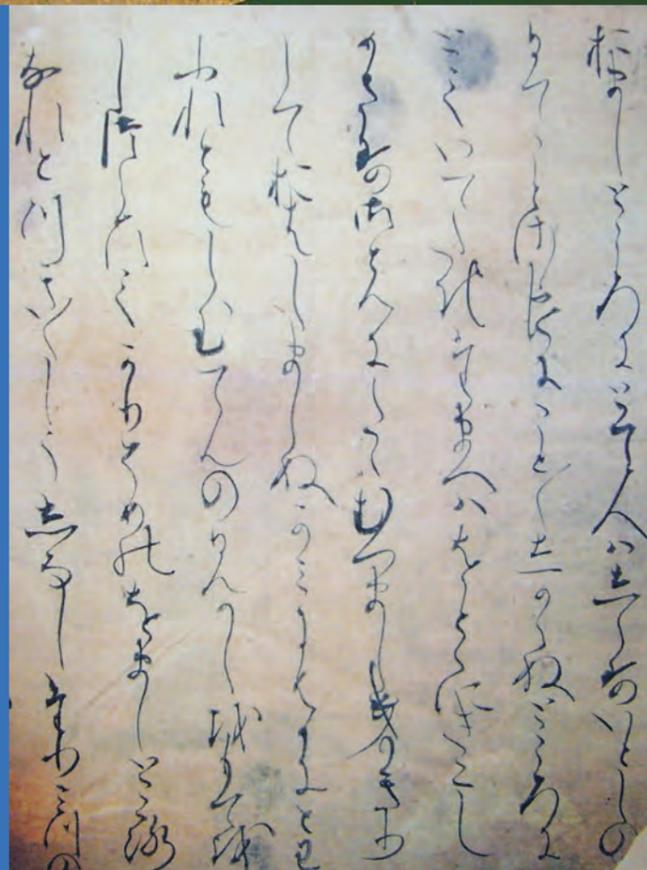
Nihei Michiaki

Translation entails the transmission of a text not only into a different language but also into a different cultural and historical context. As such, no such thing as a 'perfect translation' is possible. Furthermore, when the text to be translated is a piece of foreign literature written in an archaic rather than modern language, it would be needless to say how its translation would be difficult and limited. It could be said that *Genjimonogatari* [The Tale of Genji], a fifty-four volume work written one thousand years ago by the Japanese female author Murasaki Shikibu, has joined the pantheon of 'world literature' not only due to the masterful nature of the work itself but also because so many people from different countries and regions have dedicated themselves to the difficult task of translating this classic. The following overview of the major translations of *Genjimonogatari* published in Northeast Asia including China, Taiwan, and Korea, well illustrates the significance of 'translation' as a form of cultural exchange.

The Chinese and Korean translations of *Genjimonogatari* had initially been based on modern Japanese translations, rather than the original 11th century text. *Genjimonogatari* was written using the language and rhetoric of the Heian period and therefore the interpretation of many passages remains a contested issue among Japanese scholars. As such, it is not surprising that the earliest translations, which had taken place before the scholarship of Japanese classics had been well established in China and Korea, had relied on modern Japanese translations published in Japan.

In China, the translation of the first volume of *Genjimonogatari*, 'Kiritsubo', was published in a magazine as early as 1957, by Qian Daosun who, during his adolescence in Japan, had been educated in Japanese classic literature. Some say that this translation was based on the original text, but it seems more likely that annotations featured in the modern translations of the text had been referenced. The Chinese artist and cartoonist Feng Zikai, who had studied briefly in Japan, began to translate all volumes of *Genjimonogatari* over five and a half years, starting in 1961. His translation was published in three volumes between 1980-1983, after the Cultural Revolution and his subsequent death. This first full Chinese translation of *Genjimonogatari* was based on the modern translations of Yosano Akiko and Tanizaki Junichiro, as well as other Japanese researchers, but remains greatly influential since it is easy to read and continues to be published by several companies. Most of the Chinese publications of *Genjimonogatari* in China have directly utilized Feng's translation.

