EMBRACING A THORN: DIASPORIC IDENTITY AND ZAINICHI EXPERIENCE IN THE DOCUMENTARY FILM *OUR SCHOOL*

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ABSTRACT

Zainichi in Japanese directly translates to "residing in Japan," and generally refers to Korean migrants and their descendants who established permanent residence in Japan before 1945. After the Second World War, those who remained were faced with three options: 1) become naturalized Japanese citizens; 2) become South Korean citizens; or 3) adhere to the "*Chōsen*" nationality, a country that no longer existed. This paper focuses on the last group who chose to retain their Chōsen nationality and thereby were perceived by wider Japanese society as supporters of North Korea, exposing them to constant discrimination. In particular, this paper focuses on the education of this minority group through the study of a Zainichi-focused documentary film, *Our School* (2007). I argue that the shared experience of marginalization, exclusion, and hostility in Japan prompted North Korea-affiliated Zainichi to band together and nurture their Zainichi identity as an act of resistance.

First, I investigate Zainichi's historical background and the educational institutions in Japan that uphold and foster this Zainichi identity. Second, I analyze the documentary film *Our School*, arguing that its "participatory mode" of documentary filmmaking effectively portrays the director's message, trying to lessen the emotional estrangement that the South Korean audience has towards Zainichi. Third, by studying two specific aspects of the lives of Zainichi students in North Korea-affiliated schools that are portrayed in the documentary – the wearing of traditional Korean clothing and the learning of the Korean language – I review how the challenges that students face as minorities motivate them to construct and embrace their identity even tighter.

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Embracing a Thorn: Diasporic Identity and Zainichi Experience in the Documentary Film *Our School*

Jane Lee

Introduction

When translated, the Japanese term *Zainichi* (在日) means “residing in Japan.” Although the literal meaning does not refer to any particular ethnicity, the term has come to describe Koreans who established residence in Japan before 1945 and their descendants. These Korean immigrants (hereafter Zainichi) moved to Japan *en masse* during the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula. The Zainichi migrated to Japan as laborers due to the labor shortage caused by Japan’s industrialization, and later arrived as conscripted workers when the Second World War intensified.

Living under the Zainichi moniker was challenging. Koreans in Japan faced uncertainty and insecurity as a result of their temporary status, which also entailed rampant discrimination and exclusion. When World War II abruptly ended in Japan, the Zainichi suddenly became non-Japanese and were forced to identify themselves as foreigners. In the absence of a country or government to protect them, the nationality of Koreans in Japan was uniformly given the nationality *Chōsen* —the name of “the long-time dynasty and the former colony”—on the Japanese alien registration record in 1947 (Kim 2016, 94). However, the terms used for self-identification became much more complex after the Korean peninsula was split into two separate nations in 1948. Following the partition, Zainichi who supported South Korea wanted to differentiate themselves from those who supported North Korea. The Korean term for North Korea, known in English as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, is ***Chosŏn*** *minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk*. As

North Korea retained Chosŏn in its official name, the simplified term, Chōsen,[1] came to denote North Korea in Japan. Additionally, because the Japanese colonial government-general in Korea had been known as *Chōsen Sōtoku*（朝鮮総督府, denotes "The Government-General of Chōsen"), Zainichi who recognized their homeland as South Korea wanted to clear the remnants of Japanese colonialism by using a different name to define themselves. For these political, ideological, and historical reasons, the Zainichi who supported South Korea referred to themselves as Zainichi *kankokujin* (people of kankoku[2])—thus differentiating themselves from the Zainichi *chōsenjin* (people of Chōsen), who regarded North Korea as their homeland. However, the Japanese authorities did not view these terms—*Chōsen* and *Kankoku*—as proper names indicating the nuances of Zainichi nationality. Instead, the Japanese government viewed this as a provisional signifier that indicated Zainichi individuals' colonial lineage but not their nationality under Japanese law. Japanese bureaucrats explained that their nationality would be a temporary designation and that it would only be used until the situation in the Korean peninsula was stabilized and the Japanese government could thus clarify the nationality of Koreans in Japan. Due to such complexity and discrepancy, the term "Zainichi Korean" emerged, simply meaning the people from the Korean peninsula who are now living in Japan.[3]

As diplomatic relations with Japan and South Korea have gradually normalized, Japan has implemented incremental changes in their assimilation policy designed to resolve some of the instability faced by Zainichi Koreans. One such policy has been the option to change their nationality, thereby allowing them to “choose” their own identities in Japan. Zainichi Koreans wishing to do so have three possible choices:

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[1] The Japanese transliteration of Chosŏn.

[2] The Japanese transliteration of Hanguk, "South Korea."

[3] In this paper, the author will use "Zainichi" and "Zainichi Korean" interchangeably when referring to the broader group. When referring to North Korea-affiliated Zainichi, however, Zainichi *chōsenjin*, will be used as clarification. This also applies to the term Zainichi *kankokujin.*

1. Naturalization, thus becoming a Japanese citizen and thereby, to a degree, evading the systemic barriers and discrimination they face as ethnic Koreans.
2. Choosing South Korean citizenship and benefit from permanent resident status in Japan.
3. Maintaining Chōsen nationality, obtaining temporary resident status in Japan, and enduring both discrimination and far less social protection.[4]

A number of Zainichi Koreans affiliated with North Korea rejected the options of becoming Japanese or even South Korean in order to maintain their Chōsen nationality. In return, the Japanese government assigned *Chōsen-seki* (朝鮮籍, denotes "Korean domicile") status—basically stateless—to those who did not choose legally acceptable citizenships (i.e., Japanese and South Korean). People who maintained their Chōsen-seki status choose to stay stateless either due to their affinity with North Korea, or because they did not wish to choose a side (which, in turn, would require them to acknowledge the division of Chōsen). Though not all who maintained their Chōsen-seki status had pro-North Korea tendencies, two key factors—first, that those who were assigned Chōsen-seki status did not choose a legally acceptable status, and second, that most were affiliated to a pro-

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[4] Many average Koreans, especially those who could not read or write in Japanese and were unfamiliar with the technical, bureaucratic language of registration regulations, did not have the technical or language skills needed to pursue a nationality designation—especially when the benefits of such a designation remained unclear. Additionally, many Zainichi were, at the time, focused on survival and making ends meet—thus leaving them little ability to undertake such a cumbersome and time-consuming bureaucratic process. Because of this, approximately 92 percent of Zainichi identified in the Foreigners Register of 1950 retained the designation of Chōsen—despite the fact that over 94 percent of Zainichi actually originated from the southern portions of the Korean peninsula (Kim 2016, 95).

North Korea organization—led to a growing social perception in Japan that the Chōsen-seki were North Korean nationals.

This paper focuses on the lived experience of Zainichi chōsenjin who had to endure systemic discrimination by maintaining Chōsen-seki status, and who thereby actively embraced their diasporic identity. In particular, this paper will focus on the education of this minority group through the study of a South Korean Zainichi-themed documentary film, *Our School* (2007). I argue that due to their shared experience of discrimination, exclusion, and even hostility in Japan, the North Korea-affiliated Zainichi band together and nurture their Zainichi chōsenjin identity as an act of resistance. In doing so, Zainichi refuse to be assimilated and or allow their history to be erased.

First, I investigate the Zainichi's historical background and the educational entities in Japan that are central to upholding and fostering Zainichi identity for subsequent generations. Second, I analyze the documentary film *Our School*, which uses a "participatory mode" of documentary film to effectively portray the director's argument, as well as interviews to construct his message. Throughout the documentary, the seemingly candid interactions between the director and Zainichi students serve to engage the audience and generate a sense of empathy for the students' plight. Third, by studying two specific aspects of the lives of Zainichi students in North Korea-affiliated schools that are portrayed in the documentary—the wearing of traditional Korean clothing *chima-jeogori* (more widely known as *hanbok* in South Korea) and learning *uri mal* (denotes "Korean language" in North Korean version of Korean)[5]—I review how the challenges that students face as minorities motivate them to actively reinforce and embrace their “Zainichi-ness” even tighter.

