



“Zainichi Cinema” in a Global Frame: Apple TV+’s *Pachinko* (2022) and the Cosmopolitan Middlebrow

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Abstract

In March 2022, streaming platform Apple TV+ released *Pachinko*, a much-anticipated adaptation of Min Jin Lee’s novel of the same name that follows a Korean family across four generations to explore the interstices of colonial Korean, Zainichi Korean (literally “Koreans in Japan”), and Asian American experiences. Spearheaded by Asian American executive producers, writers, and filmmakers, and featuring a majority Asian cast primarily speaking Japanese and Korean, the drama has been hailed as the biggest multilingual spectacle (with a per-episode budget estimated at \$6.5m), a champion of minority representation in Hollywood, and the latest Korean media content to attain global circulation, but curiously sidelining existing debates on Zainichi screen images in Japan. Taking *Pachinko* as a case study, this paper examines the challenges and the promises of studying “Zainichi cinema,” or the discursive construct surrounding Zainichi Korean screen narratives, within a global frame. Drawing on the model of transpacific studies, I first historicize the Zainichi cinema debates within the marginalization-in-Japan framework of Japanese studies and the Koreanness-in-dispersal framework of Korean studies before engaging, via *Pachinko*, with the additional frames of Asian American studies and global media studies. In the second half of the paper, I turn to formal analysis, exploring the series’ unique use of parallel editing and subtitles, which constitutes what I call the cosmopolitan middlebrow style, addressing the globe’s rising middleclass. Ultimately, I argue that *Pachinko* calls for a global reframing of Zainichi studies, not because of Hollywood’s supposed universal appeal, but because of the multiplicity of reading positions the series addresses, thus effectively rendering every viewer a partial stranger vis-à-vis the story world.

Keywords

Pachinko, Exilic and Diasporic Cinema, Global Media, Cosmopolitanism, Transpacific Studies

Let us begin with a publicity photograph that appeared ubiquitous for a brief moment in March 2022, at least for those interested in news concerning Asian American, Zainichi Korean (literally, “Koreans in Japan,” a term referring to the diasporic Koreans in Japan), or popular Korean culture. The photograph shows eleven of the main cast members of *Pachinko*, Apple TV+’s lavish adaptation of Min Jin Lee’s novel of the same name, posing in front of the Academy Museum of Motion Picture in Hollywood where the premiere took place.¹ Seen from one angle, the photograph of the predominantly Asian ensemble registers the changing face of Hollywood. K-drama fans around the globe would immediately recognize Lee Min-ho, one of the industry’s biggest names, taking center spot with his “new face” co-star, Kim Min-ha. At the far right end, we find Korean American tenor and musical actor Jin Ha posing in a colorful women’s hanbok in a gender-blending performance of Korean American identity, amicably locking arms with Oscar-laureate Youn Yuh-jung. At the other end, Soji Arai (a.k.a., Park So-hee) stands with his chest out, showing off a pair of custom-made pin badges representing the shapes of the Japanese archipelago and the Korean peninsula symbolizing a different kind of a Korean identity, that is to say, a hybrid identity not neatly containable in Korean, Japanese, or Asian American identity categories. Amidst such performative displays of differently inflected Korean identity positions, it is easy to overlook Minami Kaho, who stands next to Youn without any attention-grabbing posture. Interestingly, Minami’s Korean roots on the maternal side of her family have largely gone unnoticed, as has the Zainichi-themed arthouse film *For Kayako* (Oguri Kohei, 1985) that launched her career.² In addition to communicating Hollywood’s bid for ethnic diversity, the photograph also reveals Hollywood’s changing position within the increasingly decentered global mediascape, where Seoul serves as one of the key nodes through its transnationally circulating K content (a phrase primarily used in relation to *South* Korean media products, but whose usefulness rests on its amorphous capacity to assimilate works by diasporic Koreans while tacitly erasing those made in North Korea). Moreover, it aspires to represent the transpacific encounters of Asian American, inter-Asian, and differently inflected Korean contexts that *Pachinko* facilitates.

The photo-shoot described above serves to illustrate what interests me most about this dramatized series, which has been dubbed the “biggest multilingual show ever,” and was produced with a colossal budget (reportedly on a scale similar to *The Crown*, for which

¹ The publicity photograph has accompanied various articles in different trade journals, including the following: Paul Chi, “Pachinko’s Stars Plead for Attacks on Asian Americans to End,” *Vanity Fair* (March 17, 2022) <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2022/03/pachinko-apple-tv-plus-premiere> [accessed December 29, 2022].

² Given the nationality law’s patrilineal bias, which formerly limited the rights to pass down foreign nationality to males, Minami was born with Japanese nationality passed down on her paternal side (with the revision of 1985, the same rights have been extended to female foreign nationals). Minami’s expression of her Korean roots is thus structurally less legible than those of individuals with Korean fathers. Incidentally, the role she played in *For Kayako* also embodied the difficulty of defining Zainichi Korean identity purely in ethnic or patrilineal terms. Modeled on Sakhalin-born Zainichi Korean writer Lee Hoe-sung’s novel of the same title, *For Kayako* centers on the protagonist’s attraction to Minami’s character, an ethnic Japanese girl adopted by a Korean father in the borderlands of Sakhalin.

