

# Representations of Zainichi Korean women in Japanese film: *Yakiniku Dragon*

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## Introduction

Recently discussions on diversity and representation in Hollywood films are taking place. However, not just Hollywood is dealing with debates about the representation of minorities in film, Japanese cinema is also becoming scrutinized as a result of an increasingly heterogeneous Japan. Zainichi Koreans are one of Japan's biggest ethnic minority groups (Ko 2010, 117) and have been a subject in various films made by both Japanese and those with Zainichi Korean heritage. Most research on representations of Zainichi Koreans in Japanese film, however, tends to focus on male characters and the way Zainichi Koreans are represented in general. *In Zainichi Cinema: Korean-In-Japan Film Culture* – one of the most recent publications on Zainichi representation in Japanese film – Oliver Dew (2016) has discussed films that were released between 1968 and the present, with the latest film (*Pacchigi! 2*) dating from 2007. A decade has passed since this film has been released, and the environment in which films dealing with Zainichi Koreans are created might be changing with the years. Moreover, gender literature is opening up important discussions concerning the intersection of gender and ethnicity and representations in film.

In what way do gender and ethnicity intersect in Japanese films that portray Zainichi Koreans and what is the significance of these representations for Zainichi Korean women in particular? Rather than just being represented, self-representation and the representation of the diversity of experiences and positionings of groups in society in film has gained prominence. Representations of minorities do not only deal with the real-life consequences dominant portrayals, imagery and narratives can reinforce and produce, but also with power relations between majorities and minorities and more importantly, power relationships within minority groups themselves. This thesis will use an approach based on the concept of “intersectionality”, which can be described as an analytic tool that gives insights into the complexity of social problems like discrimination. It's a way of understanding and analyzing that recognizes that

social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped by multiple factors that deal with social division (like gender, race or class) that work together and influence each other, instead of being shaped by a single factor (Hill 2016, 11).

An intersectional perspective that not only focuses on ethnicity, but also on gender enables us to concentrate more on intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relationships in film, allowing us not only to see how the "other" is portrayed as a result of power relations, but also how this representation is influenced by perceived gender differences that are the result of social relations. In Hollywood film, the ethical dilemmas for women and men often adhere to traditional sex and gender-role expectations (Escholz, Bufkin, Long 2011, 306). Making use of Zainichi as a subject for looking at ethnic minorities' portrayal gives insights in the way non-Western film in a post-colonial setting deals with said ethnic minority and sex and gender-roles, showing a different perspective of Zainichi cinema and discrimination, as self-representation does not necessarily rule out other forms of inequality.

Residing in Japan, but being positioned between the Korean peninsula and Japan, Zainichi have been considered neither Korean nor Japanese by respectively Korean and Japanese societies, as by Zainichi themselves. Korean identity is juxtaposed with Japanese identity, which is represented as what Zainichi identity is not (Chapman 2004, 32). In addition to being juxtaposed with Korean and Japanese identities, their various nationalities, intergenerational differences and different socio-economic class contribute to what might be called the "in-betweenness" of Zainichi Koreans. For Zainichi, this "in-betweenness" can be described as a space that is neither Korean nor Japanese, but an "in-between" space where new hybrid (but also conflicting) Zainichi identities are created (Ko 2010, 132, 134). Because of this "in-betweenness" and ambiguous "cultural identity" of Zainichi Koreans, which is partly a

result of Japanese imperialism, it is interesting to see how and by whom this identity is represented in Japanese film and what discussions regarding representation have taken place.

According to Mika Ko (2010, 124) a collective Zainichi Korean identity was formed to fight against discrimination and prejudice as a result of their post-colonial struggle in Japanese society. Mainly the older generations of Koreans in Japan can be described as having a strong sense of Korean identity (Ko 2010, 126). However, it is also important to understand Zainichi Korean identity not only as one collective identity, but also in terms of multiple identities, or multiple overlapping positionings, as Stuart Hall (1989, 226) formulates identity. A collective Korean identity tends to define Zainichi identity only in terms of Korean ethnicity (Ko 2010, 129).

“In order to discuss the identity of *zainichi* without confining it to ethnicity alone, we should consider identity, following Hall’s formulation, as a ‘positioning’, and ‘a matter of “becoming” as well as “being” [...] In this respect, by opening up to the criss-crossing nature of identities, Hall’s formulation of identity/ies allows us to see the *zainichi* not only as one singular ‘Korean identity’ but as multiple identities possessing multiple and overlapping forms of identifications, not only through ethnicity and nationality, but also through class, generation, gender, and so on.” (Ko 2010, 129)

In Japan’s colonial period, Korea was (officially) annexed by Japan from 1910 until the end of World War II; a number of Koreans immigrated to Japan in order to work as cheap laborers, others were brought to Japan to work in coal mining and construction work. As we will see later, some followed other family members to Japan. After the war, the majority of Koreans returned to Korea under a repatriation project organized by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP). However, due to political instability, a cholera outbreak on the Korean peninsula and strict restrictions set by SCAP concerning the amount of money and assets Koreans were allowed to take back home, the number of repatriates declined after spring

1946 (Ko 2010, 118). Thus, Zainichi Koreans may be described as the group of Koreans who were resident in Japan during the colonial period, who stayed after the end of the Second World War and their descendants. While “*zainichi*” (在日) refers to a group of people staying in Japan, it is mostly used to refer to those of Korean descent (Ko 2010, 122), hence, this paper will address them as Zainichi Koreans or Zainichi.

In Zainichi intellectual discussions, Zainichi identity has been negotiated, with changes in the population (like increasing numbers of post diasporic second- and third-generation Zainichi) leading to the declaration of a “third way” of being Zainichi. This “third way” enabled Zainichi identity to be located in multiple spaces (both Japan and Korea) instead of the previously essentialized and polarized Japanese and Korean national divide (Chapman 2004, 42). Nationality is a factor in shaping the multiple identifications of Zainichi. In fact, not all Zainichi Koreans possess the same nationality or may identify with their nationality: some hold a North Korean nationality (instead of South Korean nationality) or are naturalized Japanese. There are several (Zainichi) Korean organizations, like the North Korean affiliated Sōren and the South Korean affiliated Mindan. Currently, only the South Korean nationality is officially acknowledged by the Japanese government. Keeping North Korean nationality has declined in popularity, and younger people have become more attracted to naturalization, unlike older generations, who tend to associate naturalization with a denunciation of Korean national identity and war-time assimilation practices (Ko 2010, 120-121).

Secondly, there exist generational differences between groups of Zainichi Koreans: the older generation which has experienced Japanese colonialism grew up under different economic and social environments compared to the younger generations that grew up in post-war Japan (Ko 2010, 127). A strong assimilation policy was imposed on Koreans during the colonial period, causing problems and conflicts for their identity and subjectivity for different

generations of Zainichi (Ko 2010, 124). Furthermore, economical differences also contribute to the heterogeneity and diversity of the group we call Zainichi Koreans. Ko (2010, 127) compares a Zainichi “petite bourgeoisie”, that consists of Zainichi who became successful entrepreneurs, with Zainichi who are still positioned at the bottom of Japan’s economy.

Another dimension that creates difference within Zainichi communities and that is of importance to this paper, is the heterogeneity of Zainichi Koreans gender and sexuality wise. Experiences of Zainichi women differ from those of men; male-centered Zainichi politics have been criticized by Zainichi women activists, who feel that they have been silenced for the sake of “ethnic liberation” (Ko 2010, 130). These activists speak from multiple and conflicting identities, and thus, Ko (2010) argues that seeing Zainichi Korean identity in terms of multiple overlapping forms of identification opens up positions of political resistance to those who do not fit well into the essentialist Korean identity, like women, naturalized Japanese, half-Japanese, and so on. Moreover, it challenges the essentialist notion of Japaneseness – which excludes the Zainichi – not by counter-Korean essentialism but by presenting multiplicity and heterogeneity (Ko 2010, 131).

