

The Presentation of the Korean Self with Everyday Food: Negotiating “Koreanness” through Kimchi Diplomacy in Contemporary Japan

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This study explores domestic cultural diplomacy efforts to brand “Koreanness” using kimchi as a medium of civic movement for minority awareness and intercultural dialogue in Japan. Amid current global consumption trends, popular Korean dishes, including kimchi, have become diffused among the many other international dishes appropriated in Japan. Once negatively regarded in Japan as immigrants’ food that symbolized ethnic Koreans’ marginalization, many now consider kimchi to be a comfort food. Although some Korean residents perceive kimchi’s popularity in Japan as a sign of reduced skepticism toward and gradual acceptance of Koreanness and Korean residents in Japanese society, many Koreans approach kimchi as a medium through which they express their Koreanness and negotiate their position as an ethnic minority in relation to Japan’s “homogeneous” national identity. Discussions surrounding the production and consumption of kimchi in Japan reveal the delicate negotiations at play in the Korean minority’s assertion of *proper* Koreanness in Japan. Based on ethnographic work conducted among Korean communities in western Japan, this study investigates the performative and preservation efforts that the Korean community undertakes to sustain their ethnicity while becoming an increasingly integral part of Japanese society.

Keywords: Zainichi Korean, kimchi, cultural diplomacy, self-representation, soft activism

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