Netflix dished out \$6.5m per episode): the multiplicity of possible reading positions and the lack of a single culturally “authentic” interpretative context effectively renders every viewer a partial stranger vis-à-vis the story world. As in Lee’s novel, Apple’s *Pachinko* follows a Korean family across four generations and across multiple borders: from colonial Yeongdo (near Busan) to imperial Osaka, from postwar/postimperial Japan to New York, and back again to bubble-economy Tokyo. At the center of the saga is Sunja, first introduced as a smart and courageous girl unafraid to speak her mind in a colonial and Confucian world, who becomes, once exiled from her community, a spiritual pillar of a diasporic family in Osaka. Notwithstanding Arai/Park’s heartfelt comment that, thanks to the popularity of *Pachinko*, “now people all over the world will know who Zainichi people are, maybe for the first time in history,” this is not a case where a Zainichi creator’s narrative acquires a broader audience beyond her primary target audience (say, in a non-English language sphere) through the transnational network of the film festival circuit (Chow 2022). Nor is it clear that *Pachinko* ought to be read as a Zainichi Korean narrative per se. Rather, *Pachinko* can and should be understood in a global frame, not simply in the sense that Silicon Valley-based streaming platforms make “global stories centering people of color” accessible (presumably to “non-colored” viewers), but also in a more conventional sense, in which globalization has been understood as a coeval dynamic of divergence as well as convergence which should alert us to the pluralizing reception contexts emerging around the centralized operations of the streaming giants (Chow 2022). Countering Arai/Park’s bid to claim *Pachinko* as a vehicle for building global awareness of Zainichi Korean identity, we find an equally compelling bid for Asian American reading positions. Spearheaded by two Korean American women in executive roles—executive producer Theresa Kang-Lowe and showrunner and scriptwriter Soo Hugh—*Pachinko* was a showcase for Asian talent, with 95% of the 637 cast members identifying as Asian (Singer 2022), and the eight episodes directed by up-and-coming Korean American directors Kogonada and Justin Chon. Kang-Lowe’s reference points are the embarrassingly small list of entertainment titles with all-Asian casts greenlighted by major studios (i.e., *Joy Luck Club* in 1993 and *Crazy Rich Asians* in 2018), suggesting that *Pachinko*’s significance has as much to do with Asian presence in Hollywood as with representing the particular history of Koreans in Japan (Singer 2022). By the same token, it is important to note that Asian Americans are just as likely to relate to the story as partial strangers, given the displacement of the familiar Korean diaspora story away from the United States, just as viewers in Osaka’s Korea Town, one of the key locales in the story, might view the on-screen rendition of their neighborhood with a certain estrangement (shot, as it was, in an open set constructed in Canada) or miss the series altogether due to Apple TV+’s low-key presence in Japan.³

³ I will bracket the discussion of *Pachinko*’s failure to reach Japanese viewers beyond K-drama fans or to generate discussion in any visible way among Zainichi Korean commentators, but it is easy to imagine the pandemic’s adverse effects, especially given the producers’ reluctant decision to forego location shoots in Osaka’s Ikaino/Ikuno district (which contains the largest concentration of Zainichi Koreans) in favor of consolidating the locations in Canada and Korea. While some critics have pointed to the Japanese media’s problematic culture of

Taking *Pachinko* as a case study then, this paper examines the challenges and the promises of studying Zainichi Korean screen narratives at a time when a fixed interpretative framework cannot be taken for granted as the basis for understanding how these stories are produced, circulated, and received. Academic workshops and talks dedicated to the series have accordingly explored it in different contexts, ranging from women's historiography of Zainichi Koreans, the global rise of Korean language media content, and transpacific studies that cut across "area studies, American studies, and Asian American studies, as they are practiced not only in the United States but elsewhere" (Hoskins and Nguyen 2014: 24).⁴ Insofar as I am interested in wresting *Pachinko* from the silos of methodological nationalism, I borrow the basic method of transpacific studies, with its exploration of minor transnationalism or the "creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries" (Lionnet and Shih 2005: 7).⁵ As I will demonstrate, however, the geographically and culturally divergent audience that *Pachinko* addresses belongs more fully to the debate among film and media scholars on how to imagine global storytelling addressed to the growing cohort of middleclass spectators around the world.

In the following, I will firstly recast Zainichi Korean screen representation within the transpacific framework, namely by locating it in the discursive space between two subfields of area studies: the postcolonial turn in Japanese studies (with a measure of methodological nationalism as "Japan" is reinserted at the center as the primary object of

self-censoring voices deemed to be critical of Japan as the primary cause of the series' lackluster performance in the country (McCurry 2022), we cannot play down the streaming giant's ethically questionable decision to prioritize its brand image over community outreach, namely by foregoing the same scale of promotional campaign seen in South Korea and the United States in the Japanese market, ostensibly for fear of instigating a rightwing negative campaign and tarnishing Apple's brand image. As a point of contrast, roughly around the same time as *Pachinko's* release, Japan-based independent producers, distributors, and movie theaters had courageously defied actual (not potential) right-wing harassment in order to serve viewers in Japan with Zainichi-authored, Zainichi-themed films (with an infinitely smaller operational budget, and without the kind of legal team Apple TV+ has at its disposal). Examples include Yang Yong-hi's *Soup and Ideology* (distributed by Tofu), a personal documentary touching on the trauma surrounding the Jeju 4.3 Uprising; Koh Chanyu's *Watashitachi wa ningenda!*, a reportage-documentary historicizing Japan's immigration policies; and Choi Cheol-ho's *Kitakaze Outsider*, a fiction based on the director's family story made on a shoe-string budget (the latter two titles were self-distributed and shown in select independent outlets).

⁴ Soo Hugh gave a keynote speech in the *Empires in Motion* conference (March 21-23, 2022) at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa; a workshop organized by the Korean Studies Association in Japan and hosted by Hokkaido University (August 20, 2022) addressed online platforms' role in depicting traumatic history; and a closed door teach-in with Apple TV+'s guest speaker held in Tokyo in June 2022 addressed Zainichi women's historiography.

⁵ Hoskins and Nguyen's call for a transpacific studies has already generated some contrasting applications. My interest in the transpacific reframing is closer to David Roh's heuristic approach, the goal of which is to "reflect and refract a triangulation of multiple national actors, transits, and sites, thereby revealing previously neglected questions and highlighting new critical directions," rather than the more utilitarian application by researchers championing particular intercultural artists so as to "re-examine and re-evaluate transnational and inter-group relationships and networks" (Roh 2021: 7 and Takezawa and Kina 2020: 2).