The history of Zainichi Koreans raises questions about their ability to convey their own history through film: as Zainichi are one of Japan’s biggest ethnic minority groups and their settlement in Japan is a direct result of Japanese imperialism, their representation in Japanese film implies the presence of a power dynamic between Japanese filmmakers and portrayed Zainichi community members. An example of the workings of this power dynamic would be 1960s Japanese yakuza (gangster) films, which have, in the past, contributed to stereotypes about male Koreans leaning towards criminality and violence, which are stereotypes that reach back into the colonial period (Dew 2016, 101). This kind of films have also spread so-called myths of Koreanness, providing tropes and stereotypes which later cycles of films directed by Zainichi Koreans themselves would appropriate and play with, according to Dew (2016, 107).

Dew (2016, 23) also contends that the most interesting Zainichi films are reflexively aware of and move beyond their own potential participation in the burden of representation and recognize the constructive and representational power of stereotypical Zainichi images. Zainichi Koreans have increasingly directed and produced films about themselves, contesting stereotypical and fetishized images. Still, gender aspects have been discussed insufficiently in discussions of both Japanese and Zainichi cinema and Zainichi history in general. This thesis encourages looking at Zainichi history and film from another perspective by asking the question of how Zainichi Korean women have been depicted in recent (2010s) Japanese film and how these portrayals are significant for Zainichi women.

Firstly, this thesis will consider the meaning and significance of portraying minorities in film in the first chapter. After a short discussion of existing Zainichi cinema, literature on film and gender and intersectionality, chapter two zooms in on *Yakiniku Dragon* and the way the film deals with Zainichi identity through the exploration of a few scenes and the analysis of *Yakiniku Dragon*'s script. The last chapter focuses on *Yakiniku Dragon*'s underlying gender portrayals and its implications for the way Zainichi experiences are perceived and its implications for Zainichi women in particular. The analysis of *Yakiniku Dragon*'s imagery and script will shed light on how gendered labor divisions and a different attribution of themes to different genders excludes Zainichi Korean women's voices and experiences from Zainichi nationalism or empowerment discourses.



## Chapter 1 “Politics of representation”

Why does the way minorities are represented in film matter? What is the significance of certain kind of portrayals? And what are struggles about representation about? Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994, 180) argue that there is no real “truth” about the nature or experiences of a certain community or certain individuals that can be transmitted through film; movies are a reflection of certain ideological discourses or perspectives. In addition to being created in an ideological system, films are also produced in capitalist settings: in a competitive environment, producers are motivated to make movies that sell and thus take into account their audience or consumers, who constitute the driving force behind the types of films and representations that are produced by media. At the same time however, increasing monopolization of media outlets may threaten open competition and choices offered to consumers may be illusionary (Escholz, Bufkin, Long 2011, 301).

Rather than consumers influencing representations in film, Escholz, Bufkin and Long (2011, 302) argue that both communication theories and cultural studies research contend that the media disproportionately project hegemonic snapshots that tend toward the reproduction of hierarchical relations. This observation applies to Stuart Hall (1996, 444), who argues that the “machineries” and “regimes” in society and the way things are represented play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive role. Events, relations and structures have real effects, but only get attributed meanings within the existing discourse when they are subject to specific conditions (Hall 1996, 444). Media attribute meanings to these events, relations and structures with their representations, shaping real-life activity. Likewise, enculturation theory suggest that these representations perform a social control function by structuring the audience’s worldviews (and thus are constitutive), whereas interpretive reception research, feminist film criticism and cultural studies contest that the audience actively resists dominant media messages and may develop resistive discourses (Escholz, Bufkin, Long 2011, 302). Shohat and Stam (1994, 178)

can be seen as agreeing to the latter, as they consider the issue of representation as dealing with the question of “realism” in film, with debates leading to several spectators or critics defending their own version of the “real”. Culture and or society, ideology and the way of representing can be said to collectively shape social and political life (Hall 1996, 444), but what is it exactly that minorities are negotiating and struggling over? Why is representation an issue?

Hegemonic or not, representations have real-life consequences for the individuals or communities portrayed, hence they may perpetuate racism and sexism. Representations can shape expectations that might have one believe people of a certain ethnicity to have certain character traits or beliefs. Genders might be associated with certain professions or behavior, resulting in those differentiating from the expectations or the norm standing out or being treated differently. Whereas dominant groups are less impacted by negative portrayals of characters, characters that are associated with unempowered groups become more easily representative for the entire community, especially with negative behavior (Shohat and Stam 1994, 183). As mentioned before, *yakuza* films have contributed to a myth about Koreanness, portraying Korean men as criminals and prone to violence. Representations thus impact real-life assumptions and the understanding of history.

Moreover, a perceived lack of representation of a certain (ethnic) minority can be seen as what Shohat and Stam call a “triple insult”, implying:

“[...] (a) you are unworthy of self-representation; (b) no one from your community is capable of representing you; and (c) we, the producers of the film, care little about your offended sensibilities, for we have the power and there is nothing you can do about it.”  
(Shohat and Stam 1994, 190)

According to Escholz, Bufkin and Long (2011, 300), media’s practice of exclusion and stereotyping promotes a common sense view of reality that is oppressive and exploitative of

groups with less power in society. On the other hand, being represented implies that the members of these groups occupy significant social space and says, “you matter” (Escholz, Bufkin, Long 2011, 300).

Moreover, the desire for representation is not only related to the acknowledgement of the existence of a certain group, the right to being portrayed as diverse as the community is, is also being negotiated. Hall (1996) perceived a shift in the “politics of representation” in the case of representations of black people in Britain. Rather than the right of being represented, the “politics of representation” have shifted toward “access to the rights to representation” (or self-representation) and the “contestation of marginality, the stereotypical quality and the fetishized nature of images” (Hall 1996, 443). Thus, the recognition of the diversity of subjective positions, social experience and cultural identities has gained prominence (Hall 1996, 444).

The call for self-representation can be seen as a reaction to “affirmative action” casting, where, in the case of Hollywood, actors with a minority background are casted for the roles of white characters. Casting actors with a minority background may simply be a defense mechanism to ward off accusations of racism or can serve racist purposes. Furthermore, “the system can simply use the performer to enact the dominant set of codes; even, at times, over the performer’s objection.” “An epidemically correct face does not guarantee community self-representation” (Shohat and Stam 1994,190). Even if the main characters are not majority characters (Japanese characters in this case), films can reproduce a kind of discourse and relationship between different people and groups in society. In accordance, casting Zainichi Korean actors or films that include Zainichi Korean characters does not necessarily guarantee a representation that doesn’t conform to the dominant set of codes that apply in Japan. Films that are produced by Zainichi Koreans themselves may try to paint a different picture of their community but can conform to dominant ideologies at the same time.

A trend Mika Ko (2010) identifies regarding Japanese film that contain characters of ethnic minority backgrounds, is what she calls “cosmetic multiculturalism”. She describes this phenomenon as “a multiculturalism which on the surface celebrates cultural diversity, but at a deeper level does not subvert the dominant structure of Japaneseness vis-à-vis ‘others’” (Ko 2010, 32). However, she also contends that “cosmetic multiculturalism” offers the possibility for the “others” or dominated to exploit their own “otherness” and turn it into a device for negotiation and resistance (Ko 2010, 169).

Negotiation and contestation, however, might not come as easy for certain “others”. Shohat and Stam (1994) make a distinction between dominant groups who are less or not affected by certain representations and unempowered groups who are affected. Sensitivity around stereotypes and distortions also arise from the powerlessness of historically marginalized groups who can’t control their own representation (Shohat and Stam 1994, 184). Stereotypes can be hurtful by default, but they do not all exercise the same power in the world. Shohat and Stam (1994, 183-184) exemplify their argument with the media’s tendency to portray Black males as potential delinquents and the fact that this heavily impacts the actual lives and safety of Black people.

Power thus plays an important role in the issue of representation. Following Foucault’s theory on the power of discourse to produce truth (Feder 2014, 43), it can be said that those in society that can produce movies and have influence on representations (knowledge), exercise power over those represented and contribute to the constitution of hegemonic ways of seeing certain groups in society. Power works in another way too, in the sense that “the more power any group has to create and wield representations, the less it is required to be representative” (Isaac and Mercer 1996, 455) or to negotiate existing portrayals. How, then, have Zainichi as a historically marginalized group been able to negotiate and resist certain representations?

