



Exploring Identity Dynamics in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* through different Paradigms: Marginality, Liminality, Alterity, Cultural Syncretism, Exilic Consciousness, and the Myth of Going Home

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Abstract— This article researches the complex experiences of Koreans residing in Japan as depicted in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*. The analysis is divided into three parts each of which consisting of different paradigms: marginalization, liminality and alterity, cultural syncretism and exilic consciousness, and the myth of returning home. It shows how they remain marginalized despite the passage of time which indicates that their existence is liminal as they negotiate a dense cultural identity oscillating between Korean heritage and Japanese societal norms. The idea of alterity captures this constant estrangement from Japan. Further, this study delves into how characters in this novel adopt a hybrid culture mixing both Korean and Japanese traditions. Lastly, it explores the myth of coming back to Korea that affirms emotional attachment to an idealized homeland that is barely attainable. *Pachinko* is also unique because it uses generations for its story line thereby revealing the transforming face of Zainichi experience marked out by resilience, cultural negotiations and long-term effects caused by displacement.



Keywords— Marginality, Liminality, Alterity, Cultural Syncretism, Exilic Consciousness

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a detailed summary and analysis of the novel *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee, which examines the lives of Koreans living in Japan, Zainichi. The paper highlights three main patterns underpinning the novel: constant marginalization, liminality and alterity faced by the Zainichi; cultural syncretism and exilic consciousness; and idealizing coming back home. In so doing, it strives to contribute to comprehending intricate narratives of displacement, identity, and resilience among Koreans living abroad in Japan during Korea's colonial era. The study of this novel gives an insight into how displacement continues to affect identities among Zainichi over time. Based on this framework, Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* is evaluated through its paradigms such as marginality, liminality and alterity; cultural syncretism/exile consciousness; and returning home myth

making readers aware of how Zainichi Korean live in Japan. Throughout the story one clearly notices that Koreans are constantly faced with numerous hardships that come about due to systemic discrimination as well as social exclusion within their society.

II. MIN JIN LEE'S *PACHINKO*: SUMMARY

Min Jin Lee, has garnered significant attention for its exploration of the experiences of the Zainichi, Korean individuals residing in Japan during and after the Japanese colonialism of Korea. The novel's examination of the Zainichi's complex identity and marginalization within Japanese society provides valuable insights into the lasting effects of Japan's colonization of Korea and the enduring impact on the Korean diaspora. The New York Times best seller *Pachinko* (2017) by Min Jin Lee is a historical novel

revolving around a Zainichi saga family spanning the years 1910-1989 in the times of colonized Korea, World War II and post-war era. As they try to navigate their lives in Japan. Divided into three parts, the novel is set in "Gohyang/Homeland 1910-1933", "Motherland 1939-1962", and "*Pachinko* 1962-1989" highlighting three generations. *Pachinko* opens in Yeongdo, Busan, Korea in 1910, with the 27-year-old Hoonie who comes from a well-off family and who suffers from physical deformities. Hoonie marries Yangjin who comes from a destitute family to help them survive in a time of scarcity and hardships. After Sunja, their fourth child and only girl, turns 13, Hoonie dies from Tuberculosis.

As Korea faces the challenges of The Great Depression in the 1930s, Yangjin takes on the responsibility of running a boarding house to make ends meet. Into their lives, comes Baek Isak, a Protestant minister from Pyongyang who stays at their boarding house on his way to Japan. Despite falling ill with tuberculosis, having been inspired by the prophet's marriage in the book of Hosea, Isak believes in sacrifices to God and offers to marry Sunja when he learns she is pregnant with the child of a wealthy fish broker, Koh Hansu. They eventually move to Osaka to live with Isak's brother, Yoseb and his wife, Kyunghee, in Ikaino, a Korean ghetto where immigrants face discrimination and poor living conditions and where no renting is allowed for Koreans.