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[5] Though South Koreans also use *uri mal* to refer to the Korean language—since its literal meaning is "our language" —"Korean" instead of uri mal is more commonly used in South Korea. North Koreans, in an effort to differentiate themselves from the South, use uri mal instead of Korean. The author may use the terms

Historical Background of Zainichi

In August 1910, Chōsen was annexed by Japan. No longer citizens of a sovereign nation, Koreans became subjects of the Japanese empire. In the 1920s, many economically marginalized Koreans moved to Japan to pursue economic opportunities as laborers, which led to exponential growth of the Korean population in Japan. In fact, from 1924 to 1938, the number of Koreans in Japan grew from 100,000 to some 800,000 (Kim 2008, 875). Korean migration to Japan also intensified when the Japanese government enforced its wartime mobilization law in April 1938, aiming to conscribe Koreans as soldiers, workers, and comfort women during the Second World War.

By the end of the war in 1945, approximately 2 million Koreans were residing in Japan. Although 1.5 million Koreans were repatriated to liberated Korea, more than half a million chose to remain in Japan (Chapman 2006, 90). Based on the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ data published in 1960, “Out of 647,006 Koreans who registered with the government as Koreans by March 1946, about 79.5 percent (514,060) expressed their desire for repatriation” (Kim 2008, 876). However, as their homeland’s domestic political situation became increasingly unstable, their stay was prolonged, and their legal status in Japan became uncertain.

By May 1947, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers ordered that an Alien Registration Ordinance take effect by registering former colonized countries’ citizens as

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Korean language and uri mal interchangeably; however, when making reference to the language spoken by students in *Chōsen gakkō*, the author will use uri mal.

foreigners. By December 1947, among the 639,000 registered foreigners, 599,000—or 94 percent—were Korean (Kwon 2002, 28). At the time, Koreans in Japan registered their nationality under the name of Chōsen, “The name of the Korean peninsula and not the name of a nation or nation-state” (Ryang 2023, 5). The Korean peninsula did not have a single, unified government through which to repatriate its dispersed diasporas. Instead, it was governed by two different occupiers—Soviet Union in the North and the United States in the South. Hoping that such division and instability represented an only temporary partition of their homeland, Koreans in Japan referred to themselves as Zainichi chōsenjin.

In April 1952, as Japan formally abandoned its claim over Korea under the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan stripped the Zainichi of their Japanese citizenship, assigned them Chōsen-seki status, and effectively rendered them “stateless” (Kim 2008, 876). After the Zainichi lost Japanese citizenship, they were unable to find employment in the public sector. As their employment situation in the private sector was not favorable, most either earned a living as day laborers or remained unemployed. Moreover, Zainichi Koreans were barred from most social welfare programs, including public housing and financial support, that was offered to Japanese citizens after the war (Mun and Aoki 2015, 329). Zainichi Koreans were also forcibly required to provide fingerprints, thereby highlighting their “foreign” identity. Such public identification generated stigma, making the Zainichi more visible and vulnerable to discrimination (Lie 2008, 74–75). Due to these social barriers and forms of systemic discrimination, many of the Zainichi experienced downward socioeconomic mobility, landing in lower social classes and living in slums.

As the lives of the Zainichi went from bad to worse, they banded together to create an organization that would help address their common problems. Established in October

1945, the *League of Resident Koreans in Japan* (also known as *Chōren*) became the Zainichi's main organization. However, at the outset of the Cold War, ideological clashes between the right and left occurred within the League. While the organization's dominant ideology was socialism, a faction that adopted a pro-South Korea ideology established a separate organization called *Mindan* (short for *the Korean Residents Union in Japan*, 在日本大韓民国民団). By 1949, both the U.S. occupiers and the Japanese government dissolved the League because of its support of North Korea. However, the League later reassembled under the name of *the Association of Korean Residents in Japan*, more commonly known as *Chongryon* in Korean and *Sōren* (朝鮮総連) in Japanese in May 1955. Chongryon preserved its socialist ideology, which attracted significant financial support from the North Korean government. Subsequently, Chongryon became the dominant Zainichi organization in Japan. Chongryon established an extensive network of independent schools, which incorporated Korean-language instruction, a means of showing loyalty towards the leadership in Pyongyang, and a flourishing network of affiliate branches throughout the country (all of which reported back to the Tokyo-based headquarters) (Ryang 2023, 7).

However, the power dynamics between Chongryon and Mindan began shifting in 1965. Under the bilateral treaty between South Korea and Japan in 1965, the Zainichi who chose South Korean citizenship gained permanent residence in Japan. Following this measure, "About 350,000 Koreans obtained the right to permanent residence in Japan, but some 250,000 Koreans, especially those who supported North Korea, refused to apply for this status and remained 'stateless'" (Kim 2011, 235). This meant that only 250,000

Zainichi were considered supporters of Chongryon, and as individuals assigned Chōsen-seki status, they were denied far more rights and ultimately faced greater discrimination.

For many Zainichi Koreans, the permanent residence resulting from the 1965 bilateral treaty presented an unsavory political compromise. The treaty provided minimal financial compensation and limited rights to those with permanent residence, and for many domestic and overseas Koreans, the treaty was tantamount to covering up Japanese war atrocities. At the time, the South Korean president Park Chung-hee, who desperately sought foreign aid, agreed that the historical matter between Japan and Korea had been "settled completely and finally," instigating massive public dissent, including among Zainichi Koreans. It appears that many Zainichi rejected the possibility of acquiring South Korean nationality on moral grounds. They refused to profit from the bilateral treaty at the expense of their Chōsen identity.

In addition, Zainichi emphasized the sentimental and historical significance of "Chōsen." When they were asked where they belong, they did not identify their homeland as either South Korea or North Korea, but rather as Chōsen. The term Chōsen does not reflect the painful division of the Korean peninsula, and the Chōsen identity was symbolic of the Zainichi's view of their homeland: a unified Korean peninsula. After all, Chōsen takes on the dual meaning of a country of the past and what the Zainichi hoped would be a unified peninsula in the future. As shown in one interview with the first-generation Zainichi in the documentary, "Most of Zainichi think that *Nam Chosŏn* [South Korea] is my country and *Buk Chosŏn* [North Korea] is also my country . . ." (0:48:10)[6], the division of the peninsula for the first generation was an unacceptable reality. Their denial of reality and nostalgia for the past are one of the reasons why they have long retained the term Chōsen in the nationality section of their alien registration form.

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[6] *Nam Chosŏn* is a way of referring South Korea in North Korea. Since the interviewee is affiliated with pro-North Korea organization *Chongryon*, they use the term that is used in North Korea.

Also, by intentionally defining themselves as Chōsen citizens, Zainichi wanted Japan to be both aware of its past colonization of and atrocities in Korea and held accountable for its suppression of and discrimination against the Zainichi. Although they themselves could not be legally protected and their social status was unstable, they chose to maintain their Chōsen nationality to become living evidence of the past (Kwon 2002, 91). An excerpt from an interview of second-generation Zainichi Park Ho-young portrays such motivation well: “My Chōsen nationality proves that I belong to colonial Chōsen. I don’t plan to change this nationality because if I change it, the living proof of Japan’s colonization disappears. I am keeping Chōsen nationality because this proves that I am from colonial Chōsen. If we lose our presence, there will be no signs of colonization” (Kim 2008, 14).

Zainichi Schools

Immediately after the liberation of Korea in 1945, the first generation of Zainichi established schools so that their children, who did not know the Korean language, could eventually return to their homeland without any difficulties. Since then, education has been the highest priority for the Zainichi community. However, the war in Korea ended the Zainichi’s dream of returning to their homeland. And as their stay in Japan became more permanent, Zainichi parents had to establish a more sustainable and stable educational infrastructure and set of institutions for the next generation. This, in turn, led to the proliferation of Zainichi schools in Japan. Although the first generation often had no choice but to live a marginalized existence in “dead-end slums” due to systematic barriers and discrimination, they wanted a different future for their children. Their desire was for the next generation of Zainichi to live with “future-oriented goals” as confident and liberated Koreans (Chatani 2021, 602). Such hope for the next generation motivated them to establish more than 500 ethnic schools throughout Japan. Today, fourth- and fifth-generation Zainichi in Japan choose to attend one of three types of available schools:

- Japanese public school;
- Mindan-run Korean school *Kankoku gakkō* (pro-South tendency); or,
- Chongryon-run Korean school *Chōsen gakkō* (pro-North tendency).