## **Zainichi cinema**

In the case of Zainichi, the call for self-representation in film can be seen as part of an overall empowerment movement. The desire for representation behind the camera and on-screen by Zainichi is seen by Dew (2016) as

“one articulation of the broader Zainichi citizenship movement that began in 1970, a movement which also sought representation and recognition in public life, in blue chip companies and public professions that were off limits to non Japanese nationals (Pak Chong sok’s employment discrimination against Hitachi, 1970 to 1974); recognition of their right to be in Japan, to not be subject to the humiliation of fingerprinting (the fingerprinting refusal movement of the 1980s [...]) or, in the 1990s, the right to be a Japanese national with a Korean name (the Campaign for the Readoption of Ethnic Names).” (Dew 2016, 70)

Whereas Koreans worked on films during the war, filmmaking with regard to Zainichi Koreans was limited to newsreels and education films that were produced by ethnic associations in the years immediately following the end of World War II (Dew 2016, 4). In the late 1950s and 1960s however, the hardship, discrimination and prejudice that Zainichi Koreans experience(d) were disclosed by mostly left-wing film-makers, unlike the films from the war-time period. Some of these films however, shaped the conventional image of Zainichi as poor and weak, however, honest and of good character (Ko, 139-140). Even though Zainichi figures have started appearing in more genres since the 1970s, Zainichi were often portrayed as victims or as a source of social problems, or both in yakuza (gangster) films, for instance. Moreover, the narratives often revolved around Korean ethnicity and the binary relation between Zainichi Koreans and Japanese, regardless of the genre (Ko, 141-142). Ōshima Nagisa’s films are pointed out as an exception by Dew (2016) and Ko (2010), whose films sought to use Korean

criminality and victimhood to indict Japan's colonial aggression and discriminatory practices. Furthermore, his crew's frequently included Zainichi Koreans themselves (Dew 2016, 11).

The rise of "Zainichi consciousness" starting from the 1970s led to the production of independent Zainichi productions that treated Zainichi as a subject, rather than just an object of spectacle (Dew 2016, 12), as being represented in Japanese film differs from being able to recognize oneself in character portrayals. According to Ko (2010, 145) films such as *Inhoujin no kawa* [*The River of the Stranger*] (1975) and *Gaki no Teikoku* [*Empire of Kids*] (1981) are a breakaway from conventional images of Zainichi in Japanese cinema. The former emphasizes the "contemporaneity and even association for Japanese and Koreans in their political activism, while denouncing Japanese discrimination and colonialism against Korea." (Ko 2010, 144). The latter does not employ a plot based on the significance or difference of Korean ethnicity, unlike conventional films involving Zainichi characters (Ko 2010, 145). Ko (2010, 145) and Koichi Iwabuchi (2000, 61) also point out *Tsuki wa docchi ni deteiru* [*All Under The Moon*] or *Moon* (1993) as a film that offers a new possibility of portraying Zainichi in cinema. The film is remarkable because it is a Zainichi production: it has been made by a Zainichi director (Sai Yoichi), scriptwriter (Chong Wushin) and producer (Lee Bongou). It is also the first Zainichi-related film to achieve commercial success and to feature Zainichi, while refusing conventional representations of them. Furthermore, it was the first success of Cine Qua Non, an independent (Zainichi) film company founded by Lee Bongou (Dew 2016,15).

*Moon* deals with a Zainichi taxi driver named Tadao. He is neither honest, nor a poor victim of discrimination, nor a social outlaw. He also isn't anguished about or particularly proud of his Korean identity, thus his Koreanness is treated as a given in the film (Ko 2010, 147). *Moon* is seen as a film that doesn't refrain from incorporating "weak" Zainichi (as they are usually portrayed) (Ko 2010, 147) in a funny story that also opposes the internalized conventional image of Zainichi as "poor victims" as the result of the legacy of Japanese

colonialism, which is not only created by the dominant Japanese, but also by Zainichi themselves (Ko 2010, 148).

Ko (2010, 153) and Iwabuchi (2000, 58) argue that the film unmasks “the existence of Korea-related derogatory words and racist attitudes in the everyday lives and minds of Japanese” and encourages audiences to face up to the issue of racism as their own problem by challenging the superficial political correctness through several scenes. Some Zainichi activists and intellectuals, however, have criticized the film for not providing new insights nor empowering Zainichi and reproducing the existing power relations between the dominant and the dominated by acting as a “commissioned” speaker of the dominated (Ko 2010, 148). Here, we see again how self-representation – of Zainichi in this case – does not necessarily guarantee a representation that is not according to the dominant set of codes.

Iwabuchi (2000) also writes that his analysis of *Moon* (1993) raised questions regarding intra-ethnic social relations among resident Koreans themselves and inter-ethnic relations between resident Koreans, Japanese, and other non-Japanese residents in Japan in the 1990s, that are usually neglected in self-representations of Zainichi Koreans. He considers *Moon* as “giving insufficient attention to intra-ethnic differences and to the historical memory of resident Koreans, a significant factor in its Japanese context”. As a result, “*Moon* risks producing a new representative image of resident Koreans which renders Japan’s colonial responsibilities irrelevant.” (Iwabuchi 2000, 56). It also points to the position of Japanese audiences who are keen on erasing and absorbing cultural “others”. This relates to Shohat and Stam (1994, 205), who argue that a “positive image” approach doesn’t guarantee stereotyping “from below”, where the stereotype is recognized, however used to new ends. In addition, *Moon* empowers and reproduces unequal power relations at once. It’s depiction of a Filipino hostess has been criticized for lack of feminist perspective by trying to deconstruct a reified image of resident Koreans in Japan by exploiting another reified image, that of Filipinos (Iwabuchi 2000, 65-66).

Since the success of *Moon* and the general trend towards multiculturalism in Japanese society, the number of films (both feature and documentary ones) dealing with Zainichi has increased and has attracted more attention from the 1990s onward (Ko 2010, 157). Cine Qua Non's strategy of combining crossover films with print publications, which included transcripts of round-table discussions surrounding each film release, also created space to discuss Zainichi representations according to Dew (2016, 18). The complexity and diversity of post-war Zainichi experience has also been addressed more; more recent films made by third generation Zainichi Koreans like *Ao – Chong* [*Blue: Chong*] (2000) and *Annyong-Kimuchi* [*Hello Kimchi*] (1999) explore the “in-betweenness” of Zainichi and how this is also experienced differently. *Osaka Story* (1996), however, doesn't deal with the problem of being Zainichi vis-à-vis Japanese society, but the problem of Zainichi vis-à-vis a “feudalistic, patriarchal Korean family system” and thus does address intra-ethnic differences. Other identities concerning gender, generation, and (homo)sexuality are also considered to be in conflict with the traditional Korean ethnic or national identity of Zainichi (Ko, 159-60), showing that multiple (Zainichi) identities or positionings overlap and contest each other.

This research aspires to contribute to existing research by focusing on these intra-ethnic differences, with gender differences in particular, by analyzing a film that (indirectly) addresses these differences.

### **Intersections of minority and female representations**

Like the films that deal with various identities that are considered to be in conflict with the ethnic national identity of Zainichi, this thesis will also take a more intersectional approach and look at the intersections of ethnicity and gender regarding representations in Japanese film. Literature on gender and film has explored how women with an ethnic minority background have been represented in Hollywood film. The importance in considering an intersectional approach in the case of Zainichi, however, lies in the fact that women can be considered as



another marginalized group within Japanese society and the Zainichi community itself. An intersectional approach can teach us more about intra-ethnic social relations and how ethnic minorities might reinforce dominant set of codes through film themselves. As showcased through the example of Filipino's representation in *Moon*, the less powerful themselves also exercise power over others who might be even less powerful. It also sheds light on different experiences of being displaced or conflicting identities Zainichi might experience.

Ko (2010, 169-170) mentions that the scope of the representation of Zainichi women is limited and that aspects of gender are often overshadowed by "ethnic concerns". In addition, most leading characters of the films analyzed by scholars like Ko (2010), Iwabuchi (2000), Dew (2016) and Ichiro Kuraishi (2009) are male and the relations between female and male (Zainichi and Japanese) characters and their underlying gender relations have been registered but addressed less (Ko 2010, 170).