In Osaka, Sunja gives birth to Noah and Mozasu, Isak's son. To alleviate financial struggles, Sunja begins selling kimchi in the market before securing a more stable job at Chungbo's restaurant, providing her with increased financial security. As a Protestant Christian, Isak refuses to show loyalty to the emperor after the colonial government enforced a mandate for Christians to bow at Shrines daily in Korea and weekly in Japan. Considered rebels by the Japanese, Isak is imprisoned, tortured, and eventually released to die at home. Noah becomes Sunja's pillar of strength and pride, excelling in school and becoming fluent in Japanese. Despite this, Noah yearns to assimilate as a Japanese person, adopting the name Nobuo Boku instead of Noa Baek, "Like all children, Noa kept secrets, but his were not ordinary ones. At school, he went by his Japanese name, Nobuo Boku, rather than Noa Baek; and though everyone in his class knew he was Korean from his Japanized surname, if he met anyone who didn't know this fact, Noa wasn't forthcoming about this detail" (Lee, 164).

In 1944, Koh Hansu reemerges in Sunja's life, warning her of impending war dangers and urging her to leave the city. Yoseb, however, remains skeptical of Hansu's advice and relocates to Nagasaki for a job opportunity. Sunja, Kyunghee, Yangjin, Chungbo, and the

children move to Tamagushi's farm, where the children begin learning Korean in preparation for a potential return to Korea post-war. Sadly, Yoseb, who has been located by Hansu and brought to the farm as well, succumbs to the severe burns he sustained in the bombing despite Kyunghee's unwavering efforts to take care of him. Hansu cautions everyone against the idea of returning to Korea due to the harsh conditions and political instability. Instead, he advises Sunja to prioritize personal interests, business, and safety over national identity.

Sunja settles in a new home in Ikaino, navigating challenges as Koreans in Japan who no longer hold citizenship and who are at risk of deportation in trouble cases. Sunja, Kyunghee, and Yangjin establish a confectionery stall, while Chungbo departs for Pyongyang to aid in the reconstruction of Korea. Noah enrolls in college at Waseda, with Hansu sponsoring his education, and Mozasu begins working at Goro's *Pachinko* parlor.

In 1965, Sunja relocates to Osaka to care for Solomon, the son of Mozasu, following the passing of his mother. Meanwhile, Noah discovers that his true father is not Isak, who raised him, but rather the Yakuza member Koh Hansu. In response, he abandons his studies at Waseda and moves to Nagano, assuming a new identity in a *Pachinko* establishment to repay Hansu, while cutting ties with his family and concealing his Korean origins. After Hansu tracks him down, Noah's mother pleads for his return, only for him to tragically take his own life after she leaves.

Solomon pursues higher education in Manhattan and secures employment at Travis Brothers. However, he is exploited by Kazu, a Japanese individual who used him to get the old woman, Sonoko Matsuda, into selling her home before dismissing Solomon. Feeling disillusioned, Solomon decides to follow in his father's footsteps and work in a *Pachinko* establishment.

As the book nears its conclusion, Sunja pays a visit to Isak's grave and learns from the caretaker that Noah had frequently visited as well. Delighted by this news, she places a photo of Noah on Isak's grave. The story concludes with Sunja reflecting on her life and all that she has experienced.

III. SYNTHESIZING THE RELEVANT LITERATURE REVIEW: THE ZAINICHI'S SENSE OF DISLOCATION, IDENTITY CRISIS, OTHERING, INEQUALITY, MARGINALIZATION AND TRAUMA IN LEE'S *PACHINKO*

Lee's *Pachinko* explores the complex intersections of Korean identity, colonialism, and the immigrant experience in Japan for the Zainichi Korean community. The research paper titled "Immigrant's Sense of Dislocation and Identity Crisis" delves into the complex experiences of Korean immigrants navigating their displacement and search for identity in Japan, as portrayed in Min Jin Lee's novel *Pachinko*. The paper employs a multi-layered theoretical framework, drawing upon Salman Rushdie's concepts of belonging and memory, Stuart Hall's cultural identity theory, Homi K Bhabha's notions of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity, and Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin's perspective on hybridity.

The paper highlights the profound sense of alienation and dislocation experienced by Korean immigrants in Japan, exemplified through the struggles of the novel's protagonist, Sunja. Her "authentic identity" is disregarded as she encounters prejudice and discrimination from the dominant Japanese society. This marginalization, rooted in ethnic prejudice, leads to a profound identity crisis among Korean immigrants. The research further explores the multifaceted nature of identity crisis through the character of Noa, who grapples with issues of class, culture, ethnicity, and prejudice. Despite assimilating into Japanese society, Noa's sense of belonging is shattered when he is confronted with his "otherness," ultimately leading to his tragic suicide.

