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Dressing Difference: Representations of *Chima Chogori* in Japan and an Ethics of Subjectivity

Abstract

This paper investigates the works of third-generation Zainichi Korean artist Oh Haji, who has incorporated *chima chogori*—Korean ethnic dress for women—into her practice. Highlighting the continued presence and significance of *chima chogori* within Japanese art and visual culture from the early twentieth century, this paper examines how Oh's works intervene in a long history of representations of women in ethnic dress in Japan.

During Japan's colonization of the Korean peninsula (1910-1945), representations of Korean women in *chima chogori* were actively produced and circulated in the metropole, where *chima chogori* was mobilized to construct essentialized difference and thereby police the boundaries between Japan and Korea. In the postwar period, *chima chogori* reemerged in Japan, taken up by Zainichi Koreans in their response to and resistance against the continued legacies of colonialism. Yet, the ambivalence of *chima chogori* as a strategic yet gendered form of resistance is often manifested in visual and literary representations, where a figure of schoolgirl in *chima chogori* serves as a ground through which male subjectivity is articulated.

Departing from earlier representations, Oh Haji's practice foregrounds and reveals—rather than overlooks and obscures—the contradictions and failures of representation. In doing so, Oh's works, I argue, ultimately speak to and open up an ethics of subjectivity, with a wider implication that they may critique an imperialist system, along with its legacies, that had constructed difference for the domination of the other and has continued to condition the lives of Koreans in Japan.