The importance of looking at the interplay of gender and ethnicity becomes apparent when looking at research by feminist film critics like Escholz, Bufkin and Long (2011), who have identified reoccurring patterns in the portrayal of female and minority characters in Hollywood films and television. Through an analysis of labor force participation, sex-role of occupation and gender, they assessed character representations and have concluded that contrary to men, representations of women in Hollywood films were to the near exclusion of middle age and older women. In their eyes, this reinforces what Naomi Wolf (1991) calls "the beauty myth", which entails that females' primary societal value is based on physical appearance and youthful beauty. In contrast, male representations differed sharply in that middle age and older characters were portrayed and seemed to be seasoned, career-oriented individuals who seemed to get wiser with age (Escholz, Bufkin, Long 2011, 305). Also, females and minorities are shown in younger roles than their male/white counterparts in general, which

reinforces “sexist stereotypes that base the value of women on their sexual attractiveness at a young age” (Escholz, Bufkin, Long 2011, 323).

Another remarkable and relevant observation is the fact that the patriarchal family unit is frequently shown as the ideal for women on screen. Their research suggests that female characters are more likely to be married and have children than male characters. As a consequence, such presentations imply that men have the freedom to pursue challenges and attain goals separate from the family, whereas women are expected to perform their roles as wives and mothers, regardless of their career aspirations. “The moral and ethical dilemmas for screen males and females are largely matters of adhering to traditional sex and gender-role expectations.” (Escholz, Bufkin, Long 2011, 306). Thus, these conclusions point out how gender is a factor that greatly contributes to the differences between individuals that are considered to be a part of the same group. They also raise the question of how the gender relations in Japanese film dealing with Zainichi Koreans have been discussed.

Ko’s (2010) research doesn’t focus on Zainichi women’s representations in particular, but she does observe a lack or limited range of representations of Zainichi women. In *Representing the Zainichi: Victim, clown, and super-cool hero* she argues on a final note that, while there has been positive development in Zainichi women’s voices being heard, the roles of Zainichi female characters in films are often minor and limited.

“in the 1980s, there was a dramatic shift in *zainichi*-related politics in which the old, male-centered Korean ethno-nationalism was put in question and women’s political involvement became more active than before. The voices of *zainichi* women who had been silenced for an alleged higher cause of ‘ethnic liberation’ started to come to the surface, questioning power relations not only between the Japanese and the *zainichi* but also between men and women.” (Ko 2010, 169-170)

One of the characteristics she identifies in the representations of Zainichi women is female roles being strongly anchored within “traditional” Korean ethnicity. Zainichi female characters often wear Korean costumes, being confined within the “Korean tradition” and a traditional “ethnic framework”. Another issue is the patriarchal family system and the suffering of women that is being registered but not addressed (Ko 2010, 170). Like Iwabuchi, she recognizes a weakness of the films dealing with Zainichi in the sense that they their “ethnic concerns” overshadow other issues like gender and sexuality (Ko 2010, 170).

More detailed research about female Zainichi characters in film has been conducted by In-Sil Yang in 戦後日本映画における「在日」女性像 *Female Zainichi representation in post-war Japanese film*. Yang (2003) argues that in Japanese film, there is a tendency of Zainichi women, women from the Korean peninsula and women from China appearing in their respective ethnic costumes or in hostess roles. While other authors have criticized *Moon* for its portrayal of the Filipino hostess, they seem to see it as the director’s choice and Zainichi Korean’s stereotyping of newcomers only, while she sees a pattern or problem in the way Japanese films stereotype non-Japanese Asian women (Yang 2003, 36).

Yang (2003) sees Ella Shohat’s research on female minority representation as representative: imperialist views of Latin American, Asian and African women in western films are based on orientalism and lurk constantly. Yang (2003), however, places importance on inequalities within the “East” or “ other” , and wants to disclose Japan’s gendered, colonial, postcolonial and neo-colonial relation to Asia. She considers the relationship between Japanese audiences and the represented Zainichi women as a Japanese orientalism (Yang 2003, 38).

“Zainichi” women in Japanese films have been represented as national symbols of nostalgia for the homeland, and positively appraised for this, which she sees as a model

pattern of Oriental gaze. And, [...] this is a way of covering a problem of the Japanese society's gendering system and ethnic discrimination itself." (Yang 2003, 56)

She analyzes the representations and discourses made through "chima-chogori" (ethnic costume which is a uniform worn by Korean schoolgirls) and the figure of "omoni" (mother). Over several periods and in various genres Zainichi women have been represented in relation to "chima-chogori". So-called self-representational films like *Yun no machi [Yun's Town]* are not an exception (Yang 2003, 39). In the film, "chima-chogori" symbolizes the first generation who had to deal with discrimination and poverty, but also the re-examination of one's own ethnic identity in the case of third generation Zainichi women, connecting them directly to first generation Zainichi (Yang 2003, 41). The dress has become the symbol for Zainichi women and for the (original) ethnic identity that is associated with Korea and Koreans (Yang 2003, 40).

Female Zainichi have also been encoded through usage of certain words like the Korean "aigoo" and other kinds of speech (Yang 2003, 50). The mother figure (or 'omoni' figure) has been portrayed as internalizing Japan's society gaze as a majority towards the minority or newcomers. Because the "chima-chogori" and the "omoni" figure, together with Zainichi women in general represent Zainichi identity, they are seen as something that must be protected in several films (Yang 2003, 49). This manifestation of "chima-chogori" and the "omoni" figure as representation of Zainichi identity is seen by Yang (2003, 47) as the result of the gender bias problems from inside Japan and the Zainichi community. Additionally, she perceives a lack of discussion of Zainichi female representations in films by Japanese film critics, which in her opinion, once again confirms that films are not created one-sidedly but are created based on the collective perception and knowledge that the audience has (Yang 2003, 50). Films like *Moon* may have provided a new kind of representation for (male) Zainichi Koreans as crossing borders and being more individualistic, however female Zainichi representation has remained tied to tradition and ethnic identity and thus have been discussed

less by film critics (Yang 2003, 51). These conclusions will inform my approach to the film *Yakiniku Dragon*.

## Chapter 2: Yakiniku Dragon and Zainichi identity

Keeping in mind that self-representational films and films with minority characters as the main focus can still reproduce preexisting discourses, this chapter explores *Yakiniku Dragon*'s portrayal of Zainichi Koreans. How does *Yakiniku Dragon* (2018) enable us to look at gender and Zainichi identities? *Yakiniku Dragon* is a film about a Zainichi family in the late 1960s, which offers an insightful case to examine the gender dynamics of social mobility and Zainichiness. The film portrays fragmentation in the Zainichi community and conflicting (Zainichi) identities. It is also one of the most recent self-representational works for Zainichi.

The film is based on a written play by Chong Wushin about the life of Zainichi in Osaka during the same time period (Flavin 2014, 17). The play's characters are based on Chong's own experiences as a member of the Zainichi community and his interviews with Zainichi residents who have been evicted in order to build the Osaka International Airport.

“I was seeing history from the perspective of the oppressed, from the standpoint of those who are neglected by our history books. The oppressed and downtrodden are not necessarily innocent and beautiful at heart; they have their ugly sides, too. But I was seeing their stories.” (Noda 2011)

Chong thus wished to give the oppressed in Japanese society a voice through the film. After the play's success, Chong was able to produce a film adaptation with a mixed Japanese and Korean production team. Not only the production is partially Korean, Korean actors Sang-ho Kim (Ryūkichi) and Jeong-eun Lee (omoni) contribute to the film as well. Yet, none of the main actors are of Zainichi heritage.

The story begins in 1969, a Zainichi family and their close friends who live in a hamlet with other Zainichi Koreans are the plot's main focus. The story centers around their daily lives and troubles, which in general seem to be about marriage in the case of the ladies, and the

family's son Tokio has to deal with bullying at high school. Most scenes take place in the family's combined home and *yakiniku* (grilled meat) restaurant. Throughout the film, the risk of being evicted stays present, as the hamlet is considered state owned land, even if father Ryūkichi repeatedly says that he bought the land they occupy by himself from a Japanese acquaintance. Philip Flavin (2014, 28) sees the play's shifts between tragedy and comedy and the focus on Zainichi as a reflection of "Chong's own attitudes toward life and his desire to highlight the Korean-Japanese experience as a minority abandoned by both Japan and Korea."