Most Zainichi *issei* (first-generation) parents did not want to pass on the hardships and struggles they experienced as Koreans in Japan, and thus sent their children to Japanese schools. However, due to the monocultural nature of Japanese schools, Zainichi students had no exposure to ethnic education that could foster their identity as Zainichi Koreans. Second-generation Zainichi students, in particular—who attended school when the remnants of the colonial era remained—frequently experienced discrimination and were often bullied in Japanese schools. As a result, Zainichi children attending Japanese public schools “[have] never been given positive enforcement or healthy recognition” of their roots. Quite clearly, “This reflects deep-seated racial bias toward Koreans in Japanese society” (Ryang 2023, 2). Given such profound drawbacks to attending Japanese public schools, some parents instead sent their children to Zainichi schools where they could receive an education that celebrated their Korean roots and where they would not have to be self-conscious or ashamed of their race.

Though the majority of Zainichi parents sent their children to Japanese public schools (up to 90 percent), some 10 percent sent their children to Korean schools, either

Kankoku gakkō or Chōsen gakkō (Kwon 2002, 38). Mindan-run Korean schools initially aimed to foster an ethnic education and focused on teaching the Korean language. However, as more students started attending Japanese public school, Kankoku gakkō switched their approach and prioritized helping students adapt to Japanese society, using a curriculum in line with the Japanese Ministry of Education (Kwon 2002, 38). Although Kankoku gakkō and Japanese public schools are similar—in that students are taught in Japanese, use Japanese school textbooks, and both schools are beneficiaries of the Free High School Tuition law[7]—nearly all students attending Kankoku gakkō are the children of diplomats and expatriates who plan to return to South Korea. Therefore, for those children, Kankoku gakkō provides a South Korean education in anticipation of their return.

In contrast, Chongryon-run Korean schools, Chōsen gakkō, have continued to prioritize ethnic and ideological education, emphasizing *uri mal* education, history, and culture. Due to their heavy emphasis on ethnic education, Chōsen gakkō have come to produce a peculiar phenomenon in which "children become more Koreanized than their parents" (Chatani 2021, 602). Therefore, historically, many families sent their "sons to Japanese public school but their daughters to [Chōsen gakkō]," so that mothers and women could pass down their Korean identity, language, culture, and values to the next generation (Chatani 2021, 603). Now that Chōsen gakkō have become the only available educational institution where the Zainichi can nurture their ethnic identity, even Zainichi parents who hold South Korean nationality sometimes choose to send their children to Chōsen gakkō.

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[7] In April 2010, Japanese high school students, regardless of foreign schools, were all subject to the Free High School Tuition law. Chōsen gakkō, which have been excluded from all equality measures since their inception, were the only ones excluded from this policy.

Nevertheless, numerically speaking, the number of Zainichi students attending Chongryon-run schools has never exceeded that of Japanese public schools. Over time, the drive to send children to Chōsen gakkō decreased even more, resulting in significant enrollment losses at these schools. The reason for this phenomenon is, as Zainichi *issei* began to accept that an eventual homecoming seemed more and more unlikely, and as children born and raised in Japan became more familiar with the Japanese language, their motivation for maintaining a separate Korean identity has weakened. Moreover, even parents who want their children to receive ethnic education have started to see the limitation of Chōsen gakkō. Because Chongryun leadership believes that North Korea is the true homeland of Zainichi Koreans, they adhere to the same curricula as schools in North Korea. In such an environment, "Children were exposed to formulaic language used to display reverence to the Great Leader Kim Il Sung and were taught to identify themselves as overseas citizen of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" (Ryang 2023, 1–2). At Chōsen gakkō, students learn the North Korean version of the Korean language, referred to as uri mal, and use different vocabulary, pronunciation, and inflection from their South Korean counterparts. Examples include using chima-jeogori instead of hanbok, uri mal instead of Korean, Nam Chosŏn instead of South Korea, and Buk Chosŏn instead of North Korea. Lastly, today, the teachers in these schools are third- and fourth-generation Zainichi, all of whom were born and raised in Japan. As a result, these teachers often lack native fluency in Korean, which in turn limits their ability to implement Korean language education beyond basic, superficial instruction.

As a result of these factors, the number of Chōsen gakkō, which reached 540 before the division of Korea in 1945, has decreased to 64 as of 2018. However, despite their significantly diminished status and influence, Chōsen gakkō are still meaningful in that they are the only institution in Japan transmitting Chōsen culture through the educational system. Although this paper focuses on a proportionally small number of students who attend Chōsen gakkō, the author nevertheless believes it is important to study the voices of people who are still struggling to preserve this seemingly unpopular, and rapidly disappearing, educational institution. In focusing on this diminishing community, the author hopes to call attention to the need for more stand-alone research on these schools and students before they fade into obscurity or disappear entirely.

Our School **(2007)**

A wide range of media dealing with Zainichi issues has emerged in both Japan and South Korea. These media range from literary works—such as poetry, novels, and plays—to fictional and documentary films. Among these, in this paper I will examine documentary as a medium that offers insights into the everyday lives of fourth-generation Zainichi students attending Chōsen gakkō.

As explained by film scholar Bill Nichols, documentary can reveal the lives of individuals in great detail and depth. The difference between fictional filmmakers and documentary film directors is that documentary filmmakers "go into the field" and "live among others and speak about or represent what they experience" (Nichols 2010, 181). But as more than just objective works of "non-fiction," documentaries are ultimately arguments set out in a narrative woven from a meticulous and often painstaking selection of footage. Likewise, the film director of *Our School*, Kim Myung-joon, combed through an extensive selection of more than 500 hours of video footage, which he edited over the course of a year to create a single and cohesive argument. In doing so, he attempted to bring down the long-held emotional wall that the South Korean audience has had against Zainichi chōsenjin, who are seen as being affiliated with North Korea. As he had explicitly narrated at the beginning of the documentary, "This movie is a record of what I saw and felt while living in this school for three years" (0:02:14), he recounts or represents a story from his own perspective, often describing what it has taught him.

As a South Korean, Kim Myung-joon speaks a common language with his subjects. Although cultural proximity offered a unique opportunity for the director to produce documentaries with Korean-speaking Zainichi students, the director's presence exercised a particular type of influence on the individuals interviewed and filmed. In fact, director Kim Myung-joon intentionally included a scene of a student conversing with his homeroom teacher asking, "Is it okay to sing a Japanese song when there is no camera?" and the teacher reluctantly answers, "Yes . . ." (0:20:40), suggesting that what is on the edited documentary does not necessarily reflect the whole reality. Kim also captured an especially telling interaction, when the student asked, "I purposely spoke more Korean at the student council meeting earlier because there was a camera. But what do you want me to do? Should I do what I normally do without being conscious?" (0:20:53). This scene also suggests the existence of the camera and the director somewhat distorting the situation as it would be under regular circumstances. The director included those scenes to show that what is shown in the final product slightly differs from how the students act when the camera is not present. Kim Myung-joon willingly admitted such discrepancy is inevitable, especially when the director's presence is so vivid. Kim did not hide this from the public.

Instead, the director deliberately arranged these scenes, inviting the audience to see behind the scenes.

Our School, created by a South Korean director and released in the early 2000s, was one of the first of what would become numerous documentaries about Zainichi chōsenjin. Before *Our School*, there were few opportunities or means of interaction between South Koreans and the students in Chōsen gakkō. Kim Myung-joon was among the first group of South Koreans granted permission to visit Chōsen gakkō. Having an opportunity to enter the school and interact with Zainichi chōsenjin students, director Kim himself learned that these North Korea-affiliated students were not much different from students in South Korea. The director therefore felt a sense of obligation to bring down barriers constructed by decades of anti-communist policy and to reveal the story of Zainichi chōsenjin students to a South Korean audience. With this intention in mind, Kim Myung-joon lived at the school with students for over three years, closely interacting with and interviewing them day and night.