deconstruction) and the diaspora turn within Korea studies (with a measure of methodological ethnocentrism and Seoul-centrism that comes with its exploration of Koreanness without borders). The overview will suggest that *Pachinko* is not so much a trailblazer giving voices to the voiceless, but a latecomer that repeats the ethically fraught ritual of dramatizing an “overcoming” of trauma, victimization, and silence in order to create an emotional spectacle at the cost of potentially condoning the view that colonial rule, discrimination, and cold war divisions are things of the past. The second half of the paper investigates the elusive question of the series’ global address by turning to two of the most often discussed formalistic elements: parallel editing and subtitles. Specifically, I will analyze these formalistic elements as traits of what I call the middlebrow cosmopolitan style, which redraws the boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar, representing the familiar in an estranged setting or the unfamiliar in an intimate setting. In the context of representation of Zainichi Koreans, one of the effects of middlebrow cosmopolitan style, then, is defamiliarization of an ethnic identity claim as it is reframed within a female-centered narrative, translated into different languages, or recirculated in transpacific interchanges. While I draw on film scholars’ recent reappraisal of the category of the middlebrow as a stigma given “to heritage films, to historical costume dramas, to serious issue films, to adaptations, biopics and humanist dramas,” or to “an aspirant but unadventurous audience who always carry ‘the implication of pretensions’,” I am most interested in exploring middlebrow taste as the language of a growing global middleclass with an aspiration for social change (Galt and Schoonover 2014: 197).⁶

Recasting Zainichi Cinema’s Reading Position in a Transpacific Frame

In *Zainichi Cinema: Korean-in-Japan Film Culture* (2016), Oliver Dew offers a useful, though somewhat counterintuitive, definition of “Zainichi cinema,” not as a corpus of Zainichi Korean filmmakers’ works or on-screen representations of Zainichi Koreans, but rather as an affective “reading position.” In his account, a Zainichi cinema reading position first emerged in the 1970s, largely as a subcultural practice of Zainichi Koreans and interested Japanese viewers involving an oblique reading of occulted Zainichi Korean traces in mainstream Japanese cinema, but evolved into a cottage industry in the 1990s, with film festivals, critical essays, and popularly received films collectively exploring Zainichi Korean screen images (Dew 2016: 21-22). “Zainichi cinema” became legible, Dew emphasizes, against the backdrop of the cold war’s thawing and the manifold effects of this process: legal revisions that granted Zainichi Koreans relatively secure (if contingent) de-facto citizenship in Japan; Kim Dae-jung’s open-door policy, which lifted a long ban on Japanese popular culture; and the Japanese cinephile community’s general “turn to Asia,”

⁶ Middlebrow taste is popularly associated with the middleclass and, by extension, with a certain conservative politics invested in maintaining the status quo. Sally Faulkner has challenged this prevalent view by stressing the dynamism of class mobility that defines the middleclass and popular demand to work through social changes that inform middlebrow taste (Faulkner 2016, 2, 6). Such a dynamic reframing of the middlebrow is arguably easier to imagine when we consider the global rise of the middleclass that is central to media corporations’ understanding of its global user base (Guha 2020).

facilitated primarily by the global circulation of Sinophone films, but which also raised the profile of contemporary films from the Koreas (Chung 2009: 147; Ryang 2009: 63). The context in which Zainichi screen images are now read, therefore, differs considerably from the context in which, a couple of decades earlier, semi-autobiographical articulations of (male) Zainichi Korean *nisei* (the first generation born in Japan) authors became legible as Zainichi literature (*zainichi bungaku*) within the broader milieu of Japanese literature. Schematically put, Zainichi literature offers scholars a privileged site to explore postcolonial issues within the confines of the cold war episteme, while Zainichi cinema offers a productive site for debating the status of the colonial legacy in post-cold war or “post-Zainichi” conditions (Lie 2008: 11; Dew 2016: 19-21). The research question underpinning Zainichi cinema scholarship might thus be summarized by Dew’s rhetorical question: “is it possible to show traumas being overcome without promoting a complacent and amnesiac attitude to the past?” (Dew 2016: 21).

The problem of the “overcoming” paradigm has been most productively debated in relation to the independently produced comedy *All Under the Moon* (1993), which defied expectations to win a total of fifty-six awards nationally and internationally, and was picked up by over seventy theaters nationwide (Yang 2003: 35). It is remembered today as one of the representative films of the 1990s (it was voted best film of the 1990s in *Kinema Jumbo*’s centenary project, in 2019, which selected era-defining titles). *All Under the Moon* was received as a groundbreaking work, not only for showing the potential of a small independent production to gain mainstream exposure. It was also, like *Pachinko*, widely seen as the product of various minority creators working together, in this case, a Zainichi Korean novelist, director, playwright-cum-scriptwriter, and producer (Yang Sogil, Sai Yoichi/Choi Yang-il, Chong Wishin, and Lee Bong-ou, respectively).⁷ More controversially to some, however, the film introduced a kind of Zainichi Korean hero previously unseen in cinema or on television: a “slacker” taxi driver with a propensity to make off-color jokes related to hot button issues, such as the forced labor imposed on colonial Korean men (*kyōsei rōdō*) and the “repatriation” of tens of thousands of Koreans, predominantly those with roots in the South, to North Korea (*kikoku jigyō*), spin irreverent pick-up lines, such as “I hate Koreans, but I like you,” and launch xenophobic rants, such as “If you don’t like it here, go back where you came from” (the latter provocatively displaced from mainstream Japanese speech to a first-generation Korean matriarch’s epithet launched at her Filipina employee) (Iwabuchi 2000: 61-62).⁸ It is true that efforts to deconstruct the stereotypical tropes of victimized Zainichi Koreans to make room for individualized, nuanced, and

⁷ As Yang rightly points out, over-emphasizing the non-Japanese nationality of the film’s producers overlooks an equally important legacy that merits further consideration: a form of color-blind casting in which Japanese actors and actresses are cast in the prominent roles of Zainichi Koreans (Yang 2003: 35).