Overall, the film can be interpreted as trying to bring awareness to the invisibility of Zainichi and their hardships and it may serve as a way to preserve the memories of the Zainichi community in times where Zainichi stand out less in Japanese society (Flavin 2014, 29). It may also provide Japanese and Zainichi audiences with an image of what reality looked like for some Zainichi and the fragmented nature of the community. Flavin (2014, 27) sees the invisibility of Zainichi in this period as an overarching theme of the play *Yakiniku Dragon*, and the same can be said for the film. Although having lost his arm in the war, Ryūkichi's service is never recognized by the Japanese government. The government also hasn't provided the Korean population with a place to go, leaving them to live in hamlets and ghettos. Furthermore, after the family's eviction, they haven't been reimbursed in any significant way for the loss of their homes. Regardless of educational attainment, the family isn't able to achieve much social mobility. It's as if they don't exist in Japanese society.

Tokio, the youngest and only son of the family narrates the story. He begins by saying he hates the town and the people in it and afterwards introduces his family to the audience. He has three elder sisters, Shizuka, Rika and Mika. Mika is the third eldest sister and is mostly seen with her lover, mister Hasegawa, who already has a wife. His wife is considerably older and is a sponsor of the nightclub Hasegawa works in and Mika wants to perform in. The second eldest sister, Rika, is introduced while we see her verbally fighting with her husband to be Tetsuo, an

image that returns throughout the film. The oldest sister, Shizuka is handicapped as a result of a leg injury and walks with a limp. Tetsuo is also Shizuka's childhood friend, and he still has feelings for her. All three daughters are able to understand Korean to some extent, however Mika speaks Korean fluently. It remains unclear whether Tokio has the ability to speak Korean.

“Omoni” (Young-Soon) is introduced as the first person of authority, not just of the children, but she is also being referred to as “omoni” or “okāchan” (mother in Japanese) by other visitors of their restaurant “*Yakiniku Dragon*”. Their father Ryūkichi (or Yong-Gil) , who is being referred to as “aboji” (father in Korean) or “otōchan” (father in Japanese), misses an arm. Omoni and Ryūkichi both have had a previous marriage; Shizuka and Rika are from Ryūkichi's former marriage and Mika is from omoni's former marriage. Tokio is the only child to come out of omoni and Ryūkichi's marriage. The film takes the audience through decisive moments in the lives of the family and their acquaintances across a period of a few years that inform the audience about what it means to be Zainichi.

### **Zainichi identity**

How does the film engage with differing and overlapping experiences of being Zainichi like the experience of physical, psychological, geographical and cultural displacement? The film noticeably incorporates various scenes that deal with what it means to be Zainichi, with some of them being based on Chong's own experiences. The film can be said to attempt to portray the diversity of subjective positions, social experience and cultural identities, which have gained more prominence in the “politics of representation”. This chapter will make use of translations of the play's script by Flavin (2014) in discussing some of the scenes themed with what can broadly be considered Zainichi experiences. In the scenes described below, the characters talk about the relationship between Japan and Korea, Zainichi's sense of security, their job opportunities, education, culture and their position in Japanese society.



The family is characterized as different from the rest of Japanese society when Ryūkichi first appears on the screen and scolds everybody for being loud. He says: “We are in Japan, don’t speak with a loud voice”, hinting at their non-Japanese background. Throughout the film, Japanese alternates with Korean, which hints at Zainichi’s ambiguous cultural identity, that is being Korean in a Japanese setting. Their difference is also established in scenes that refer to their position in Japanese society:

#### 1. Zainichi as the embodiment of a contradiction

Zainichi have faced and may be subjected to various kinds of discrimination, of which *Yakiniku Dragon* offers some examples. Tokio, who has a more reserved role in the story, is bullied by Japanese children at his school. Hence, in the film, he is mostly seen trying to skip school. After having been bullied and abused at school once again, he creates a fuss at home, screaming and fighting against his family members.

Tetsuo: Aboji, you lost your arm in the war, didn’t you? Even with that experience, you still want your son to have a Japanese education?

[...]

All these contradictions... that are the Zainichi. We are subjected to prejudice and discrimination, we despise Japan and long for Korea, but we can’t leave this place...

Shinkichi: Well, that’s obvious! What would we do for work if we did return to Korea? Most of us don’t speak Korean all that well.

Tetsuo: It’s the tearful tale of the Zainichi: in one hand, money; in the other, tears.

[...]

Ryūkichi:      Running away is not an answer. This is where have to live. There's no place for us to go... This is all we have...

In this scene, we see that the meaning of being Zainichi is articulated by Tetsuo as an experience of “in-betweenness”, residing in Japan but feeling neither Korean, nor Japanese. Resentment for Japanese society and desire for the homeland that is “Korea” is also expressed: Tetsuo seems to find it strange that even though Ryūkichi fought for the Japanese empire (that has oppressed Koreans) in the war and even lost an arm, he still prefers Japanese education for his son. Tetsuo longs for Korea, but also seems to be aware that they don't have the means to return and earn a living in Korea. This desire for the homeland is seen as one of the characteristics of the first generation of Zainichi and a phenomenon that can mostly be attributed to first generation migrants in general. In diasporic communities, a lack of acceptance and or overt prejudice by the host country often strengthen the attachment to the homeland and the commitment to inevitably return (Chapman 2004, 36). Second- and third-generation Zainichi however, have established themselves in Japan, where friends (Japanese friends among them) and relatives also reside. In addition, there would be no reason for them to “return” to the “homeland” where they are not literate, culturally and linguistically speaking (Chapman 2004, 36). From the late 1970s almost 80% of the Zainichi population did not know, or at least had very little knowledge of, the homeland (Chapman 2004, 31).

Generational differences like these and “in-betweenness” are also seen in the degree to which the daughters and Tokio use Korean. Whereas the daughters speak a little Korean now and then, Tokio only uses Japanese. Furthermore, the family's treatment of newcomers or “direct import” as they are called by Tetsuo, also exposes their difference from more recent Korean immigrants. One of Shizuka's love interests is a Korean man who has just arrived to Japan and works in the same factory as Shizuka. His lack of knowledge of the Japanese language among other things greatly irritates Tetsuo. These generational differences and also

the differences in length of residence in Japan point to the fragmentation in the community and Zainichi being more “Japanese” than more recent Korean immigrants. As mentioned before, discussions about “becoming Japanese” have taken place in the Zainichi community, with efforts being made towards a “third way” of being Zainichi. This “third way” defines Zainichi identity more as hybrid, diverse and fluid (Weiner 2009, 171) and located in different spaces, instead of the essentialized and polarized Japanese and Korean national divide (Chapman 2004, 42).

As shown through this scene, the binary relationship between Japanese and Koreans is a big element in *Yakiniku Dragon*. While this binary relationship is apparent throughout the film, the family’s and Zainichi’s “Japaneseness” also becomes apparent through their interactions with Japanese and more recent Korean immigrants. In addition to their ethnicity, what is the cause of this feeling of “in-betweenness” and how does it manifest itself during Zainichi’s stay in Japan?

One source of the feeling of unbelonging is Zainichi’s inability to return to Korea. While there are various reasons one cannot return to Korea, the film addresses the family’s inability to return to Korea through a scene in which Ryūkichi tells his story to Hasegawa after he asks for Mika’s hand in marriage.

## 2. Returning to Korea

Planning on returning to Korea (Jeju Island) after fighting for Japan in the war, the boat with all their belongings sunk and the Jeju Uprising (or Jeju Massacre) thwarted his plans once again as his town was destroyed, and his family killed. Thereafter, the Korean War began and he met his second wife before they had Tokio.

Ryūkichi: I worked more . . . for my daughters and my son . . . I worked and I worked and I worked . . . and when I had a chance to think, I realized that I am now an old man . . . I have given up on my dreams of returning to Korea, to my home . . . it's so close . . . and yet far . . . impossibly far away . . . That is my . . . life . . . my fate . . . My daughters . . . they have their lives . . . I want them to be happy . . . for me as well, I want them to be happy...

“国境は近い、けど遠い。ものすごく遠い”, “the border is so close, yet so far away.

Impossibly far away.” Ryūkichi’s story is characteristic for Zainichi who planned on returning to Korea after the Second World War but decided to stay in Japan because of financial reasons and the fact that they did not have a home and or family to return to. The family lost everything, forcing them to remain in Japan, which emulates the author’s own family story (Flavin 2014, 26). It remains unclear what role omoni played in providing the finances to return to Korea. Another aspect that isn’t touched upon in the film, but might have posed troubles for some Zainichi, is the consequences of having fought for the Japanese empire in the war. The question is how Koreans and other Zainichi regard those who voluntarily or involuntarily have fought for their oppressors.