Nichols would classify this type of documentary film as being in participatory mode, precisely because Kim extensively uses interviews and active interaction between the filmmaker and his subjects. The following section explores this type of documentary—filmed in participatory mode—and examines how the medium's narrative was forged through the filmmaker's perspective on his interactions with students. Lastly, this section discusses how the story of Zainichi chōsenjin students, as represented by the filmmaker in *Our School*, successfully engendered empathy and had a social impact in South Korea by changing popular perceptions of the Zainichi chōsenjin population.

- Participatory Mode

Bill Nichols suggests a theory of classifying documentary films into six modes: poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, and performative. *Our School* could be identified as being a participatory documentary. The most prominent feature of participatory documentaries is the active interactions between the documentary director and his or her subjects. Dynamic interactions are predominantly conducted through interviews. The filmmakers seek to present a single story, woven together through interviews, different accounts, and multiple opinions. In other words, interviews are used as "the persuasive mechanism charged with convincing the audience of the film's veracity" (Natusch and Hawkins 2014, 118). The diversity of voices and opinions expressed in interviews are carefully merged into the message that the director wishes to present. This serves to "enhance the audience's belief in the film's credibility" (Natusch and Hawkins 2014, 118). In addition, the audience learns from various non-verbal elements such as the interviewees' emotions, facial expressions, and tone. The audience also learns about the filmmaker-subject relationship through the settings and the formality of the language used in the interview. As Nichols stated, "As viewers we have the sense that we are witness to a form a dialogue between the filmmaker and his or her subject" (Nichols 2010, 187).

From the interviews in *Our School*, the audience is made to observe the intimacy and rapport between the interviewees and the interviewer, Kim Myung-joon, as they develop over time. The interviews were conducted in personal places like students' dormitories, Zainichi parents' houses, or even in a car sitting next to one another. When interacting with each other, they use informal Korean typically reserved for close relationships. Male students called the film director "Myung-joon hyŏngnim" (1:33:33), and female students called him “Myung-joon oppa” (0:49:34), meaning “older brother Myung-joon” in English. In one scene, the director was shown on film. At dinner with students and their parents, young children took director Kim Myung-joon’s camera and interviewed the director, imitating him (0:28:34). They playfully film Kim’s distended stomach after a large meal, and the audience can easily see that even very young children do not hesitate to communicate with the director. Interviews with parents of the Zainichi students were also taken in an unstructured format where they were sitting, drinking beers and eating Korean barbeque, laughing, and joking with one another. Zainichi parents spoke rather naturally in front of the camera in these settings, sharing their thoughts as though they were talking to someone they knew well and trusted. Such candidness was engendered by the intimate relationship between Kim Myung-joon and the subjects of the documentary, and this, in turn, helped lower the barriers between the audience and the students, allowing the audience to empathize with them. The candidness and emotional directness of the interviews indeed bolstered the quality and credibility of this participatory documentary (Nichols 2010, 194; Natusch and Hawkins 2014, 118).

- Documentary as a Social Tool

Through the persuasiveness and intimacy generated by the participatory documentary, the filmmaker invites the audience to take action. Once the film is released, the interactions between the filmmaker and the documentary’s subjects expand to a wider audience and invite that audience to respond. In this sense, the filmmaker becomes “a social actor,” engineering a specific social impact through the documentary (Nichols 2010, 182). According to renowned documentary maker John Grierson, the documentary goes beyond simply representing actuality. It explicitly intends to create a social impact, and he further argues that the goal of a documentary is for the director to find the hidden meanings behind the facts, interpret them, persuade the audience, and bring about change. Therefore, documentaries have a social purpose, and they help generate both a sense of social responsibility and the impetus to amend, address, or change the situations that were presented before the audience.

The director of *Our School* attempted to have an impact on South Korean society by challenging preconceived notions of Zainichi chōsenjin that prevail in South Korean public discourse. Since the national division in 1945 until the end of South Korea's military dictatorship in 1979, anti-communism defined national policy in South Korea for nearly 40 years. During this time, the image of Zainichi Koreans, particularly those considered to be affiliated with North Korea, was distorted by ideological and political stigma. Beginning in the 1990s, as democratically elected presidents came into power, strong anti-communist ideas started to fade. Freedom of expression and speech was guaranteed, giving space for directors like Kim Myung-joon to invite South Korean audiences to view the Zainichi chōsenjin community more empathetically.

To help lower ideological barriers among Kim Myung-joon's South Korean audience and create a certain degree of proximity with Zainichi students who attend North Korea-affiliated schools, the director started with scenes that the South Korean audience could easily relate to and understand. First, the director introduced scenes from the first day of school. Much like the first day of school in South Korea, the students at Chōsen gakkō gathered in the school gymnasium. The camera captured students' excited faces, anticipating who would be their homeroom teacher in the next year, which also resonates with the South Korean public. As the name of their homeroom teacher was announced, the camera recorded students' reactions—cheering, clapping, and laughing—inviting the audience to reflect on their own experience of their first day of school (0:07:33). Also, by featuring the preparation process and the school-wide sports day that resembles the sports day in South Korean schools, the director led the audience to realize that the students attending North Korean schools are not so different from them (0:51:20).

By emphasizing the commonalities between South Korean school life and Chōsen gakkō's school life at the beginning of the documentary, the director tried to lessen the emotional estrangement that the South Korean audience has towards Chōsen gakkō students. The director then highlighted how difficult it is for students to protect their Korean identity in Japan and provided background information explaining their affiliation with North Korea. The director clarified that their association with the North was not because they deeply sympathized with North Korea's ideology, but rather due to North Korea's historical emotional and financial support for the Zainichi population while South Korea had remained largely indifferent to the diasporic Korean population in Japan. By explaining how South Korea's past policies were responsible for the dominant views about Zainichi chōsenjin, Kim Myung-joon tried to elicit compassion and sympathy among the South Korean audience. Inspiring such sympathy appeared to be possible, especially because the emotional barriers between the Zainichi chōsenjin students and the audience had already begun to be torn down earlier in the film. These emotional changes among South Korean audiences—along with their open minds toward Zainichi chōsenjin, who have affiliations with North Korea—are not one-sided. Through interviews with Zainichi students, the director tried to illustrate that the changes in perception are mutual. A student said in his interview:

> I thought I shouldn’t use the word ‘South Korea’ until elementary school because we learned South Korea under the name of *Nam Chosŏn* while growing up. However, I continued to hear the word ‘South Korea’ while watching the 2002 World Cup, and my perception of the country [South Korea] started to change as I saw their people [South Koreans] actively assert their rights and hold rallies on their own, which was unthinkable in Japan. Through learning and experiences, I could now acknowledge the country ‘South Korea’ (1:32:32).

The popularity of *Our School* led to an outpouring of South Korean support for the plight of Zainichi students at Chōsen gakkō. Once Kim Myung-joon completed his work, he traveled to more than 30 locations throughout South Korea and Japan for local screenings in an effort to reach communities that did not have access to the film. In major cities in South Korea, 13 multiplex cinemas screened the documentary. As such, local screenings and theatrical releases were held simultaneously, and *Our School* reached a wide audience and was a remarkable success in South Korea. As director Kim emphasized, “10,000 views in documentary films are comparable to 1 million in general commercial films.” *Our School* quickly surpassed 10,000 views within the first week of its release (Park 2007).

According to Kim Myung-joon, many South Koreans were surprised to find out about the situation faced by many Zainichi in Japan and made gestures of support following the film’s debut. During a conversation with the audience after a screening of the movie, director Kim received several questions from South Korean audience members, including: “I did not know about Chōsen gakkō before, but now that I know, what can I do for them?” Some South Korean parents also expressed their wish to send their children to Chōsen gakkō in order to encourage them to embrace a once-forgotten community and to gain a unique educational experience in Japan.

An example of *Our School*'s more tangible social impact includes the fact that the Korean public's attention was drawn to Edagawa Chōsen gakkō — which was on the verge of being closed due to lack of funds. After a series of documentaries featuring Chōsen gakkō, including *Our School*, was released in South Korea, campaigns to support the school against possible closure gained momentum. Many South Korean citizens, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and religious organizations led fundraising activities to help finance Edagawa Chōsen gakkō, which was eventually rebuilt in a better location. Such unprecedented viewership, and its effects on South Korean audiences, suggests that the documentary undoubtedly had a social impact: Zainichi, who had been shunned, ostracized, or altogether forgotten by South Koreans, garnered public attention, and the stories of the fourth-generation Zainichi students won over hearts and minds, generating social change.

