

THE CENTRE FOR KOREAN RESEARCH PROUDLY PRESENTS

Impression Management of School Uniform Culture in Korea: From Colonial Modernity to New Korean Wave



Professor Kyunghee Pyun

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Kyunghee Pyun is associate professor of art history at the Fashion Institute of Technology, State University of New York. Her scholarship focuses on the history of collecting, the reception of Asian art, diasporic Asian artists, and Asian American visual culture. She wrote *Fashion, Identity, Power in Modern Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) discussing modernized dress in the early 20th-century and is working on school uniforms in East Asia. As an independent curator, she has collaborated with contemporary artists in New York since 2013. Her recent project, *Invisible Nomads & Weavers: The Yörüks, Bakerwals & Changpas* is part of her visual ethnographic research on the impact of migration and globalization on nomadic communities of weavers and farmers of Pashmina goats in Central Asia. She is currently working on a book titled *School Uniforms in East Asia: Fashioning Statehood and Self*. As a curator and a critic, she has served on many contemporary art and design competitions, held internationally.

Thursday, February 4, 2021 at 5PM [PST]

Register at: <https://ckr.iar.ubc.ca/thursday-february-4/>



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Using sociologist Erving Goffman's theory of "impression management," this paper explores how students in Korea have interacted with other students, authorities, and their communities. A mandatory school uniform policy was applied to all schools from the early twentieth century to the 1970s. A brief period of deregulated school uniform policy in the mid 1980s was succeeded by consumer-centered fashionable uniforms, linked to fashion photography in teen magazines. This talk is part of a larger book project which surveys changing meanings and symbols of school uniforms in East Asian countries during the throbbing process of modernization, industrialization, and globalization. Applying the sociological methodologies of impression management, this paper analyzes process and meaning in the mundane interaction of students dressed in school uniforms. It is argued that performance in the process of accepting, resisting, and consuming sartorial regulations of a school community existed regardless of the mental state of the individual. Standardization of daily attire had a great impact on the formation and the performance of one's identity. With the increasing income gap among the diminishing middle class and the ultra-wealthy, students attending brand-name private schools proudly present themselves in tailored school uniforms or style their school uniforms with expensive accessories. Is a school uniform a necessity or a form of entitlement? How do uniforms violate a wearer's bodily integrity? How do wearers internalize or fight off restrictions with emphasis upon conformity and modesty? A "close reading" of reproduced images in printed media such as magazines, advertisements, and propaganda posters provides clues to these questions.

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