While returning to Korea poses difficulties, staying in Japan is also troubling. “In-betweenness” manifests itself in the contradictory treatment of Zainichi in Japanese society. Invisibility but also visibility shape Zainichi’s experiences. Omoni expresses her frustration of not being able to trust anybody in Japanese society when it comes to the security of their family, as she feels that nobody but their own family can protect Tokio from being bullied.

Tetsuo: Omoni, he won’t be able to survive being mild-mannered.

Omoni: Be quiet! Who did this to you? Tell me. I'll go right now and complain.  
I'll give them a piece of my mind.

Mika: If you do that, they're only going to tease him more.

Omoni: If we don't watch out for ourselves, who will? The school? The police?  
We can't trust anybody!

Zainichi's sense of being invisible in society is addressed here. They live in a hamlet, fairly segregated from non-Zainichi Japanese. The family feels like it can't trust anybody and has to protect itself. This comes as no surprise with policies preventing Zainichi from obtaining various forms of social welfare and obligating them to register their fingerprints (etc.) until the 1990s, when a new category of "special permanent residence" was created to unify the status of all permanent residents (Chapman 2004, 39-40).

Feeling invisible and unprotected is, however, at the same time also contradicted by Zainichi's hardship in gaining social mobility, which points out a certain (negative) visibility of Zainichi in Japanese society. Koreans who stayed in Japan after the war were largely self-employed. Struggle with finding an employment at an appropriate educational level is discussed in the film through the following scene.

### 3. Kimchi is kimchi

Rika enters the house as she sees Tetsuo and other acquaintances sitting inside, hanging around. She gets mad at Tetsuo for hanging around while she is working outside in the heat. They get into an argument about him not having a job and it is suggested that despite having graduated from university, Tetsuo still hasn't been able to get employed because of his Korean ethnicity.

Rika: Do you understand that we're scraping by? Can't you find the time to  
apply for a job?

Tetsuo: Are you saying that I should look after/take care of pigs after graduating university?

Rika: Your academic background isn't some kind of medal. From head to toe, we are Koreans. Even if our faces are the same as the Japanese, our status is kimchi.

Tetsuo: I'm bottled kimchi, no? So, am I not a bit more high class?

Rika: Kimchi is Kimchi! You're the only one that thinks you are special. Don't look down on other Koreans. Don't make fun of us.

Tetsuo: Will you shut up!

Rika: Talk proudly after you've found a proper job! What? Do you have a complaint?

Shizuka interrupts the conversation and tries to calm Rika down, saying that there will surely be a job appropriate for Tetsuo, and that she should be patient. Rika dismisses Shizuka and tells her sister not to meddle, as this is a problem between husband and wife, addressing the underlying tension between Rika and Shizuka over their relationship with Tetsuo, but also the supposed duties of husband and wife.

What we see in this scene, is a discussion between the characters about whether Koreans with a higher education are able to find a job in Japan more easily and hence are of a higher "status". In the scene, Rika contends they both are Koreans "from head to toe". Tetsuo sees himself as bottled kimchi, thus of a higher quality than regular kimchi. Kimchi is one of the main side dishes of the Korean cuisine and is seen as a cultural symbol of Korean national identity (Cho 2007, 225). In this scene, and throughout the film, kimchi becomes a metaphor for (Zainichi) Koreans. Rika thinks that there is no difference between Zainichi Koreans who

are highly educated and those who are not, kimchi will always be kimchi, whether it's canned or not. She realizes that their ethnicity will prevent them from improving their class, regardless of educational attainment.

Despite gaining an education Zainichi were often unable to improve their socio-economic status. While Zainichi Koreans were granted the right of permanent residence in 1965, the Japanese government erected and maintained various legal and institutional barriers that restricted Zainichi's opportunities in the areas of political participation, ethnic education, social welfare and public employment (Kim 2008, 876). Furthermore, prejudice against Koreans made it difficult for Koreans to get employed for desirable jobs at Japanese companies, which made Koreans accept displeasing, dirty and low-paying (3Ks) "low-status" jobs. From the 1960s onwards, the growing Japanese economy and labor shortages provided Koreans with better job opportunities. Some were able to achieve considerable economic success, namely in *pachinko* (gambling parlors), restaurants, money-lending and other self-employed businesses (Kim 2008, 880). The family being employed in a "*yakiniku*" (grilled meat) restaurant in this film is characteristic for the restricted opportunities Zainichi had. Even though Ryūkichi and omoni's educational background isn't specified, intergenerational upper social mobility doesn't seem to be the case for the family in the film, with the daughters working in factories and helping out in the yakiniku restaurant.

Although the family makes an effort to give their children a Japanese education, assimilation makes Zainichi's stay both easier and difficult. In the film, a discussion about Japanese education follows after Shinkichi (a friend of the family) mentions that Tokio not attending his famous private school seems like a waste of money. Ryūkichi contends that they will always be living in Japan and that the Japanese educational system is for the best, seemingly not realizing or caring that he's helping to maintain a system that is against his own people. The aspect of assimilation in Zainichi's lives is addressed in this scene through Ryūkichi's belief

that Tokio should attend a Japanese school. By attending a Japanese school, Tokio goes along with the “system”, but it also exposes his marginality. Later on, it becomes clear that Tokio has to redo the whole year as a result of his truancy habit. Omoni asks Ryūkichi once again if they shouldn’t let him transfer to another or (Korean) ethnic school. The situation becomes fatal as Tokio hears his dad once again say that he should go to a Japanese school, because they are in Japan and will continue to stay there. Tokio flees to the spot he usually goes to, however this time, we see him standing on a bridge and ultimately, he commits suicide by jumping in the river. The death of Tokio shocks his family and his death can be seen as a sacrifice made by the family and can be seen as a symbol of the effects of the contradiction that is Zainichi having been born in Japan but having feelings of unbelonging.

With the passing of time, projects have been set up by the Japanese and Korean governments to encourage Zainichi’s remigration, which have also been incorporated in *Yakiniku Dragon*’s plot. In a scene, Shizuka and Taesu celebrate their engagement at *Yakiniku Dragon*, however a drunk Tetsuo disturbs the scene. Tetsuo and Rika get into a fight and Tetsuo confesses his love for Shizuka, which results in Tetsuo and Shizuka’s now fiancée getting into a big fight. Tetsuo finally explains his abrupt confession and says that he will be repatriating to North Korea and wants Shizuka to come with him. The film ends with the family becoming dispersed, as Rika and her new lover move to South Korea, Tetsuo and Shizuka repatriate to North Korea, and Mika and Hasegawa, who have opened a small business, stay in Japan. Omoni and Ryūkichi decide to stay in Japan, however their future remains unknown as they leave the hamlet with their belongings on a trailer.

The couples’ migration to North and South Korea is part of a repatriation project supported by the Japanese Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Flavin (2014, 27) sees the impact on the Zainichi population returning to the Korean Peninsula as the political implications of the thirty-eight parallel in which the Zainichi population become



political pawns between North and South Korea. Regardless of the project's humanitarian motives, Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2009, 56) also contends that the free choices of those who left were constrained and shaped by their vulnerable position in society, misinformation surrounding the repatriation process and power relationships within families (patriarchy). As a result, Zainichi have been migrating and remigrating from and to both Koreas and Japan, looking for better living conditions and reunion with family (Kim 2005, 118, 127).

In the early stages Zainichi's decision to repatriate to North Korea were influenced by the DPRK's propaganda starting late 1950s, throwing its full weight behind a mass repatriation from Japan, publicly offering transport, free housing and welfare to returnees (Morris-Suzuki 2009, 51). Chongryun also promoted repatriation through marches, education campaigns in Chongryun-affiliated schools and the association's newspaper, promoting the prospects awaiting returnees (Morris-Suzuki 2009, 52). Tetsuo and Shizuka, however, repatriate in 1971, a time in which actual daily life conditions in North Korea had come to light through letters of returnees sent to relatives and friends in Japan. Tetsuo decision to repatriate seems to have been made out of affiliation with socialism, as his friend Shinkichi warns him that it would be well to see the letters that have come back from the North and the Japanese government's temporal suspension of repatriation to the North as a sign not to go.