As discussed, the documentary was released not long after South Korea relaxed its previously intensive anti-communist education and politicization of Zainichi chōsenjin, which made the South Korean filmmakers cautious about popularizing the discourse about Zainichi chōsenjin—especially through the open screen. However, *Our School* was unprecedented, not only because it broke the "taboo" of introducing Zainichi chōsenjin with a depoliticized and humanistic perspective, but also due to its success. Despite being a low-budget, independent documentary, *Our School* was one of only a few documentaries that achieved enough acclaim to be screened in commercial theaters in South Korea. *Our School*'s popularity opened the door to other Zainichi-related films and documentaries. In addition, as director Kim witnessed the South Korean public's changed perspective toward Zainichi chōsenjin following the film's release, he himself became a social activist.

Following the success of *Our School*, Kim Myung-joon produced several additional Zainichi chōsenjin-themed documentaries and became a founding member of an NGO called *Mongdangyŏnp'il*, which helped support Chōsen gakkō.

With this background in mind, and also keeping in mind how the film reflects a process of Korean identity formation among its own South Korean creators and audience, the following section will analyze *Our School* and its portrayal of the everyday lives of Zainichi fourth-generation students and their efforts to form and maintain a unique Korean diasporic identity. This is a documentary about 22 senior high school students who attend a Chōsen gakkō in Hokkaido, Japan. Out of these 22 seniors, 17 hold Chōsen nationality, which is considered to be equivalent to North Korean citizenship, 4 hold South Korean citizenship, and 1 has Japanese citizenship. As such, not all students who attend Chōsen gakkō are affiliated to North Korea, but those who wish to learn Korean and nurture their Korean identity attend or transfer to Chōsen gakkō regardless of their nationalities. *Our School* helps understand and visualize how fourth-generation Zainichi forms and protects their diasporic identity, including during their everyday lives at Chōsen gakkō. Although there are many topics worth analyzing in the documentary, the paper will focus on two specific aspects: what it means to wear a chima-jeogori (traditional Korean clothing), and what it means for the Zainichi to learn uri mal (denotes "Korean language").

The term chima-jeogori is not how South Koreans refer to Korean traditional clothes. Instead, hanbok (韓服) is the familiar term for South Koreans. Hanbok is a gender-neutral word that collectively refers to traditional garments for both women and men. However, as Chōsen went through modernization and Western clothing entered the cultural milieu, men's clothes quickly changed to Western style, while women's clothes maintained the traditional hanbok form. As a result, a tradition of men wearing Western clothes and women wearing hanbok was established. As this historical and cultural tradition was introduced into Chōsen school uniforms, male students wore uniforms similar to Japanese students, while female students wore a chima-jeogori uniform. In examining peoples' use of these terms, it was interesting to note that in their interviews, students who attend Chōsen gakkō did not use the word hanbok (韓服), which contains the character *han* (韓) that signifies *han'guk* (韓國), South Korea. Instead, students used the term chima-jeogori to refer to the hanbok. The same reason applies when it comes to referring to the Korean language. Zainichi chōsenjin students use the North Korean version of Korean and use a different term for the language. Instead of calling the Korean language as *han'gugŏ* (韓國語), they use uri mal. Uri mal literally means "our language" in Korean, and it is another way of referring to han'gugŏ (韓國語), the Korean language. Though both han'gugŏ and uri mal have the same meaning, students who attend Chōsen gakkō and people who define themselves as Zainichi chōsenjin do not refer to the Korean language as han'gugŏ, as in han'guk (韓國) or South Korea, which they do not identify to. Meanwhile, in Kim Myung-joon's narration, he referred to it as hanbok and han'gugŏ for South Korean audiences to erase their unfamiliarity with, or discomfort about, calling the hanbok chima-jeogori and han'gugŏ uri mal. Though the terms were different, this unfamiliarity was mended by the director's involvement. As the director bridged the distance, the South Korean audience could focus on the commonalities between them and the subjects rather than the differences.

What It Means to Wear a *Chima-jeogori*

Preserving cultural affinities is often a priority for immigrant and refugee communities. As part of these preservation efforts, they strive to retain certain practices and follow certain social norms. For example, as the girls attending Chōsen gakkō begin junior high, they start to wear the Korean traditional clothing chima-jeogori as their school uniforms.[8] In some of the footage—which was filmed during the winter in Hokkaido where sub-zero weather persists until March and where heavy snow often falls in April—the girls' chima-jeogori do not appear warm enough, and we see students' ears and noses turn red from the chilly weather. Nevertheless, unless the weather is truly unbearable, girls at Chōsen gakkō do not wear jackets or other warm clothing over their chima-jeogori uniforms. In fact, in interviews, some female students said that they sometimes suffer from poor health as a result of solely wearing thin chima-jeogori during the harsh winters in Hokkaido. However, it is not the schools that prevent girls from wearing warm coats. On the contrary, it is a discipline enforced by the students themselves: they do not cover up their school uniforms but instead proudly and openly show their chima-jeogori as a symbol of who they are. In fact, there are scenes in the documentary where students encourage each other not to wear outerwear that covers up their chima-jeogori when they step outside their school (0:15:46).

The public display of their chima-jeogori allows them to openly and visibly represent their Zainichi-ness. In one scene, they explain that revealing one's Chōsen identity by wearing the chima-jeogori is far more important to them than keeping warm.

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[8] In Chōsen gakkō, male students wear similar school uniforms to Japanese public school students, but female students wear white jeogori (top) and black chima (skirt) as school uniforms (Kwon 2002, 65).

While watching the steam emerge from the students' mouths due to the cold, Kim Myung-joon asks students why they should make their identity so visible in such an inconvenient way. One student answered:

> Protecting my identity as a *Chosŏn saram* [Chōsen person] in Japan and protecting one's identity in Nam Chosŏn [South Korea] are entirely different. In Nam Chosŏn, it is enough to be aware of one's identity, but Zainichi like us who are living in Japan should not only keep our identity 'inside.' If I aim to protect my 'inner self' but do not express it publicly, my 'inner self' will gradually change without even realizing it. Eventually, I will become like a Japanese. We do not want that to happen, so that is why we wear the chima-jeogori and learn uri mal [Korean] (0:18:45).

As this interview illustrates, while wearing traditional garments is a means of self-acceptance and acknowledging one's identity, it also has deep historical and political meaning—which, in turn, interacts with gender norms.

- Confronting the Stereotyped Image

The symbolic image associated with chima-jeogori was systematically constructed in the wake of the colonial period. At the height of the Japanese government's wartime mobilization order, the Japanese government desperately needed Koreans to be active participants in the Pacific war. Externally, the government initiated a full-scale campaign of Japanization, believing that it could transform the chōsenjin into Japanese citizens who could go to war and fight for the emperor. Internally, to ease Japanese citizens' anxiety about contaminating Japanese "pure-blood" by assimilating foreign chōsenjin, the colonial government reinforced the particular image of Chōsen women as weak, feminine, and docile. This image was primarily represented as a feeble Chōsen female wearing chima-jeogori (Kim-Wachutka 2018, 165). The image of Chōsen actresses wearing traditional garments and the appearance of Pyongyang *kisaeng* (female entertainers whose work often included sex work) wearing chima-jeogori were frequently publicized in Japanese magazines and newspapers. By framing Chōsen as unthreatening, submissive, and fragile, and by reinforcing this idea through representations of females wearing chima-jeogori, the Japanese government tried to achieve its political goals without much resistance or agitation within Japanese society. Ultimately, these fixed images of Chōsen women as “the epitome of female sexuality and a symbol of Chōsen’s subjugation” persisted and eventually “further stereotyp[ed] Korean women within the context of orientalism” (Kim-Wachutka 2018, 167–68).