⁸ Between 1959 and 1984, over 90,000 Koreans, the great majority of whom had ancestry in the Southern half of the Korean peninsula, chose to or were pushed to “repatriated” to North Korea, in some cases with Japanese spouses, in what is now understood to have been a conscious effort on the part of Japan to rid itself of an severely impoverished demographic, finding an accomplice in a war-ravaged Communist state that needed skilled workers (Morris-Suzuki 2005: 357).

hybridized speaking positions had an important place in this transitional period—a topic that was avidly discussed on the pages of new Zainichi-run magazines (*Horumon Bunka* and *Saenullee*, among others) —focusing more on “ordinary language” exchanges related to everyday concerns rather than ideological debates. Yet, scholars and critics found this masterclass ethnic comedy unsettling, not simply due to its iconoclastic irreverence, but also because of the elusive notion of the popular audience. Iwabuchi Koichi, for instance, quotes a popular gossip magazine’s profile piece on Sai Yoichi and producer Lee Bong-ou that had a prominent subheading citing their iconoclastic posturing out of context, proclaiming that “we do not care about the thirty-six-year long Japanese colonial rule. What is most important is my life of here and now” (*Spa!* quoted in Iwabuchi 2000: 64). Such depoliticized media responses in turn helped to formulate what we might call a fixed pattern involving a three-pronged scholarly response: chastising the irresponsible media; critiquing the (predominantly male) filmmaker’s complicity in prematurely moving on from addressing the heavy issues of (post)colonial injustices, the burden of which gets offloaded to female voices in the stories, in favor of a “cosmetic multiculturalism”; and deferring the actual breakthrough to the future, a moment when there are so many diverse Zainichi Korean narratives out there so that each filmmaker is not burdened by the imperative to represent their community (Iwabuchi 2000; Kuraishi 2006; Ko 2010; Kaneko 1995; Yang 2003). This troika response was seen not only after *All Under the Moon*, but also the likes of *Go!* (2002), *Blood and Bones* (2005), *Pacchigi* (2004), and other mainstream films that continued the de-victimization path into the 2000s.

Dew’s emphasis on reading position, not authorship, is meant to safely extract him from his predecessors’ conundrum of having to hold the handful of minority filmmakers accountable for the ways in which they represented their communities while the great majority of mainstream films that paid no attention to minority experiences to start with were let off the hook (Yang 2003: 36). Referencing British cultural studies’ research on the burden of tokenism placed on minority filmmakers (i.e., the pressure to represent the whole of the community threatens to reduce their creativity to an essentialized notion of identity), Dew suggests two alternatives: the first is demanding modernist reflexivity (auto-critique in his wording), so that the filmmaker at once *represents* the underrepresented voices, but then shows the limitations of such representation without resolving the structural imbalance of power; the second is a shift in emphasis from authorship to reception (24). Rather than expecting the heroic filmmakers to “break through” the barrier of underrepresentation, Dew makes a different demand of them: to give us an affective melodramatic structure that helps us to work through the silence, the absence, and the occulted images where meaning fails, where pain, grievances, and trauma that our society cannot rationally process nevertheless become accessible to our emotions. It is also important that his repudiation of authorship study also involves a jab at the austere modernist reading of minority filmmaking in favor of middlebrow, emotionally appealing melodramas.

A cursory summary of studies relating to Zainichi cinema is enough to point to a certain continuity and discontinuity, which *Pachinko* marks. In some ways, Sunja is the upright, sympathetic, and patriotic Korean that *All Under the Moon* rebuked. By the same token, *All Under the Moon*'s unabashedly male-centered narrative, in which the nonchalant taxi-driver's mother and his Filipina love interest carry the burden of signifying ethnic identities as well as inter-ethnic tension, is precisely the kind of minority narrative that *Pachinko* disavows. In another sense, however, *Pachinko* has, like *All Under the Moon*, elicited nervous responses from critics weary of the emphasis it places on "overcoming" historical traumas (think of the catchy opening song "Let's Live for Today" by The Grass Roots, to which actors/characters from the colonial set joyously dance with actors/characters from the bubble-era set in a brightly lit pachinko parlor). While Dew's framework thus proves useful when analyzing *Pachinko*, his own analysis paradoxically keeps the "Zainichi cinema reading position" squarely within the parameters of Japanese studies. Similarly, I share Dew's interest in reclaiming middlebrow popular cinema as an important site of negotiation. Against the cultural elitism latent in film studies' tendency to privilege exilic and diasporic filmmakers working in the resistant mode on the fringes of the film industry, Dew embraces the middlebrow—consider his preference for the cross-ethnic romantic melodrama *Pachigi* (Breakthrough, 2004), set against the nostalgic mise-en-scene of 1960s counterculture, over Oshima Nagisa's self-reflexive films, which treat viewers as accomplices to state violence against postcolonial Koreans. Yet, his analysis still manages to overlook the quintessential middlebrow attraction of South Korean dramas and the interchanges between the Zainichi cinema reading position and the Korean drama reading position (i.e., *kanryū* or *hallyu*). These interchanges are arguably latent in the contexts that Dew examines, but *Pachinko* makes them hard to ignore, given the significance of the affective infrastructure already developed around *hallyu* fandom. Particularly in Japan, where a *hallyu* reading position has been shaped by female translators, critics, and viewers (active fans who are users and viewers), *Pachinko* serves as an important contact zone where the old boys' club of cinephiles who made up the Zainichi cinema reading position that Dew describes encounters its repressed other: the feminized middlebrow spectators.

Increasingly in the 2000s, Zainichi Koreans started to become legible on the Korean screen and in Korean studies. This development was accompanied by a slightly different form of "overcoming" discourse. In his observation of the "geographical expansion" of the collection parameters at KoFA (the Korean Film Archive), Steven Chung interrogates the delicate challenge post-democratization South Korea faced in order to attend to the stories long silenced by both the cold war exigency of security and the patriarchal underpinnings of postcolonial national historiography without turning the speech which they contained into "an emotive and triumphant narrative of homecoming." On the one hand, the "homecoming" paradigm helped to justify KoFA's active pursuit of colonial-era Korean films (also known as Joseon films) housed in overseas archives as well as works by ethnic Koreans outside South Korea regardless of their nationality (including films by Zainichi

Korean filmmakers).⁹ On the other hand, the rhetoric of homecoming or of “excavating” these films risks obfuscating the political forces that had actively kept them out of the narrative of Korean cinema (as imagined in South Korea) for decades. Without a critical recognition of these forces, KoFA’s expansive purview risks sanctioning a Seoul-centric imaginary of a global Korea that encompasses Zainichi Koreans, Korean Americans, Korean adoptees, and other diasporic and variously marginalized peoples once actively ejected from South Korea. Chung astutely points out that the testimonies of former “comfort women” (Japanese military slaves) in the 1990s first articulated this challenge of hearing long-silenced voices without reducing this process to a cathartic ritual of breaking silence. What the outpouring of formerly silenced voices in the 1990s testified was, in Chung’s view, not simply the victimization of female colonial subjects by the Japanese military, but also fifty years of politically induced silence: “a repressive collusion between a patriarchal nationalist discourse that silenced victims through gendered shame and a cold war interest in regional, economic, and political stability that precluded proper reckoning of the colonial past” (Chung 2011: 197-200).