The article additionally emphasizes that the Korean immigrant experience in "*Pachinko*" is not merely one of physical displacement but also a constant negotiation between their Korean heritage and the demands of their adopted Japanese culture. This struggle for belonging is further contextualized within the broader framework of diaspora studies, drawing upon Salman Rushdie's insights into the immigrant experience of loss, the longing for the past, and the challenges of reclaiming a lost homeland.

The study concludes by highlighting the persistent and evolving nature of identity formation for diasporic communities. It underscores how cultural and social norms of the adopted land, in this case, Japan's, significantly influence the shaping and reshaping of Korean identities. The use of multiple names by Koreans in Japan, as depicted in the novel, serves as a poignant symbol of this constant adaptation and negotiation of identity.

In a further article on the matter titled "The Saga of Unceasing Suffering: The "Zainichi" and Cultural Precarity in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*", Arya argues that the Zainichi are an example of a marginal migrant community subjected to the processes of Othering, inequality, and marginalization represented in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*. The history of Zainichi is cheek by jowl with discrimination as it was launched by Japan's colonialism to Korea, and inappropriate Japanese immigration policies. Despite being permanent residents, they continue to face marginalization, violence, and suffering.

The author draws on the notions of precarity, uncertainty and instability of the Zainichi in Japan, that confronts many migrant populations, and which includes economic insecurity and the risk of various forms of violence. Meanwhile, Judith Butler's alternative reading foregrounds the instability and precariousness of precarity itself as coextensive with the precariousness and migrancy of migrants. Known as 'denizens,' migrants are seen to belong less than citizens, consequently being privy to limited benefits, which leads to social and cultural estrangement.

Min Jin Lee delves into the history of the Zainichi Koreans in her book *Pachinko*, highlighting the challenges the Baeks family faced from prejudice and other types of cultural disavowal. The book, which covers several generations, illuminates the difficulties Zainichi people encounter in Japanese society, from questions of acceptability to concerns about identity and belonging.

In order to comprehend the injustices and marginalization that marginalized groups experience, the author finds it essential to grasp the idea of othering. Processes known as "othering" generate marginality and enduring inequality based on a variety of group identities, including sex, race, ethnicity, and religion. This can result in xenophobia and prejudice, which can lead to violence and abuse of migrants.

In *Pachinko*, the oppression of the Zainichi in Japan is well captured. The Zainichi characters face discrimination and violence in Osaka; Isaak from the Baeks family is taken in wrongfully, arrested and jailed. The aspect of Isaak deteriorating through prison is brought further into reality by showing that the police force was oppressive and sadistic to accentuate Othering's ramifications on individuals and communities. Isaak is unfortunately beyond recognition when he is released: he looks old and sick. His family has to suffer badly, too-his children, Noah and Mozasu, are ridiculed and persecuted due to their so-called Zainichi identities. The case of that suicide incident even shows the mistreatment of Zainichi youth and other problems that the poor minority has to face.

The generation of the Zainichi is ill-fitted; Mozasu thus shifts to the *pachinko* business, detested by their colonizers, while Noah attempts to become adapted but gets horrifically rejected. Their struggles are symbolic of the intricacy and unsundered fight of immigrants trying to survive in an environment hostile to them.

Baeks family's trauma and estrangement serve as a constant metaphor for the migrants' broader experiences of race and culture. They have to make a home in Japan where they have to live as permanent outsiders who suffer from trauma, suffering, and violence each and every day. Such generations-long oppression and misery are used to underline ordinary experiences common to migrants. As such, through the case example of Zainichi Koreans in Japan, Othering, inequality, and marginalization come to light expressing a critical reflection on the treatment of the marginalized communities within the society.