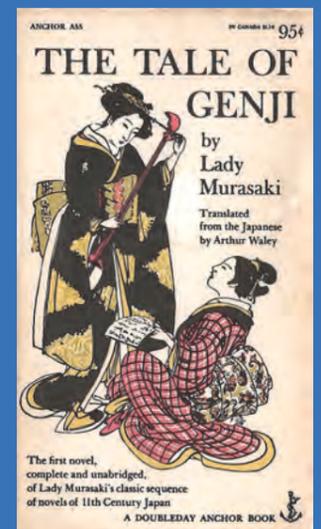
In Taiwan, an outstanding Chinese translation of *Genjimonogatari* based on the original text was undertaken by Lin Wenyue, a scholar of Chinese-Japanese comparative literature and Chinese literature. The translation was first serially published in a magazine from 1973 to 1978; the full translation first published in five volumes and then the revised edition in two volumes. Lin Wenyue's education until early adulthood had taken place in Shanghai's Japanese concession, and she later engaged in research at Kyoto University. Lin was knowledgeable of the numerous annotations of the original text, the modern translations of Yosano Akiko and Tanizaki Junichiro, and the English translations of Europe and America. However, her translation of the original text was based on her own interpretations and the style is in keeping with the refined atmosphere



Above: Scenes from the *Tale of Genji* painted by Tosa Mitsuyoshi, of the Tosa school in Osaka. Dating from the second half of the 16th century (Azuchi-Momoyama period).

Left: A 13th century fragment of *Genjimonogatari*. From collection of Nihei Michiaki.

Right and below: A selection of covers of the translated books.



of the original text. Lin's translation was highly regarded, even in China, and came to be published in simplified Chinese. Due to this achievement, Lin Wenyue was awarded the Japan Research Achievement Award in 2013 as the only Asian awardee.

The Chinese and Taiwanese translators were aided by the fact that *Genjimonogatari* had been influenced by Chinese literature and historical texts; translating into Korean, however, was inevitably more difficult. In addition to a general understanding of *Genjimonogatari*, an understanding of the background, institutions, and history that gave rise to the work, as well as an in-depth knowledge of the language and culture of the Heian period are required for Korean translators.

Unfortunately, such knowledge and understanding was lacking in the earliest Korean translations of the original text, carried out by Yoo Jeong in 1973 and Jeon Yongshin in 1999. Fortunately, the 21st century has witnessed the publication of Korean translations based on the original text that have been written by researchers of *Genjimonogatari*. In 2008, a high-quality abridged translation of all volumes of *Genjimonogatari* was published by Kim Jongduck, the leading researcher in South Korea on this classic. Lee Misuk, who has published a research monograph on *Genjimonogatari* in Japan, also began to translate the work in 2014. Her translation is based on an interpretation of the original text and various commentaries and two of

six volumes have been published by SNU Press to present. The complete Korean translation of *Genjimonogatari* by a researcher of the work will hopefully be accomplished in the near future.

It would be wrong, however, to expect the above mentioned 'outstanding translations' to be 'perfect translations'. A 'perfect translation' simply cannot exist. As an act of transferring a text into another language based in a different culture and with a different history can inevitably only exist as a fusion of cultures. In its original form, 'translation' is above all cultural exchange.

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Aspects of Japanese publication translations in Sinmunkwan's magazines

Tanaka Mika

Sinmunkwan (新文館) was a publishing company established in Seoul in 1908 by Choe Nam-seon (1890-1957), one of the key intellectuals of modern Korea. It gained prominence as the publishing house of *Sonyeon* (少年) (November 1908 – May 1911), considered to be Korea's first modern magazine, and *Cheongchun* (青春) (October 1914 – September 1918), a comprehensive cultural magazine that was popular in the 1910s. Featured in these two Korean magazines were numerous translations of Japanese publications. An analysis of these translations sheds light on the nature of Sinmunkwan's relationship at the time with the Japanese publishing sector.