Like *All Under the Moon* which crystalized the conundrum posed by the “overcoming” narrative, Kim Myong-jun’s documentary *Uri Hakkyo* (Our School, 2005) looms large in the critical study of Zainichi cinema within the Korean studies frame. A personal documentary that records the South Korean filmmaker’s personal and quotidian interactions with the students of one of the Chosun schools (run by Chongryun, and affiliated with Pyongyang, but also serving a practical role as a pillar of Chongryun Korean communities), *Uri Hakkyo* broke box office records for an independent documentary and was also theatrically released in Japan (Kim 2019; 82). In her study of (South) Korean cinema’s encounters with diasporic Koreans, Kim So Hye astutely observes a pattern in which independent documentary filmmakers have sought and found in far flung diasporic communities a utopian imaginary of an ethno-nationalist “us” (*uri* in Korean) that is paradoxically unavailable to them in Seoul. In a telling sequence in *Uri Hakkyo*, for instance, the Chosun school’s “homecoming” trip to Pyongyang prompts the filmmaker to reflect on the geopolitical division that forbids him from accompanying the students (owing to his South Korean nationality), but also on the otherwise close affinity he was able to develop with the students (Kim 2019: 86). *Pachinko* compels us to ask if Asian American filmmakers are also seeking, through their encounter with Zainichi Koreans, a utopian subject position unavailable to them in the United States. Take the pivotal scene that occurs midway through the narrative arch in which Sunja’s homecoming to Korea is juxtaposed with her grandson Solomon’s spiritual “homecoming,” which is attained by quitting to play a “model minority,” putting his New York-acquired business acumen in the service of his American employer and its neocolonial Japanese clientele. Both homecoming journeys are prompted by their encounters with an elderly Zainichi Korean landowner who refuses to yield her

⁹ Chung notes video works by Helen Lee, a Korean Canadian artist, as the primary example, but KoFA’s expansive collection parameters also encompass works by Zainichi Koreans. For KoFA’s role in preserving the films of Zainichi *nisei* (second-generation) essayist, activist, and filmmaker Park Soo-nam, see Ogawa 2022.

land to developers despite the astronomical sum Solomon's employer offers her in return. The parallel of the cross-generational homecomings is emphasized by an intercutting between Sunja walking into the ocean in the rain, overwhelmed by a sense of recognizing the land that she had left (or which had banished her) and Solomon dancing ecstatically in pouring rain. Yet, it is easy to see a transpacific displacement of the cross-generational dialogue, since Hugh's largely invented drama surrounding Solomon is but a thinly disguised allegory of the Asian American executive producers' dilemma in balancing their professional allegiance to U.S. corporate behemoths with their emotional investment in arguably idealized "Asian" narratives.

Parallel Addresses in a Global Frame

While Apple TV+, like many of its peer platforms, makes quantitative viewership analysis difficult by hoarding relevant data, this limitation makes the humanistic approach of analyzing the "address" more valuable as a qualitative tool for studying the hypothetical viewers embedded within the texts. One of the two popularly discussed stylistic features I will take up here is the time-traveling, crosscutting plot structure that vacillates between two seemingly disparate worlds. As a point of contrast, the novel *Pachinko* unfolds chronologically, beginning with a somewhat clichéd immigrant-narrative itinerary opening in the pastoral "Gohyang/Hometown" (as she titles the first chapter) before following a trajectory involving diasporic displacement and resettlement, and finally making peace with the "Zainichi condition" after enduring various episodes of hardship in the strangers' land (or rather, the land of their colonial oppressors). The dramatized version denies viewers such a gradual immersion in Sunja's world. Throughout the first few episodes, beautifully shot scenes set in a colonial Korean village between the 1910s and 1930s are constantly punctured by long inserts featuring her grandson Solomon's more contemporary dramas set in the midst of the speculative economic boom of the late 1980s. Some have unfavorably compared the fast-paced nonlinear storytelling to the original novel's linear plot, which affords a gradual accumulation of details, one commentator decrying how Hugh's rendering "decenters Sunja's experience for the sake of TV suspense" (Merican 2022). Others have more specifically interpreted Solomon's make-it-or-break-it corporate drama as addressing the supposed need of "a U.S. audience with little to no knowledge of Korea and Japanese history" (Harrington 2022). In Hugh's own account, the parallel structure is both an homage to Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather II* (1974) and an authorial intervention on her part to shift the point of identification from Sunja to her grandson, that is, to the generation grappling with, in her words, the "immense gratitude and burden from what your parents and grandparents sacrificed for you" (Chow 2022). Paraphrasing Dew, the questions Hugh's parallel plot pose are firstly, whether it is possible to dramatize the *issei* (first-generation exile)'s saga without overburdening the younger generation, and secondly, whether it is possible to dramatize the overcoming of such a burden without forgetting the sense of debt (Dew 2016: 21).

To an extent, reordering Lee's linear plotline has as much to do with industrial factors as artistic ones. As is customary in lavishly produced "prestige TV" dramas, *Pachinko* producers had no guarantee that they would be able to shoot the multi-season story in its entirety, the first season serving the role of pilot. Producers are thus incentivized to introduce all of the stars, narrative hooks, and spectacular locations as well as instagrammable studio sets as early in the season as possible (think of the Yeongdo fish market set erected in Vancouver that served as the favorite backdrop to actors' pre-release social media posts). In stark contrast to the precarious but decentralized production model of minority filmmakers working in the independent cinema milieu, *Pachinko* producers traded funding scarcity for another form of precarity as a result of procuring much of their outsized budget from the streaming platform.