IV. NAVIGATING IDENTITY: A MULTI-FACETED ANALYSIS OF LEE'S *PACHINKO* THROUGH MARGINALIZATION, LIMINALITY, ALTERITY, CULTURAL SYNCRETISM, EXILIC CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE MYTH OF RETURNING HOME

The saga of the Korean diaspora in Japan, as depicted in Lee's novel *Pachinko*, provides a captivating exploration of the complex and multifaceted experiences of the Zainichi residing in Japan. At the heart of this narrative lies the intergenerational journey of identity formation, a process marked by both resilience and profound challenges. The novel delves into the intricate interplay of marginalization, liminality, and alterity that permeates the lives of the Zainichi, a Korean minority who find themselves occupying a liminal space, neither fully accepted by the dominant Japanese society nor entirely rooted in their ancestral homeland. Central to this Odyssey is the characters' negotiation of cultural syncretism, a constant and delicate balancing act as they strive to reconcile their Korean heritage with the realities of their Japanese surroundings. This uneasy coexistence of identities, coupled with the myth of an idealized "homecoming," underscores the exilic consciousness that pervades the lives of the Zainichi. The multigenerational narrative in *Pachinko* bears witness to the evolving nature of this diasporic experience, as each generation grapples with the challenges and opportunities presented by their liminal position.

Marginalization, Liminality and Alterity in Lee's *Pachinko*

Marginalization

Following their marriage, Sunja and Isak relocate from Yeongdo, Korea to Osaka, Japan in 1933, during the Japanese colonial period. Their migration is motivated by the aspiration for a better life and the prospect of improving their financial situation, with the ultimate goal of eventually returning to Korea. However, upon their arrival in Japan, the couple confronts the stark realities of discrimination and social marginalization. In Osaka, they join Isak's brother, Yoseb, and his wife, Kyunghee, in the Ikaino ghetto, a predominantly Korean neighborhood characterized by substandard housing conditions. The compulsory residence in the Ikaino ghetto is a manifestation of the discriminatory laws imposed on the Zainichi Korean community, which restricted their access to adequate housing and perpetuated their liminal status within Japanese society. In addition, the colonial government obliged Christians to bow at Shinto Shrines each morning in Korea, and once or twice a week in Japan. These are places of worship in the Shinto religion, which is indigenous to Japan and involves the veneration of kami. To the Japanese, this act is portrayed as patriotic and civic duty rather than a religious one, it is considered as a sign of loyalty to the emperor who was seen as a divine figure and deity in the Shinto belief. Despite the Japanese claims that the practice is purely patriotic and non-religious, the religious undertones of the Shrine rituals, led to resistance among Korean Christians, some of whom refused to comply and acknowledge loyalty to the emperor, including Isak, Yoo and Hu. This gesture made them seen as rebels by the Japanese authorities leading to their persecution and punishment. After Isak's imprisonment, Sunja did her best to work and provide for her family, only to meet Isak back home in a critical condition left to die. This further exemplifies the aftermath of the Korean immigrants who refuse to abide by the Japanese colonial rules and to submit to their dominance, and are consequently subjected to severe repressive measures. This systemic marginalization is compounded by the liminal positioning of the Zainichi, who occupy a precarious space between their Korean heritage and the Japanese social fabric.

Liminality

Representing a key term in performance studies, liminality was coined by Arnold van Gennep in (1908) and popularized by Victor Turner (1964) as part of anthropological studies, "the term may be said to designate a transitory and precarious phase between stable states...In liminality, participants have lost their former symbolic status, but they have not yet attained their new significance. Liminality, then, is an in-between of potent but dangerous formlessness" (Skjoldager-Nielsen and Edelman, 1, 2014). Sunja's first son, Noah, in *Pachinko*, exemplifies this liminality as he struggles to reconcile his Korean roots with

the Japanese context in which he was born and raised. Having already a Japanese name, to further veil his Korean origins, though born in Japan, Noah spoke perfect Japanese, did well at school, didn't believe in the existence of god and wanted to be identified as a Japanese, completely disregarding and masking his Korean heritage. However, this forced assimilation into Japanese society came at a cost, as Noah felt perpetually caught between two cultures, unable to fully embrace neither his Korean ethnicity nor his Japanese upbringing. After learning that his biological father is in fact Hansu and not Isak, he cuts ties with his family, moves to Nagano, gets married and doesn't reveal his Korean identity to his wife. However, once Hansu learns about his whereabouts and sends Sunja to visit him, he tragically took his own life, "Sunja hadn't gone to Noah's funeral. He hadn't wanted his wife and children to know about her, and she had done enough already. If she hadn't visited him the way she had, maybe he might still be alive" (Lee, 430). This profound sense of liminality and rootlessness experienced by Noah reflects the broader plight of the Zainichi, whose lives are marked by a constant negotiation between competing demands of their Korean and Japanese identities.