In *Sonyeon*, many of the Korean translations of western works were based upon the Japanese translations of the original texts. Key characteristics of the Korean translations featured in *Sonyeon* are the addition of explanatory comments and the tailoring of expressions for the Korean audience. For example, Choe Nam-seon added explanations about historical figures (such as the Macedonian King Alexander, the philosopher Francis Bacon), as well as on western concepts such as 'materialism' and 'the Reverend'. In addition, he paraphrased 'exemplary man' into *yangban* (a term referring to the traditional ruling class or gentry of Korea during the Joseon Dynasty) so that the translation may be understood within the Korean cultural context.



Fig 1: Images from *Chugaku Sekai* (中學世界) Issue 13-1 (published in January 1910) (left) and *Cheongchun* (青春) Issue 1 (published in October 1914) (right). In this case (and other similar cases), the article itself was not translated but the illustrations or layouts of Japanese texts regarding world topics or events were referenced. Images of the original articles scanned by the author.

Another characteristic feature of the translations in *Sonyeon* is the revision of the text so that 'boys' – the magazine's readership (*sonyeon* means 'boy' in Korean) – are addressed directly and the expectations for these 'boys' are clearly expressed. One example would be the addition of the following sentence at the end of the article 'The Youth of Edison, the King of Electricity' [電氣王エディソンの少年時節] to express an expectation for these 'boys': "We wish to know what kinds of trees and eggs of invention are being fostered and hatched in the future in Korea" [新大韓에는 어떠한 發明의 나무가 자라가고 알이 깨여가는가를 알고자하오].

In the case of *Cheongchun*, a magazine in which pieces on 'global knowledge' featured prominently, the material for many of the pieces was obtained by translating numerous Japanese publications, such as *Taiyo* (太陽) and *Chugaku Sekai* (中學世界), published by Hakubunkan (博文館), or *Gakusei* (學生), published by Fuzanbo (富山房). An analysis of the translations that appear in these magazines reveals that attempts were made to situate Korea within the global context substituting 'Korea' for 'Japan'. For example, 'Ueno Zoo in Tokyo' was replaced by 'Changdeokgung Zoo', 'Tokyo' by 'Gyeongseong' and 'Kyoto' by 'Pyeongyang'.

The paraphrasing of expressions to align with Korean culture or the presentation of Korea as the 'subject' through the replacement of terms can also be observed in the children's magazines published by Sinmunkwan in the period between the final publication of *Sonyeon* and the first issue of *Cheongchun*, such as *Bulgun Jeogori* (붉은저고리), *Aideulboi* (아이들보이) and *Saebyeol* (새별). For instance, 太郎さん (*Taro-san*) from the original text is translated as 'friend' and 大名 (*daimyo*) as *yangban*.

Sinmunkwan's magazines for children are also notable for the fact that they were printed mostly in Hangul, the likely reason for this being the preservation of the Korean language at the time of Japanese colonial occupation. Purely Korean expressions were used as much as possible, with great effort being made to avoid the use of Chinese characters. Examples of this include the way in which *naruneun teul* (나르는 틀), an expression meaning 'a flying machine' that uses only Hangul characters, was used instead of *bihanggi* (飛行機), the more generally used term to translate 'airplane', but which is comprised of Chinese characters. Another such case is the use of *jeollo ganeun soore* (절로가는수레), meaning 'wagon that goes on its own' instead of *jadongcha* (自動車) for 'automobile'. Indeed, Choe Nam-seon urges the readers of *Aideulboi* to "make sure to write in Korean" for correspondence. The creation of Korean expressions in the process of translation went hand in hand with his attempts to preserve a pure version of the Korean language that did not depend on Chinese characters.

As the above example of Choe Nam-seon's translation of various Japanese publications and the publication of these translations in the magazines produced by his publication house, Sinmunkwan, illustrates, 'translation' was not merely the act of transferring a text from one language to another, but also involved active attempts to enlighten the people or to preserve culture.

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Across the Korea Strait and the Yellow Sea. Kim Ji Ha in the 1970s

Moon-seok Jang

Kim Ji Ha was a poet who resisted Park Chung Hee's regime of developmental dictatorship in 1970s Korea. In 1970, he published a poem that criticized the military dictatorship, and the Korean government imprisoned him under the outrageous claim that he had violated the Anticommunist Law. After being released, Kim Ji Ha published another poem that sang of democracy, and soon returned to prison. His life in the 1970s was a cycle of imprisonment, release, escape, and arrest, and he was not able to publish his work in Korea until 1982.