The industrial circumstances notwithstanding, there is poetry in the ways in which two worlds separated by time and distance converge and diverge in *Pachinko*'s parallel plot structure. Take the episode directed by Justin Chon where Sunja's two contrasting journeys separated by fifty years are placed in a dialogue. The first involves the young Sunja leaving home for metropolitan Osaka, joining the mass migration (or displacement) of Koreans that would result in an estimated 1.45 million Koreans being present in Japan proper at the time of the Japanese Empire's surrender in 1945 (Caprio 2009: 21). The second involves the old Sunja's homecoming, prompted by the passing of her sister-in-law and life-long friend Kyunghee and her wish to be buried in her homeland (whether bringing the remains of a native of Pyongyang to Busan counts as a homecoming in the present geopolitical conditions is never questioned in the series). In a rare departure from the series' otherwise realist representational mode, a theatrical transition (imagine the "turntable" used in theaters) emphasizes the continuity and contiguity of the two journeys (Fig. 1-2). As the camera, capturing the young Sunja's mother gently and neatly packing her daughter's clothes in a medium shot, starts its slow track-to-left motion, the old Sunja appears on the other side of the dark edge of the frame, packing her luggage ahead of her homecoming. The fifty-year interval melts before our eyes as the dark edge of the frame (a stand-in for the interval black frame in film projection that usually eludes our cognition) slowly traverses the screen.



Figure 1. On the 1930s set, Yangjin packs her daughter Sunja's belongings ahead of the latter's journey to Osaka. As the camera slowly tracks left, Sunja's room in Osaka fifty years later appears in the off-screen space to the left. Image capture, *Pachinko* (2022).

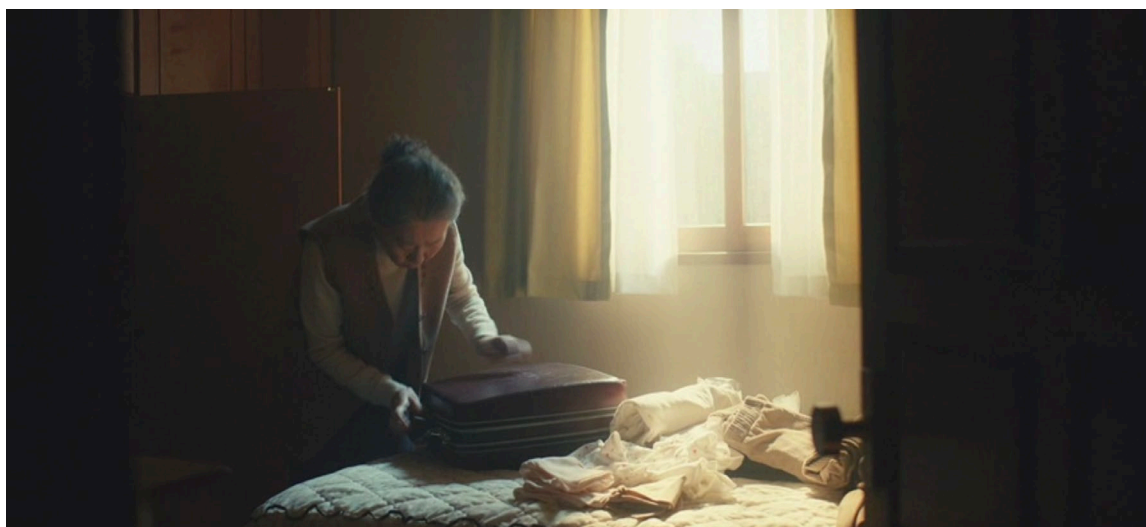


Figure 2. The slow tracking motion continued from the 1930s set (fig. 1) stops as Sunja, on the 1980s set, enters the frame, packing a suitcase in her Osaka residence ahead of her first ever return journey to Yeongdo. Image capture, *Pachinko* (2022).

It is often these everyday gestures, such as packing, cooking rice, and sitting and listening to the rain that trigger *Pachinko's* time-traveling transitions. If the idea of the middlebrow is frequently associated with feminine spectator pleasure that is more attuned to sensorial dimensions, and if such non-visual pleasure is traditionally contrasted with male critics' norms of cinephilia, then *Pachinko's* parallel plot addresses a decidedly feminized middlebrow reading position that contrasts with the masculine reading position Francis Ford Coppola addresses with his parallel storytelling in *Godfather II*. In the latter, it is the patrilinear sense of heritage that interconnects the (often violent) actions of mafia boss Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) in the present timeline and the memories of his immigrant

mafia boss father Vitto Corleone (Marlon Brando/Robert DeNiro), who is brought to life in prolonged flashbacks. Its foregrounding of domestic gestures also sets *Pachinko* apart from an earlier example of a mainstream Zainichi-themed screen narrative, *Pacchigi!: Love and Peace* (2007) by Lee Bong-ou's Cine Qua Non, that borrowed Coppola's patrilineal flashback plot style in a more rigorous fashion to juxtapose a young father's bid to save his son with severe ALS in the 1970s with his own father's bid for survival during the Pacific War by escaping from his native Jeju Island and hiding in the Solomon Islands.

Another important hinge facilitating the intercutting is the jarring use of drone shots, which become more frequent in later episodes. Accompanying the series' signature oversized trilingual typography displaying city names (Busan, Osaka, Tokyo, New York) in English, Japanese, and Korean in succession, the drone shots present (or survey) the respective cities from above, flattening their cityscapes into abstract geometric patterns evocative of the pachinko machine's intricate surface dotted with guides and obstacles (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. The drone shot accompanying the stylized typography spelling out "Tokyo." Image capture, *Pachinko* (2022).

If the effect of the drone shots is jarring, it is not simply because of the cruel irony of using an optical technology associated with surveillance, specifically of military surveillance that moves freely beyond national boundaries, for a story about the weight of that (objectively) short distance separating Korea from Japan or, similarly, the two Koreas from each other (we only need to call to mind the episode featuring the heavily pregnant Sunja in a poorly ventilated and overcrowded cabin on an Osaka-bound vessel or the occluded reference to the impossibility of bringing her sister-in-law's remains back to her native Pyongyang, given the hard border of the 38th parallel). Rather, it is also because the particular combination of an establishing aerial shot with a city name is familiar to us from a very different genre. For instance, starting with *MI:II* (John Woo, 2000), Tom Cruise's *Mission Impossible* franchise adopted a spatially dispersed nonlinear plotline that hinges on simultaneous actions taking place in different cities across the globe. As in *Pachinko*, each

of the action sequences opens with the city name announced in stylized typography. In one of the many voices calling for a discussion of global cinema that is not reducible to the economics of the worldwide circulation of films, Jeong Seung-hoon offers a useful alternative that centers on what he calls a narrative of abject agency that he finds proliferating across a wide range of cinematic texts due to the ubiquity of neoliberal conditions. Given its strong resonance, not just with *Pachinko* but with diaspora narratives as a whole, I will quote his description of his typical global cinema here.