The scenes described above are an example of the way the *Yakiniku Dragon* deals with Zainichi identity issues through portraying feelings caused by various kinds of displacements, assimilation, prejudice and discrimination and repatriation. They depict the contradictions of being both invisible and visible in Japanese society and the challenges that derive from these contradictions. The film shows tropes that are often present in films that include Zainichi, as it victimizes the family. It does, however, also show intergenerational differences. *Moon*, which has also been co-written by Chong has been criticized for its portrayal of other minorities in Japanese society and its lack of female perspective, hence, the next chapter will explore the way

male and female characters and Zainichi identity interact in *Yakiniku Dragon* to evaluate the degree to which the film recognizes the diversity of Zainichi experiences and positionings.

## Chapter 3: Gendered Zainichiness

### **Masculinity**

Interpreting Zainichi struggles like problems with assimilation, prejudice and identity through a gender lens gives us an idea of how (Zainichi) masculinity takes shape in *Yakiniku Dragon*.

According to Steve Neale (1983), every film tends to assume and actively work to renew the orders of gender, sexuality and social identity and authority marking patriarchal society.

“Every film thus tends to specify identification in accordance with the socially defined and constructed categories of male and female.” (Neale 1983, 5). This relates to Escholz, Bufkin and Long’s (2011) research mentioned in chapter one, which pointed out that the roles men and women are expected to perform adhere to traditional sex and gender-role expectations as the result of the patriarchal family unit being frequently shown as the ideal for women on screen.

In contemporary European and American societies, masculinity is perceived as going through a crisis and has become the subject of debate in psychoanalytical cultural studies, according to Caroline Bainbridge and Candida Yates (2005, 300). “This “crisis in masculinity” and its associated anxieties have often been linked to an alleged feminization of society and the feminization of men’s values and behavior”: boundaries between masculinity and femininity are increasingly becoming blurred, and the values, practices and traits associated with “femininity” are extended to men and are increasingly dominant throughout contemporary society (Bainbridge, Yates 2005, 301). As a result, “the old hegemonic fictions of masculinity become increasingly untenable in the postmodern climate, prompting ever greater insecurities and emptying out of the sureties of hegemonic masculinity.” (Bainbridge, Yates 2005, 302). While masculinity, according to Bainbridge and Yates (2005, 302-303) “is, and has always been, unstable,” popular cinema, continues to play an important role in the articulation of

psychic and cultural anxieties around masculinity and the implied loss of the privileged position of traditional modes of heterosexual masculinity.

Most importantly Bainbridge and Yates (2005, 303) refer to the increasing discourses about male suffering and its representation in film being analogous to a hysterical defense against the losses of masculinity. According to them, the dilemmas of the traumatized male subject have become a recurring theme of contemporary cinema (Bainbridge, Yates 2005, 304). These new flawed representations of men that can suggest new, more nuanced and complex modes of masculinity, however, maintain elements of the more traditional patriarchal formation of masculinity and are often at the cost of representations of women: “The presence of women in the texts is often marginalized in relation to the portrayal of the “new” man, who enviously colonizes the cultural space of sexual difference formerly occupied by women.” (Bainbridge, Yates 2005, 304).

Even if Bainbridge and Yates’ (2005) arguments apply to Western and Hollywood cinema, they are also applicable to non-western cinema. With multiple female characters and a clear focus on the family, *Yakiniku Dragon* enables us to look at power relationships and masculinity by using a gender lens. This chapter will explore the gendered division of labor and themes that are attributed to the male and female characters and its implication for the way Zainichiness is portrayed in the film. Whereas both male and female characters in the film have lines that describe their view of Zainichi identity, it is mostly the men that we see struggling with this identity in the film. We may discover how masculinity plays a role in these struggles and why it are the men in particular that are dealing with these issues. Taking into account the positioning of women in Japanese society vis-à-vis men’s positioning or the gender bias problems inside Japan and the Zainichi community Yang (2003) refers to, should we see “in-betweenness” among Zainichi women as different from men’s “in-betweenness”? Is “Zainichiness” and “in-betweenness” gendered?

## Employment

One of the ways in which socially defined and constructed categories of male and female are renewed in *Yakiniku Dragon*, is through the division of labor and employment. Having a good job is implicitly linked to being a good man or husband by the women in the family multiple times throughout the film, like in the kimchi is kimchi scene. Being Zainichi, however, poses difficulties in finding a job in Japanese society. Noticeably, men speak the most about employment discrimination in the film, hinting at a division of labor. If regular employment is linked to masculinity, employment discrimination is implicitly also linked to a male Zainichi “in-betweenness”. This division of labor also implies that Zainichi women who are tied to their husbands financially, will take into consideration their own finances and are influenced to accept their husband’s decision to stay or repatriate, making their feelings of not belonging (whether in Japan or the Koreas) different from that of men.

Another way in which Zainichi identity is gendered in *Yakiniku Dragon*, is through the bearing of bullying and prejudice. It is no coincidence that we see Tokio, the only son, being subjected to bullying and ending his life. He can be seen as a symbol for Zainichi and their hardships, dying as a result of harsh conditions in Japanese society, or as a symbol of the helplessness some Zainichi feel regarding their living conditions. This portrayal of men as a symbol for the community and in a sense as political agents, can be related to what Seungsook Moon (1998) calls the “androcentric discourse of national history and tradition in South Korea”. According to Moon (1998, 57), nationalist discourse on Korean history and tradition suggests that Korea’s industrialization brings forth a highly gendered process of societal transformation, in and by which women are assigned subordinate positions in the nation. Namely, men are regarded as the creative actors and legitimate citizens, who inherit the nation and defend it (as soldiers for example), whereas women are reproductive and domestic beings who can only contribute their bodies in building and developing the masculine nation.

The way Zainichi men are expected to fight and or struggle (for the community) shines through in a scene in which Ryūkichi says that they (the family) have no choice but to live and fight in Japan even if Tokio gets bullied:

Ryūkichi: We're in Japan. We have to fight for everything. You can't lose heart at something as trivial as teasing...

Although Tokio might not be portrayed as a hero explicitly, his portrayal indicates Zainichi men's sacrifice. Him being bullied may also be seen as a testing of his masculinity. Neale (1983) contends that in mainstream cinema, in its assumption of a male norm, perspective and look, women and the female image are not investigated in the same way as men and the male image are: women are a problem, a source of anxiety and thus investigated, whereas men are tested. Masculinity is a known ideal, femininity, by contrast, is a mystery. Like mentioned before, Tetsuo tells omoni not to be too gentle towards Tokio, or he won't survive. Thus, enduring bullying may be seen as a test of Tokio's masculinity. Tokio being subjected to bullying may also be interpreted in accord with Bainbridge and Yates' (2005) research as an expression of the beforementioned anxiety regarding the loss of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, portraying Tokio as a traumatized male subject.

Ryūkichi himself is also portrayed as a kind of hero, having both his arm and his son being taken by Japan. In an emotional scene, Ryūkichi expresses his anger towards two Japanese officials who have, once again, come to notify him about him occupying state owned land. Weeping and collapsing to the ground, Ryūkichi cries:

Ryūkichi: (In Korean) Is it your intention to take everything I own? [...] Give me back my arm! Give it back to me! And...and... give me back my son.

Sacrificing his arm and his son, Ryūkichi is depicted as a traumatized male victim.

Lastly, Zainichi men are appointed more as political agents in the sense that male characters like Ryūkichi and Tetsuo repeatedly talk about Korea as a homeland and express a wish to return or migrate. In contrast, we don't hear the female characters talking explicitly about what Korea means to them and if they wish to return, making the homeland (and the community) more of a men's issue. Therefore, the film marginalizes Zainichi women's experiences and their role in the Zainichi community.