Among the people who reached out to him in solidarity during his imprisonment were Japanese citizens. In the 1970s, around twenty collections of the works of Kim Ji Ha, a resistance poet of Korea, Japan's former colony, were published by the people of Japan, the former colonial empire. Twenty is the number of official publications produced in the 1970s in Japan; this number skyrockets when pamphlets, newsletters, and pirate publications are included. The publication of Kim Ji Ha's works in 1970s Japan was a movement of solidarity between Korea and Japan led by Japanese citizens as a campaign to support Kim Ji Ha. Japanese citizens, religious figures, literary figures, and Koreans in Japan participated in this movement. The Japanese citizens observed the process of Kim Ji Ha's trials in real time while editing and publishing the various manifestos that he drafted, along with the records of his trials. As the oppression of Kim Ji Ha intensified in Korea, the power of solidarity shown by Japanese citizens also strengthened.

When Kim Ji Ha was sentenced to death in 1974, Japanese and Korean-Japanese literati staged a hunger strike, and approximately a thousand Japanese citizens protested in front of the Korean Embassy in Japan. Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Howard Zinn, Edwin Reischauer and others participated in the International Committee to Support Kim Ji Ha, following the suggestion of Oda Makoto and Tsurumi Shunsuke. In June of 1975, Kim Ji Ha was awarded the Lotus Prize for Literature from the Afro-Asian Writers' Association as a writer of a 'free-world' country; this was also due to the help of the Japanese literati. As a result of the solidarity and attention of Japanese citizens, the complete collection of Kim Ji Ha's works was published in Korean and Japanese in 1975 and 1976, respectively. Given that the publication of Kim Ji Ha's works had been prohibited in Korea, their publication in Japan as a result of the solidarity of Japanese citizens became a huge international incident.

Some unexpected problems arose, however, in the process. As Kim Ji Ha – the 'resistance poet' of the former colony – was being helped by the citizens of the former colonial empire, Japan, for over ten years, a 'relationship of aid' became fossilized. While the stereotypes of Korea as an underdeveloped country of dictatorship, and Japan as a country helping the oppressed resistance poet, came to be reproduced, Kim Ji Ha's literary themes of criticizing colonialism were no longer given due attention. Despite the fact that so many of Kim Ji Ha's works had been published in Japan, it was only the sentiment that 'Kim Ji Ha must be helped' which flourished. The self-reflexive question 'Why should I read Kim Ji Ha now?' was omitted.



The Chinese magazine *World Literature* also introduced a translation of Kim Ji Ha's works in June 1979, in this case in association with the novel *El Señor Presidente* by Miguel Ángel Asturias, a Guatemalan writer. Both Kim Ji Ha and Asturias' works shared the themes of dictatorship and resistance, allowing the reader to read the two together in order to grasp the universality and specificity of dictatorship in underdeveloped countries from a new perspective. This Chinese publication of Kim Ji Ha's works illustrates the fact that reading East Asian literature alongside Central American literature can open up the possibility of imagining world literature in a new way. Yet, it should be noted that the Chinese translation utilized not only Kim Ji Ha's original Korean works but also the versions that had been published in Japan. This shows how Japanese, the language of the former colonial empire, continued to play the role as a mediator in the process of East Asian communication, even in the Cold War era.

Kim Ji Ha in the 1970s remained immobile in South Korea due to imprisonment and dictatorship oppression. However, translated into Japanese and Chinese, his works were able to travel. The crossings of borders demonstrated by Kim Ji Ha's works leaves us to ponder upon the task of solidarity of East Asian citizens and the conditions for such solidarity; it also opens the door to imagining world literature in a new way and the possibilities of this endeavor.

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Above: *Collected Works of Kim Ji Ha* (Vol. 1), published in Japan in 1976. The cover illustration is the work of the Japanese artist Tomiyama Taeko. Image of the original cover scanned by the author.
Below: Japanese citizens demonstrating in front of the Korean Embassy in Tokyo in July of 1974. Image from *Sanzenri* Feb. 1975, scanned by the author.