Main characters die symbolically at the beginning by being lost, cast, detached, or expelled from their respective communities, often traumatically [...] Stripped of their membership or citizenship, even human rights, the abject (characters) I just noted are forced to live in the state of “bare life” like animals or *homo sacer* that can be killed extrajudicially, as Giorgio Agamben (1998) says. The rest of the narrative shows how they survive in this symbolic postmortem state of being. They mostly struggle to rejoin their communities and regain their subjectivity (Jeong 2020: 4).

What Jeong has in mind is closer to a spy action film, in which Tom Cruise’s or Daniel Craig’s character symbolically dies as he is disavowed by the state and the intelligence community, than stories of diasporic exiles. Yet, Sunja’s exile from home is, for instance, not simply explained away as the outcome of Japan’s extractive colonial rule, but also attributed to a kind of symbolic death, as her pregnancy out of wedlock strips her of her membership, so to speak, of her family and community. If Jeong sees the struggles of Cruise’s or Craig’s character to rejoin their respective communities and regain subjectivity (through action-packed sequences) as a cinematic address calibrated to appeal to a global viewership whose common denominator is the precarious neoliberal condition, the same is true of *Pachinko*, with its subplots following colonial and postcolonial Koreans’ search for community.

Cosmopolitan Middlebrow Multilingualism

Alongside parallel edits, multilingual dialogues in English, Japanese, and Korean were an essential part of Hugh’s creative intervention. In fact, securing funding for a lavish “prestige TV” drama that has limited English dialogue (“one of the biggest multilingual shows ever,” according to one critic) became one of Hugh and Kang-Lowe’s primary challenges in the early stages of production (Chow 2022). Speaking about the producers’ commitment to multilingualism on the surface appears like a good place to consider the cosmopolitan dimension of cinematic pleasure which so often brings viewers into contact with unfamiliar worlds beyond their immediate surroundings. While acknowledging the interesting inroads *Pachinko* made in enticing viewers to overcome the “one-inch tall barrier of subtitles” that might have otherwise prevented them from enjoying “world cinema,” to paraphrase Korean film auteur Bong Joon-ho’s famous Academy Awards speech, I will note the paradoxical parochialism involved in overemphasizing the

association of subtitles with resistant modes of spectatorship.¹⁰ Subtitles are, in many parts of the world, including Japan and Korea, how the majority of viewers have experienced Hollywood's globally hegemonic media products as well as the counter-hegemonic world cinema. Rather than treating the presence of foreign languages or the sophisticated use of subtitles in *Pachinko* as a badge of cosmopolitan distinction then, we can take a more flexible approach in order to understand film viewing as something always involving a cosmopolitan encounter with strangeness, foreignness, and unfamiliarity. It is useful in this context to turn to Felicia Chan's study of cinema's cosmopolitanism, which hinges not on the viewing of foreign language films per se, but on the various ways in which film viewers occupy the position of strangers exploring the liminal zone where the incomprehensible and the comprehensible intersect (Chan 2017: 8-9).

As a point of reference, we should note that neither multilingualism nor subtitles figure much in the discussions of Zainichi screen representations within the Japanese frame (marginalization-in-Japan) or within the Korean frame (Koreanness-in-dispersal). In the former case, where it is not at all unusual to cast non-Korean Japanese actors in Korean roles, it is the handling of Korean accents (feigned accented speech in Japanese spoken by Japanese actors) that occasionally becomes a subject of debate, not multilingualism per se. In Korean cinema, representing Zainichi Korean narratives was only possible by downplaying the Japanese language, at least until Kim Dae-jung's open-door policy. Multilingualism was thus less relevant for the Zainichi Korean screen representation discussed in these two frameworks. Despite lacking linguistic diversity, however, viewing Zainichi cinema always involves the translational work of a cosmopolitan reorienting the world from the vantage point of a stranger (picture the mainstream Japanese viewers encountering *All Under the Moon's* Tokyo inhabited by various hybrid subjects).

There are roughly three ways in which multilingualism is experienced in *Pachinko*. First, from the vantage point of the cast and the crew, multilingualism is experienced through the help of language coaching. Hugh's writing process is said to have involved an unusually high dependence on translators as she would have the Korean dialogues translated back to English for her to have control over the subtlety of expressions. Jin Ha, who speaks no Japanese, still impressively managed to phonetically reproduce his lines, which included lines spoken with his family members in the regional Kansai dialect as well as lines in standard Japanese lines spoken with his colleagues. In a contrasting example, Anna Sawai, a native English speaker, made use of accent coaching so that she could speak with a subtle foreign accent, which was vital to convey how her character, an ambitious young woman working in the old boys club of Japan Inc., had achieved her English proficiency through hard work. While interesting in its own right, uncritical celebration of the production's attention to different languages and accents risks overlooking the structure of power

¹⁰ The phrase is from his acceptance speech for Best Director at the Academy Awards on February 2020. His Korean-language film *Parasite* (2019) ultimately won in the categories for Best Original Screenplay, Best International Feature Film, and, unusually for a non-English film, Best Picture.

inscribed in how multilingualism is experienced through the show. Non-English speakers, for instance, have no way of appreciating Sawai's subtly accented speech, while Ha's phonetically acquired Japanese lines lose credibility in inverse proportion to the listener's proficiency in Japanese. Secondly, for viewers, multilingualism is experienced through subtitles, particularly through the innovative use of color-coded subtitles—Japanese in blue and Korean in yellow—which is designed to encourage more active attention not only to the language differences, but also to the creolization of Zainichi Korean as well as colonial Korean speech (in a memorable instance, Hansu, a worldly businessman played by Lee Min-ho, mixes in Japanese words as he lectures young Sunja in Korean about the wonders of modern Osaka, but abruptly slips in “everything!” in English as the subject changes to his trip to America and the material affluence he witnessed).