### **Female Zainichi themes**

Focusing on the female characters in the film, a big presence in the film is omoni, who is an authority, but at the same time, the family answers to Ryūkichi. As mentioned in chapter one, Yang (2003) sees a pattern of Zainichi women in general and the "omoni" figure being portrayed as the keepers and symbols of Zainichi identity. In *Yakiniku Dragon*, the "chima-chogori" doesn't make an entrance, however, we see omoni wanting to refrain her daughters from marrying a Japanese man, and she also prefers Tokio going to a Korean ethnic school to protect him from bullying, which can ultimately be interpreted as a way of preserving Zainichiness. This implied preservation of Zainichiness omoni seems to aspire to relates to what Ann McClintock (1991, 105) identifies as one of the ways women relate to the nation. Women serve as reproducers of the boundaries of the nation, by accepting or refusing sexual intercourse or marriage with prescribed groups of men.

Overall, it can be said that, rather than employment or discrimination, all three daughters' main concern in the movie is their love life and marriage. The underlying rivalry between Shizuka and Rika over Tetsuo points to the sisters' main concern being marriage and finding a husband. Marriage is one of the main themes that is limited to female characters in the sense that it seems to shape their identity more than that of the male characters. Generational differences are also apparent in the way the daughters handle divorce. Rika intends to divorce from Tetsuo and doesn't seem to care about societal expectations, while Mika sees no problems

in marrying a divorced Japanese man. In contrast, omoni seems to view divorce as a more taboo subject, which is exemplary of first generation Zainichi who tended to have arranged marriages and remained with their husbands until they passed (Kim 2005).

The eldest daughter Shizuka is troubled about being able to get married being that she is handicapped and decides to let a newcomer Korean (Taesu) pursue her. Noticing this, omoni has a talk with Shizuka about potential marriage candidates. Noticeably, the sisters and their mother have more scenes with each other, whereas Tokio mostly has private conversations with his father.

#### 4. Good-for-nothing men

Omoni: Are you going out with that person?

Look, you're a beautiful girl. There's any number of men out there for you.

Shizuka: Taesu's a good man. What don't you like about him?

Omoni: Men like this fair-weather friend of yours are useless.

You're oblivious to all the good men around you. There's no reason to rush into things.

Shizuka: Shinkichi, for example?

Omoni: Dear God, no!

That idiot is far from having a successful career.

Shizuka: How about Abe? Or Sasaki?

Omoni: Good-for-nothing Japanese, like those two? Completely out of the question.



All of the men in this neighborhood are completely useless. Sloths in human clothing. They do nothing.

Of course, you should never tell them that I said anything like that...

Shinkichi: Omoni, we've heard every word of it.

Omoni keeps mentioning the importance of having a successful career and “doing something” in order to be seen as a potential marriage candidate for Shizuka. This points to marriage being a tool for Zainichi women in order to gain more social mobility, whereas men aspire social mobility through employment. Jackie Kim's (2005) documentation of the lives of first generation Korean women in Japan confirms this statement, with young Korean women or girls having been forced into having arranged marriages by their families, usually before following their husbands to Japan.

The educational attainment level of the sisters is not clearly stated, however Shizuka and Rika seem to be working in a factory. Regardless of economic and class factors for Zainichi in Japan in general, Moon's (1998) theory about Korea's gendered industrialization can apply to Zainichi women working in factories and them stressing the importance of having a well-paid job for potential marriage candidates. It fits in with a nationalist discourse in which women cannot be full members of the nation as reproductive and domestic beings and are thus incorporated into the process of industrialization as “cheap” labor (which cannot transform their primary identity as domestic beings) (Moon 1998, 57).

What does this gendered division of labor and gendered Zainichiness mean and what kind of implications does it have? Representing the issue of Zainichi identity, bullying and discrimination as the issues of Zainichi men, subordinates women's issues to that of the men. It says something about “nationhood”; men as citizens and heroes of the nation and women as reproducers and caregivers of the men and the nation. While *Yakiniku Dragon* sheds light on

different Zainichi identities, it also ties masculinity to the nation, underexposing women's voices when it comes to being Zainichi and their relationship with Japan and Korea. Like mentioned before, "ethnic concerns" are given more priority, even in "self-representational" films, limiting and overshadowing aspects of gender and the representation of Zainichi women.

The film mainly portrays Zainichi men's fight and sacrifices that have been made by the first generations of Zainichi men. This portrayal erases or underexposes first generation Zainichi women's narratives, who not only had to deal with discrimination and prejudice when looking for job opportunities for example, but also had to deal with harsh treatment by husbands, family in law and others in their personal lives. Kim's (2005) oral histories of first generation Zainichi Korean women show that first generation Zainichi women grappled with multilayered structures of gendered, colonial, ethnic, and socioeconomic relations of power. Male-dominated writings by first and second generation Zainichi highlighted women as "the figure of the suffering, oppressed, abused, yet all-loving mother, sacrificing to support a violent husband's drinking and gambling while raising children as proper and proud Koreans under hostile conditions." (Kim 2005 xx). Her documented life stories, however, also include betrayal and exploitation outside the orthodox discourse of colonial oppression and furthermore, highlight personal triumphs and accomplishments in overcoming dehumanizing conditions associated both with Japanese society and familial life (2005, xxi).

Ryang (1998) argues that the orthodox nationalist discourse of colonial displacement of Koreans in Japan undermines other (women's) experiences of the colonial past. Women's experience with violence from their husbands or in-laws in "the strictly patriarchal and patrilineal kinship system of traditional Korea, and in its transplanted version in Japan" lies outside of the orthodox discourse of colonial oppression that highlights forced labor mobilization as the totalizing and authentic past of Zainichi (Kim 2005, xxi). Meanwhile, first generation Korean women in Japan can be seen as not only part of a diaspora, but also as

refugees in their own homes and families, as their even their domestic position was marginalized by the kinship system (Kim 2005, xxv).

This “orthodox discourse of colonial oppression” that highlights forced labor mobilization as the authentic past of Zainichi, can be linked with the beforementioned (see Introduction) collective identity the Zainichi community is said to have created as a form of resistance. However, this discourse of colonial oppression may be compared to a type of nationalism that constructs gender difference, only symbolically including women into the “national body politic” (Ann McClintock 105). This orthodox discourse of colonial oppression is also conveyed in “self-representational” *Yakiniku Dragon*, and thus prioritizes “ethnic concerns”, only symbolically portraying Zainichi women as national (Zainichi) citizens. Seeing that representations structure the audience’s worldviews, shaping real-life assumptions and understandings of history, bringing awareness to the inadequate degree to which Zainichi women are portrayed as political agents is significant.

## Conclusion

Through an examination of the portrayal of Zainichiness in *Yakiniku Dragon*, it becomes clear that Zainichiness and their “in-betweenness” is gendered. Women and men’s different positioning in Japanese society makes Zainichi’s experience of being displaced geographically, culturally, and psychologically diverse. Leaving out this diversity in (self-representational) film refrains Zainichi’s women’s voices from being heard and does not contribute to a more diverse portrayal of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities, which self-representation implicitly aspires.

*Yakiniku Dragon* is a movie about an ethnic minority that is accessible to the mainstream and that deals with various life experiences of Zainichi families. The downside is, however, that the film simultaneously condones patriarchy, showing the complexity of representation. Chong wished to convey some of Zainichi’s stories and give the oppressed a voice. While the film also incorporates tropes like victimized Zainichi and the “omoni” figure, these struggles become evident. However, upon a closer look and after some analysis, there are more layers that come to light, namely the film’s reduction of male Zainichi struggles to gaining social mobility through assimilation to Japanese society (and masculinity) and employment vis-à-vis female Zainichi whose struggles are reduced to gaining social mobility through remaining “Korean” (marrying a Korean) and sticking to “tradition”.

Keeping in mind its (mainly Japanese) audience and the system in which the film was produced, it comes as no surprise that certain stories are less suitable for big productions. Nonetheless, if we consider the oral histories documented by Kim, the gendered experience of being Zainichi and experienced “in-betweenness” is only touched upon superficially, leaving out experiences of first generation Zainichi women whose family/home situation was far from the one displayed

in *Yakiniku Dragon*. Thus, it contributes to a view of Zainichi women as passive figures, remaining true to Korean “tradition” and implicitly erases them as national (Zainichi) citizens.

Zainichi women’s portrayals reveal the power discrepancy between Zainichi men and women and as representations can have real-life consequences, these portrayals do not help Zainichi women in gaining more influence in Zainichi (identity) politics. Considering the lack of Zainichi women’s recognition in the discussion of Zainichi history, *Yakiniku Dragon* neglects a group it may have been trying to empower.

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