Alterity

as a term used in different contexts; philosophical, literary and cultural, psychological, social, political and so on, it is used to refer to the state of being fundamentally different or "other" from the dominant social identity. In *Pachinko*, alterity is represented through the theme of otherness or the state of being different for the Zainichi. They are often seen as outsiders or "other" within Japanese society. Sunja and her family (Isak, Yoseb, Kyunghee), throughout the novel, and as being part of the Zainichi, try to navigate the challenges of assimilation and acceptance in a society that views them as different. Their alterity shapes their experiences, exclusion and hardship. For instance, Noah and Mozasu have different attitudes to deal with the discrimination they face, while Noah tries his best to assimilate with the Japanese identity and outperform his classmates, Mozasu's, on the other hand has a different attitude of handling the situation. He didn't hesitate to stand up for himself whenever he faced discrimination, as "Every day, before school began and after school ended, the bigger boys told Mozasu, 'Go back to Korea'" (Lee, 222). Mozasu's rebellious nature was a reaction to the marginalization and othering he experienced as a Zainichi, while Noah's more passive approach reflects the struggle to be accepted and the desire to shed his ethnic identity.

Even the third-generation Korean-Japanese characters, such as Mozasu's son Solomon, could not escape the profound sense of being an outsider and 'other' within

Japanese society, highlighting the enduring legacy of alterity experienced by the Zainichi. Despite being born in Japan and having parents born there as well, the fact that Solomon, and every third-generation Korean-Japanese, is still obliged to carry a Korean passport means they are viewed as the 'other' in Japanese society.

To some the term designates being the "other" in every case possible, and in both countries; Japan and Korea. For Yumi, "being Korean was just another horrible encumbrance, much like being poor or having a shameful family you could not cast off. Why would she ever live there? But she could not imagine clinging to Japan, which was like a beloved stepmother who refused to love you, so Yumi dreamed of Los Angeles" (Lee, 268). She wanted to go with Mozasu to America "to make another life where they wouldn't be despised or ignored. She could not imagine raising a child here" (Lee 268). Home in this sense is nowhere, other is always other with respect to the dominant society, and alterity cannot be unlearned or remedied. Much like Yumi, Noah views his Korean origins as a source of shame, "All my life, I have had Japanese telling me that my blood is Korean—that Koreans are angry, violent, cunning, and deceitful criminals. All my life, I had to endure this. I tried to be as honest and humble as Baek Isak was; I never raised my voice. But this blood, my blood is Korean" (Lee, 282). This ambivalence towards their ethnic identity is a common thread among the Zainichi characters in *Pachinko*, reflecting the profound psychic toll of being cast as perpetual outsiders.

The notions of alterity and liminality are further exemplified when Solomon, the third-generation Korean-Japanese character, goes back to Korea. Still viewed as the other, Solomon and his wife Phoebe, who speaks Korean, are regarded as Korean immigrants of some kind and have a reputation of being "bad Koreans." Feeling that neither Japan nor Korea is truly home for them, they simply play along as Japanese tourists. Solomon's boss, Kazu, tells him that Koreans and Chinese are not treated fairly in Japan, even if they were born there. They do not have equal job opportunities and are unable to rent properties easily. That is mainly due to the deeply entrenched societal biases and discrimination against their foreign heritage which prevents them from ever feeling a true sense of belonging no matter how long they have lived in the country.