Finally, we can speculate the platform's vantage point on multilingualism from the fact that, following the appearance of a notification at the start of every episode proudly announcing that “*Pachinko* is presented in its two original languages: Korean and Japanese,” viewers not versed in these “original” languages are, somewhat confusingly, asked to choose from seventy or so subtitle options. Given the producers' interest in creolization, it is odd to see the platform advertising *Pachinko*'s multilingualism in national terms (“Korean and Japanese”), but the expression “the original languages” is an even bigger enigma. A reference to “original languages” appears to imply the presence of a work released in a non-English region prior to Apple TV+'s purchase of the title for the Anglophone market. On the one hand, it is hard to refute the streaming giants' generally productive role in facilitating viewers' encounters with foreign-language content outside the contexts of film festivals and arthouse cinema, to which many of their clients would not have access. On the other hand, that *Pachinko* could present itself as an example of foreign language entertainment demonstrates how overcoming the one-inch barrier of subtitles runs both ways as a way of connecting non-English language content to the large Anglophone markets or as a way for U.S. giants to compete with foreign language films.

If there is one person who understands the importance of resisting fixed ideas about original languages in favor of accepting creolization, it is Arai Soji/Park So-hee, who plays Mozasu, Sunja's son. In fact, it is important that the only experience of discrimination Arai/Park talks about in his interviews is one that he experienced in Hollywood, where his Korean name (Park So-hee) alone disqualified him for roles using the Japanese language, which were reserved for “authentic Japanese.” His quest to find a role with Japanese lines in Hollywood echoes Zainichi novelists' quest to justify their use of Japanese in their creative writing. For Park, ironically, it involved adopting a playful Japanese pseudonym Arai Soji based on a popular Anglophone misreading of his Korean name. While it is common for Zainichi Koreans to use *tsūmei*¹¹ in Japan, not always owing to Japan's pressure toward conformity, but also for various nuanced motives, including a sense of

¹¹ We should note that this practice is not entirely reducible to roots in Japan's colonial rule of Korea, as *tsūmei* are passed down within the family, accruing personal and social significance.

familial heritage, given that the last name is passed down just like legal family names, Arai Soji is decidedly not a *tsūmei*, but one that he needed in order to negotiate the particular ways in which Hollywood practiced identity politics and political correctness. With the success of *Pachinko*, Arai/Park has a contract with a South Korean agent to launch his acting career in Seoul, this time as Park So-hee (hence my awkward use of Arai/Park in this chapter). The episode drives home the problem in approaching Hollywood/Silicon Valley as a solution or as an objective neutral observer: the politics of representation and the politics of language are unresolved issues in California as well as in Japan and Korea, a state of affairs which would benefit from comparative analysis within a transpacific framework.

Conclusion

Like Zainichi literature, Zainichi cinema is a historically produced discursive category without solid parameters, a stable canon, or a fixed ideology. As I outlined above, Zainichi cinema, as an interpretative framework, is inseparable from the conundrum of postcolonial storytelling in which the guiding question is how to represent trauma without the redemptive catharsis that unwittingly turns viewers away from difficult-to-represent memories. By tracing the ways in which film scholars have grappled with this unfinished question prior to *Pachinko*, I historicized the discussions surrounding Zainichi on-screen representation in the contexts of Japanese Cinema and Korean Cinema respectively before turning to *Pachinko* to engage with the additional frameworks of Asian American studies and global media industry studies. As an example of ambitious media content aimed at a global audience, *Pachinko* helps us to think between and across these different locuses that have hitherto housed debates on Zainichi Korean screen images as parallel lines of action suturing the two essentially different experiences of the colonial Korean and the bubble-era Zainichi Korean. Like viewers vacillating between two temporalities, scholars of Zainichi Korean representations increasingly find themselves torn between multiple interpretative frameworks. It is important to triangulate the three important reading positions—Japanese cinema, Korean cinema, and Hollywood—in order to keep the question of postcolonial storytelling in active circulation.

This study took a critical distance from the kind of rhetoric used by Park/Arai that expects too much from one breakthrough film, for instance, to let “people all over the world” know about Zainichi people for the first time in history. For the record, *Pachinko* is not the first Zainichi Korean screen narrative to circulate transnationally: Nagisa Oshima’s *Death by Hanging* (1968), which screened in Cannes, was picked up by cine-clubs across Europe, screened in arthouse cinemas, ultimately inserting the story of Yi Chin-u, a real life Zainichi Korean minor who was executed in 1962, into a canon of world cinema watched, taught, and discussed via seminal film theory texts by generations of film critics and scholars (Ogawa 2014); Oguri’s *For Kayako*, starring Kaho Minami from *Pachinko*, traveled on the international film festival circuit, picking up the Georges Sadoul Award, with a poetic rendition of Zainichi writer Lee Hwe-song’s novel of the same title, which obliquely

deals with the Japanese mobilization of Koreans in coalmines in Sakhalin and Hokkaido. As with any popular film, *Pachinko*'s claim to giving a voice to underrepresented people risks sidelining existing works by various filmmakers that have represented different aspects of Zainichi Korean stories. *Pachinko*'s achievement, then, lies not in being the first, but being late in the game. This is not so much to discount its importance than to illustrate the importance of continuing to find new channels, new contexts, and new reading positions for Zainichi Korean stories. *Pachinko* explored a new middlebrow channel for globally distributing Zainichi screen narratives that promises to touch and affect viewers that film festivals and art house cinemas cannot. Embracing the dynamism of the middlebrow category is particularly important today given global Korea's increasingly dominant place in facilitating transnational interchanges in that middle-of-the-road register. What makes Zainichi screen representation interesting in the post-*Pachinko* era is its ability to interface multiple visions of the global public via Hollywood, via K-drama, and via local reception contexts not necessarily in transpacific regions. While the present study limited its scope to the transpacific dialogue, a fuller account of the various local reception contexts beyond the transpacific would contribute to the important task of globally reframing Zainichi Korean studies.

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