Despite this pervasively and persistent stereotyped image of chima-jeogori, Zainichi girls intentionally chose chima-jeogori as their school uniform. Historically, Zainichi students had agency in revising and choosing their own schools’ dress codes. Such empowerment was used to help students actively resist colonial remnants and fight against the images so closely associated with their traditional garments (Kim-Wachutka 2018, 169). The typical chima-jeogori uniform that Zainichi chōsenjin students wear—a long-sleeved top with a dark skirt—was designed and selected by the female students and teachers who attend Chōsen gakkō. Kim-Wachutka nicely summarized that “The cultural interpretations of the garment and the memories associated with it as a symbol of marginalization, shame and stereotyping gave the young women the impetus to express their resistance through their clothing” (169). Thus, today, the chima-jeogori uniform has become a symbolic meaning of “ethnic revival,” resisting against a stereotyped image that has been entrenched since the colonial era.

- Publicly Declaring One’s Heritage

For the girls at Chōsen gakkō, wearing chima-jeogori is also a way to vividly embrace their roots as members of the Korean diaspora. Considering the peculiarity of national identity formation in Japanese society, such an act of revealing their otherness translates into an act of resistance. While creating a sense of cultural and psychological homogeneity in forming a nation is not unique to Japan, Japanese beliefs in the importance of a homogenous society—and its strong history of enforcing that homogeneity—set it apart from other similar cultures. Japan built its national identity by drawing stringent distinctions between ethnic and cultural “insiders” versus “outsiders” With its deeply rooted monoethnic ideology, the Japanese perceive the existence of a Korean diaspora with both fear and rejection. To borrow the Japanese distinct binary division between the in-group and outsiders (*uchi* and *soto*), the places where the sense of uniformity and solidarity in uchi (the in-group) is strong, the differences identified among outsiders (soto) are not tolerated (Lee and Park 2013, 244). The differences engendered by the diaspora—soto group—are considered to create cracks in a unified and homogeneous national identity (Lee and Park 2013, 235). In order to prevent such cracks from deepening and widening, Japan has taken an exclusionary policy toward the soto group. Historically, one of the Japanese government’s commonly used policies for minority groups is mandatory assimilation, which entails suppressing the culture of minority groups, excluding minority groups from the majority, or repatriating them to their home countries (Lee 1996, 98). In this regard, not only refusing to assimilate but also openly revealing one’s Korean identity by wearing the chima-jeogori is interpreted both as an act of defiance against the uchi group, and as a means of reinforcing their soto identity.

According to numerous recollections and interviews from Zainichi women, some express anxiety about revealing their identity as chosŏn saram by wearing chima-jeogori. Not all Zainichi women proudly proclaim their Korean heritage like the students in the documentary, and some strive to hide their identity. After conducting many interviews of second-generation Zainichi women, Kim-Wachutka wrote that one woman—who only begrudgingly wore her traditional garment for her father's funeral—had said that "being seen in the ethnic clothes by her Japanese teachers and classmates was openly admitting to being chōsenjin, something [the interviewee] had internalized as despised and despicable" (165). As this anecdote illustrates, for many Zainichi, it was widely known that revealing one's roots may engender disadvantages in their lives. Therefore, coming out as Zainichi by wearing chima-jeogori required strong determination and courage.

In this context, students who attend Chōsen gakkō, and who opt to wear chima-jeogori daily could be seen as willingly embracing the unpleasant and unfair consequences of openly showing that they are Zainichi who attend a pro-North Korean school. Their Zainichi counterparts attending pro-South Korean schools wear uniforms that resemble Japanese student uniforms. As such, the Zainichi at Chōsen gakkō are far more visible and identifiable in Japan. Though they face abusive language and assaults by conservative Japanese individuals, these students value the consistency and continuity of wearing the chima-jeogori. Such harassment and abuse, especially against girls who are more noticeable due to their chima-jeogori uniform, become more overt and frequent when Japanese public opinion toward North Korea deteriorates. Since the 1990s, girls' chima-jeogori uniforms have frequently been torn apart, and the term "chima-jeogori incident" is now used to refer to such patterns of attacks. From April to July 1994, there were 154 reported chima-jeogori incidents. In June of that year, there were 29 cases of jeogori tearing and 12 cases of chima tearing of female Zainichi students who attended Tokyo Chōsen gakkō. In the documentary, there was also a scene where Japanese right-wing protesters came out to the port to confront students returning to Japan from a school trip to North Korea (1:51:57). The protesters shouted at students using loudspeakers and displayed banners slandering North Korea and threatening the students. Unfazed, students seemed calm, as if it were not the first time that they had witnessed such demonstrations. The teachers urged female students to take off their chima-jeogori and change into gym clothes, fearing another chima-jeogori incident.

For some of the Zainichi, such discrimination and harassment have reinforced their bond to their Chōsen identity and led to increased resistance to assimilation—effects that, needless to say, are contrary to the protesters' goals. In other words, Zainichi Koreans who attend Chōsen gakkō create their own unique diasporic identity to counteract the exclusion and discrimination that they face from the uchi. National identity formation does not only happen among the majority, but also happens simultaneously in minority groups—often in response to the majority. Zainichi Koreans have experienced a long history of Japanese colonialism and political turmoil followed by national division, and the harsh realities that they faced as a once-colonized minority in Japan further solidified their group identity. Maintaining a diasporic life in Japan—where the belief of "*tan'itsu minzokuron* (theories of monoethnicity or sometimes as monoculturalism)" are deeply anchored – reflects a difficult choice, which involves being identified as Zainichi (Chapman 2006, 91).

In this context, preserving their Korean identity is like embracing a thorn. Revealing one's identity as Zainichi, particularly for those who go to Chōsen gakkō, can engender constant obstacles and challenges in their lives. Yet, no matter how much they have to endure and suffer, Zainichi students in the documentary willingly embrace these proverbial thorns ever more tightly in order to remember who they are. A student's interview portrays well what it means to maintain Zainichi identity in Japan: "(Wearing chima-jeogori in winter) is cold . . . it definitely is cold . . . However, if I wear it, my consciousness as a Zainichi chōsenjin grows—wearing it gives me courage, wouldn't you say?" (0:19:33).

- Breaking Away from the Traditional Gender Role

For the Zainichi *issei* (first generation) women, chima-jeogori was a source of nostalgia; for many, clothing was their only remaining reminder of home. However, for the second-, third-, and fourth-generation Zainichi—who have no lived memory of the Korean peninsula—traditional clothes have taken on symbolic and political meaning. Wearing chima-jeogori serves as a reminder of Japan's colonial past, which drove their parents to a foreign country while enduring constant discrimination. By wearing chima-jeogori, the young female students proclaim their ethnic identity while making the Japanese public constantly confront their past through a direct and visual medium. As Jan Assmann noted, clothes serve as a "memory tool," and the Zainichi women's chima-jeogori serves to reinforce communal memory of "the history of subjugation under Japanese rule, [and] denial of one's ethnic identity" in the mainstream Japanese society (Kim-Wachutka 2018, 176).

Chima-jeogori, as a display of one's historical awareness of and solidarity with the previous generations' suffering, also gives women a sense of empowerment. The first generation of Zainichi *ŏmŏni* [mothers] was strictly confined to predefined gender roles and boundaries, and a woman's identity was recognized and valued "only in relation to her husband, children and other family members" (Kim-Wachutka 2018, 8). Zainichi issei women were "marginalized for being women in a constricting culture, living in an 'other's' land of Japan, and having their voices considered unimportant" (Kim-Wachutka 2018, 4). In this sense, for subsequent generations of Zainichi women to wear chima-jeogori can be viewed as a vehicle for self-expression and articulating a need for political and historical justice—all through a familiar and tangible medium. Chōsen gakkō female students' deliberate choice to wear chima-jeogori as their school uniforms and to openly express their identity could also be seen as a significant break from the traditional gender roles of Chōsen women who could not speak out as the first generation of Zainichi *ŏmŏni*.

It may seem paradoxical that chima-jeogori gives Zainichi women a sense of empowerment and agency—especially since women, by wearing those traditional, gender-specific garments, have had to endure such profound discrimination and oppression in Japanese society. However, on the flip side, Zainichi women deliberately chose traditional attire as their school uniform to acknowledge their roots while delivering societal and political messages to mainstream Japanese society. In addition, Chōsen gakkō's female students' chima-jeogori uniform also influenced their own Zainichi community. By openly wearing the traditional garment, Zainichi girls and women not only try to reinforce their existence in Japanese society but also to assure their own ethnic community that they are preserving and passing down Chōsen traditions. In this sense, chima-jeogori was "rediscovered, redesigned and used as a means of confirming its wearers' identities, of transcending oppression, and of visibly yet wordlessly proclaiming a sense of empowerment" (Kim-Wachutka 2018, 170).

Given that more and more girls wearing chima-jeogori were targeted and attacked, Chōsen gakkō created a second school uniform that is indistinguishable from other students in Japan. However, the documentary did not feature scenes of girls wearing alternative uniform. Also, although the school is co-educational, *Our School*'s poster featured only female students wearing chima-jeogori, creating an impression that this Chōsen gakkō is a girls' school. This intentional selection of footage and images arouses an emotional and sentimental reaction from the South Korean audience. By highlighting the fact that the fourth-generation Zainichi wear the chima-jeogori—the traditional attire that even South Koreans do not frequently wear—the Zainichi students' struggle appears much more noble and admirable. In addition, the style of chima-jeogori that they wear is a simple white top and black skirt. Such style and color of chima-jeogori resonate significantly with South Koreans, as it is reminiscent of the costumes worn by numerous independence activists who stood up to resist Japanese imperialism in the past. Therefore, the style and color of chima-jeogori reinforces the sense of resistance and integrity that the Zainichi students' struggle represents for the South Korean audience.

What It Means to Learn *Uri Mal*

Learning Korean is a significant concern for the Zainichi community. For third- and fourth-generation Zainichi, learning the language was challenging. This was because the third and fourth generations were born and raised in Japan and spoke Japanese as their first language. A large part of the reason why their environment made it even more difficult to learn Korean when compared to previous generations was that the second-generation parents' first language also tended to be Japanese. Though the second generation was also born and raised in Japan, they were raised by Korean immigrant parents who mainly communicated in Korean. Compared to the second generation's exposure to Korean in the household, the third and fourth generations of Zainichi heard the Korean language spoken at home far less. Many Zainichi parents who were anxious about their children losing their Zainichi Korean identity often chose to send them to Chōsen gakkō so that the next generation could learn Korean.

By sending their children to Chōsen gakkō, Zainichi parents intended to preserve the Zainichi Korean identity of their children. Chōsen gakkō is unique from its counterparts, Japanese public school and Kankoku gakkō, in that it puts heavy emphasis on using *uri mal* at all times, believing that using *uri mal* would help Zainichi students to think and behave like chosŏn saram. As scholars, including Benedict Anderson, Anthony Giddens, and Ernest Gellner, have observed, the use of a uniform language helps create a national identity (Lee and Park 2013, 239). Since language is closely related to nationalism and national identity, uri mal education is strongly emphasized in Chōsen gakkō, which was the only institution where third- and fourth-generation Zainichi could systematically learn and use the language when compared to the other schools. Except for the Japanese language class, all classes are conducted in uri mal. For this reason, Zainichi parents who want their children to learn Korean send them to Chōsen gakkō regardless of their children's citizenship. In the documentary, there were some students who transferred to Chōsen gakkō from Japanese public schools, and some even had Japanese or South Korean citizenship.

Each student's backgrounds, citizenship, and ideological affiliation were different, but what was consistent in Chōsen gakkō was that they all communicated in uri mal.

To create an environment for Chōsen gakkō students to use uri mal even outside of classrooms, students themselves conducted a self-disciplinary activity called *undong* (literally "exercise"). Under undong, students discussed and came up with several initiatives that they promised to adhere to, such as having as much self-study time as possible, not being late for school, wearing the school uniform neatly, and achieving perfect marks in uri mal class. Then, they formed groups and competed among themselves for a certain period. Because of undong, students tried to use *uri mal* instead of Japanese, and at the end of the day, each team member reported to the team leader how much they used uri mal, calculated the total score, and compared with the groups. In order to excel in undong, each division encouraged members to speak uri mal with one another at all times. However, not all students' uri mal level was fluent enough to use the language in every part of their daily lives. As one of the students, Byun Jae-hoon, said, "It's easy to communicate in Japanese" (0:10:53). Indeed, most students in the documentary appeared to be more comfortable speaking in Japanese. However, some Zainichi youth felt conflicted and confused about their mastery of Japanese as a first language rather than Korean. Although not all younger Zainichi generations appeared to have a strong longing for and connection to their homeland, Korea, some who identified as Zainichi felt frustrated that the only way to speak the truth and voice out their Zainichi identity was by using Japanese.

In the documentary, Oh Ryo-sil transferred from a Japanese public school to Chōsen gakkō two years before the documentary was filmed. When she first came to the school, she could not understand or speak uri mal. Her cohort classmates had to translate everything for her, even her textbooks. Fellow students made exceptions in undong when communicating with the transferred students to help others like Ryo-sil who did not speak or understand uri mal. Ryo-sil said she was matched up with a friend who accompanied her closely and helped her understand uri mal until she got familiar with the language. Ryo-sil said she was so touched, even teared up, when speaking about other students' dedication and help with her uri mal. She said, "Before I came to this school, I hid my identity. I hated that I was Zainichi. However, when I saw that my friends in Chōsen gakkō were proud of being Zainichi chōsenjin and seemed confident of their identity, I felt so ashamed that I could not speak uri mal as a Zainichi chōsenjin" (0:41:35). Such internal dissonance motivated and stimulated Zainichi youth to learn uri mal (Lee and Park 2013, 254). In the Chōsen gakkō school environment, where peers competed and helped each other to speak uri mal, the language ended up becoming part of their daily lives. It was not just students striving to improve their uri mal skills. For example, gray-haired teachers in their fifties studied uri mal to pass the highest level of the language proficiency test. As second- and third-generation Zainichi themselves, they openly admitted that their language skills were not perfect and that they were still in the process of learning, just like their students. There was a scene in the documentary where the second-generation teacher sat focused in front of a cassette player during a listening practice test, and her students surrounded her, looking at their teacher with interest and with eyes filled with awe and reverence (1:23:22).

In the documentary *Our School*, since there was only one Chōsen gakkō in Hokkaido, students from areas four or five hours away lived in dormitories. As students and teachers lived in dormitories, the relationships that they built seemed to be very solid and intimate. Students even said that teachers were "like companions" (0:08:04). The teachers showed affection toward their students because the teachers were themselves second- or third-generation Zainichi who fully understood the difficulties faced by their students. At night, the children ran to the teachers' dormitory rooms and spent time with them, and the teachers made them late-night snacks. Teachers shared rooms with elementary school students who were living apart from their parents at an early age. Teachers took care of them like parents would. Female teachers combed and tied their student's hair and got them ready for school, and male teachers read comic books with students late into the night. When the homeroom teacher announced that he was becoming a father, students jumped out of their seats and shouted for joy, clapping their hands. Boys ran to the front of the class, patted their teacher's back, and exclaimed, "You are becoming a father!" as though their older brother were becoming a father (1:58:45). This strong companionship among the Zainichi appeared to make them feel like they were a solid, supportive community. In the documentary, many students confessed their dream of becoming a teacher at a Chōsen gakkō to support and help the next Zainichi generation not to lose their Zainichi chōsenjin identity. The sense of mission and extraordinary affection that teachers had towards their students is described very well in the remarks of the principal of the Hokkaido Chōsen gakkō, "*Uri hakkyo* (meaning "Our school" in Korean) is the only place in Japan that can provide ethnic education to Zainichi children. Since we [teachers] are on the front lines of passing down Zainichi chōsenjin identity and raising the next generation of Zainichi students, we should teach students to have a sense of mission. Children will love *uri hakko* only when we truly love it" (0:04:23).

As described above, the relationship between teachers and students shown in the documentary seemed far more than a typical relationship between teachers and students.

The second- and third-generation Zainichi teachers regarded these fourth-generation Zainichi students as future hope to sustain the Zainichi community and pass down the Zainichi chōsenjin identity. That's why even teachers who themselves were more comfortable with Japanese constantly endeavored to communicate with students in uri mal. They experienced that identity and common culture were inherited and formed through a common language. Such experience motivated the teachers and students to not only promote and encourage the use of uri mal at school, but also to use uri mal throughout their daily lives.

Our School reveals how Zainichi parents chose to put their children in a Chōsen gakkō dormitory at an early age because they recognized how important it is to live with peers of a similar age and who are in a similar situation. While living closely with other Zainichi students in the dormitory, the young ones started to develop a sense of community, and their awareness of being Zainichi chōsenjin grew stronger. In the documentary, older students were shown to be taking care of younger students as if they were their younger brothers and sisters. Since they knew how hard it could be for young Zainichi to live with complete strangers, they were, in turn, helping them survive and endure their experience. Witnessing each other go through similar hardships ultimately strengthened their sense of community and identity as Zainichi.

Every summer, teachers go on two-day or three-day trips to make home visits for students who live far away from the school. Once they arrive and meet the student's parents, teachers show pictures of their children in school and describe in detail how children are adapting to the school. While consulting with the teacher, one mother shed tears as she told the story of when her son Tae-soo first went to school so far from home. She recounted how Tae-soo ended up peeing his pants on the first day in the dormitory because the bathroom was so unfamiliar and scary at night. She said that after hearing this, she was unbearably saddened. Nevertheless, seeing her son growing up day by day, she decided to send his younger son to school as well. She said, “Now we are talking about Tae-soo, but it is *us* who really grew the most. Parents are growing up with their children [by going through such hardships together]” (0:56:23).

Today, the third and fourth generations of Zainichi cannot be identified by their appearance unless they reveal that they are Zainichi. Because they are almost indistinguishable from ethnic Japanese, they can easily assimilate into the mainstream uchi’s society or hide their Zainichi identity and live everyday lives “as if they were Japanese” (Lie 2009, 19). However, some choose to treasure their Zainichi identity by wearing the chima-jeogori and learning uri mal, fully knowing that it would do more harm than good to do so while living in Japanese society. At the same time, the challenges and discrimination that they face by actively presenting their minority identity and constantly evoking their “Zainichi-ness” motivate them to hold on to it even tighter. Students use uri mal even outside of the classroom, even in the documentary, which turned into a place where the younger Zainichi generation fostered their diasporic identity. At Chōsen gakkō, they also shared their hardships and encouraged each other when they faced challenges, solidifying their soto identity.

Conclusion

One of the largest diasporas in Japan, Zainichi Koreans have often been rejected and marginalized. However, their exposure to discrimination and contempt appears to have only strengthened the community's collective identity and resolve. In the midst of these challenges, North Korea-affiliated Zainichi have bonded together, strengthened their diasporic identity, and implemented systems of transmitting their identity to future generations. Ethnic schools like Chōsen gakkō serve as cultural hubs where new generations learn the Korean language and culture and foster their Zainichi identity. While living together with their Zainichi counterparts, students attending Chōsen gakkō also learn to overcome the confusion and challenges that they experience as a result of being minorities and outsiders in Japanese culture. They do so by sharing, understanding, and encouraging each other.

In the documentary *Our School,* Kim Myung-joon tried to capture the Zainichi students' struggles and Zainichi chōsenjin identity formation, all while eliminating the political and ideological overtones that led to South Korea's longstanding avoidance and disregard of the Zainichi. By selecting and highlighting the commonalities that the South Korean audience could easily relate to, the director narrowed the distance between the audience and the students. As the director was frequently involved in the narration or even appeared in the documentary, he attempted to bridge the emotional distance and unfamiliarity between the Zainichi chōsenjin students and South Koreans. The documentary sparked newfound interest in this once-forgotten group, and it garnered favorable responses from the South Korean public. In the 2000s, a series of Zainichi-themed documentaries were released. To some extent, these documentaries led to positive social changes, including through the establishment of NGOs that help and support the Zainichi students who attend Chōsen gakkō.

Nearly 20 years have passed since the documentary *Our School* was filmed and released. According to the film director Kim Myung-joon, some of the Zainichi students in the documentary have now become parents—meaning that sufficient time has passed for a new generation of Zainichi to be brought into the world. Since the documentary was released in 2007, the lives of the Zainichi affiliated with North Korea have changed, often reflecting improvements in their socioeconomic status. Also, South Korea has since become a cultural powerhouse gaining international recognition for its music, television, and film industries, and increasing numbers of the younger generation of Zainichi intend to visit and study in South Korea. When doing so, they are eventually required to obtain South Korean citizenship. Due to these various factors, the motivation to maintain Chōsen nationality, along with their emotional attachment to North Korea, might not be as strong today as they were when the documentary was released. The majority of Zainichi Koreans today hold South Korean citizenship. However, “The fact that one has South Korean nationality does not mean that one supports South Korea and shuns North Korea” (Ryang 2023, 7).

In terms of numbers alone, the number of Zainichi chōsenjin indeed decreased over generations. Still, even though the Zainichi community is dwindling, for those who maintain Chōsen nationality, their motivation and willingness to foster their diasporic identity and ethnic culture are exceptionally strong. It did not take long to realize that this group is a small but not weak community and that it is worthy of our attention. The diasporic identity formation of minority groups living in a former colonial country may be observed in other contexts. However, the formation of Zainichi diaspora identity, especially among those who are affiliated with North Korea, is distinct. Though war and colonial rule ended long ago, Japan’s exclusionary policies toward outsiders have persisted until modern times. In response to this discrimination, some Zainichi choose to stay in a difficult position, refusing to either assimilate into Japanese society or obtain South Korean citizenship. Simultaneously facing discrimination in Japan and experiencing a sense of betrayal by South Korea, protecting their unpopular and seemingly impractical identity as North Koreans became an act of resistance. In other words, for Zainichi chōsenjin, their Chōsen identity imbued them with a sense of moral confidence as they found a way to overcome historical, political, societal, and economic turmoil. Ultimately, their “Zainichi-ness” has become more than just an identity. Instead, it is a way of life—one that, in the case of director Kim and his South Korean audience, inspired sympathy and transcended the political divisions inherited from the Cold War era.

At the governmental level, South Korea has been passive in dealing with the Zainichi chōsenjin issue, as it is inevitably entangled with sensitive historical issues—sensitive enough to pose a risk to its diplomatic relationship with Japan. However, through various forms of media coverage, interest in Zainichi chōsenjin and Chōsen gakkō has continued to increase among the South Korean public. Lately, a series of broadcasts on Zainichi chōsenjin—framed in a humanistic view and produced by major South Korean public broadcasters—was featured on television, which made it easier for the wider public to hear stories about Zainichi chōsenjin.

In recent years, as prominent Zainichi athletes—Chōsen gakkō graduates—made remarkable achievements on the global stage, they won the hearts and minds of many South Korean sports fans. To name a few, soccer players An Yong-hak and Chong Te-se, who played for both South Korea and North Korea, and judo player An Chang-rim, who won the bronze medal as a South Korean player in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, gained massive public attention and popularity in South Korea. By frequently being featured on South Korean popular TV shows, younger South Korean generations could learn about the challenges and difficulties they faced as marginalized people who had a hard time defining themselves, sometimes playing as Zainichi chōsenjin or Zainichi kankokujin. As those beloved sports stars appear on various broadcasts to discuss the discrimination they received in Japan, the interest and attention in Chōsen gakkō and Zainichi chōsenjin community has been elevated throughout South Korean society.

When Chōsen gakkō were excluded from the Free High School Tuition law in 2010, many South Koreans sympathized with the Zainichi chōsenjin students, who were saddened and enraged. With support from the South Korean public, Zainichi parents were able to establish a fundraising campaign, which even drew the support of South Korean citizens living abroad. These mothers of Chōsen gakkō students were able to travel to the UN Children's Rights Commission in Geneva, Switzerland, where they had an opportunity to voice their unfair treatment for generations that had yet to be resolved. In addition, various civic groups created multiple activities where South Korean members could visit Chōsen gakkō for annual cultural exchange and performing arts collaborations.

Seemingly unsolvable matters that had been tainted with political and ideological stigmas have gradually yet significantly changed through the power of media. Ideological conflicts between the two Koreas have been eased through the common denominator of culture and sports. Such bottom-up changes may lead to an improvement in the situation and perceptions of Zainichi chōsenjin, who continue to fight for their identity. Perhaps one day, the preservation of their Chōsen identity will no longer be like embracing a thorn, but rather a transformation into life in full bloom.

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