The Characters' Cultural Syncretism and Exilic Consciousness

The saga in *Pachinko* further delves into the theme of cultural syncretism and exilic consciousness that permeates the lives of the Zainichi. The narrative captures the intricate interweaving of Korean and Japanese cultural influences, as the characters grapple between their

hybridized identities, caught between the allure of their ancestral legacies and the realities they confront in Japan. According to Cambridge dictionary, syncretism refers to “the combination of different religions, cultures and ideas”. The term “cultural syncretism” was first used by scholars to describe the blending of beliefs and the identification of the most authentic and original expressions, in contrast to different or similar forms of religious and cultural expression (Nel, 2, 2017). Currently being used in different contexts, the term originates in Greek culture, “The earliest use of the concept is found in Greek culture to designate assimilation of diverse groups as a united cluster, and soon it became the notion of the unity or reconciliation of differing schools of thought, cultures and religions” (Nel, 2, 2017). Sunja, the matriarch of the family, embodies this cultural syncretism, blending her Korean roots with the Japanese context she navigates. This blending of beliefs and cultural expressions is also evident in the various members of the family, whether they fully embrace or struggle with their hybridity. For instance, during the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, Hansu and Sunja insisted that their children Noah and Mozasu, who were born and raised in Japan, speaking Japanese and immersed in Japanese culture, still must learn Korean, as there was always the possibility of returning to their ancestral homeland.

Other characters, like Hansu, Noah's father who is a well-off Yakuza, has his own viewpoints and priorities on dealing with this cultural syncretism rather than focus on his cultural liminal situation. He believes and advises Sunja and Kim that personal interest must be prioritized over politics, “The war will end soon, but not the way they think. The wealthy Japanese have already sent their families to the country. They've already converted their cash into gold. The rich do not care about politics; they will say anything to save their skin. You're not rich, but you're smart, and I'm telling you that you have to leave today.” (Lee, 184). To Kim, who works for him, he adds that business should also be over nation:

whenever you go to these meetings, I want you to think for yourself, and I want you to think about promoting your own interests no matter what. All these people—both the Japanese and the Koreans—are fucked because they keep thinking about the group. But here's the truth: There's no such thing as a benevolent leader. I protect you because you work for me... You lived with that farmer Tamaguchi who sold sweet potatoes for obscene prices to starving Japanese during a time of war. He violated wartime regulations, and I helped him, because he wanted money and I do, too. He probably thinks he's a decent, respectable Japanese, or some kind of proud nationalist—don't

they all? He's a terrible Japanese, but a smart businessman. I'm not a good Korean, and I'm not a Japanese. I'm very good at making money. This country would fall apart if everyone believed in some samurai crap. The Emperor does not give a fuck about anyone, either. So I'm not going to tell you not to go to any meetings or not to join any group. But know this: Those communists don't care about you. They don't care about anybody. You're crazy if you think they care about Korea...For people like us, home doesn't exist. (Lee, 210).

His viewpoints of prioritizing his interest over the nation can be further exemplified in the following quote, “Patriotism is just an idea, so is capitalism or communism. But ideas can make men forget their own interests. And the guys in charge will exploit men who believe in ideas too much. You can't fix Korea. Not even a hundred of you or a hundred of me can fix Korea” (Lee, 211).

Exilic consciousness, a further theme in *Pachinko*, is considered a byproduct of cultural syncretism. The narrative in *Pachinko* delves into the interplay between the characters' hybridized identities, caught between the allure of their ancestral legacies and the realities they confront in the Japanese context resulting in a state of constant exile. This state of perpetual liminality and the struggle to reconcile their Korean heritage with the Japanese environment in which they were born and raised, gives rise to a profound sense of exilic consciousness among the Zainichi characters. The characters in the novel grapple with a sense of displacement and disconnection from their homeland, as well as a longing for a place they may never truly belong. This feeling of being in exile is particularly poignant for the Zainichi, who are caught between their Korean heritage and their lives in Japan. Sunja, for example, longs to return to Korea but knows that her life and family are rooted in Japan.

The concept of exilic consciousness is further highlighted through the experiences of characters like Sunja's sons, Noah and Mozasu, and their struggles with identity. They grapple with their Korean heritage and the expectations placed on them by both Korean and Japanese societies, feeling like they do not truly belong in either.

Hansu's perspective on prioritizing personal interests over national identity can be seen as a further reflection of this exilic consciousness. His belief that ideas like patriotism and capitalism are just ideas, and that one must prioritize their own interests above all else, speaks to a sense of detachment from any sense of national identity or belonging.

Overall, the theme of exilic consciousness in *Pachinko* adds another layer of complexity to the characters' struggles with cultural syncretism and their search for a sense of place and belonging in a world where they may always feel like outsiders.

The myth of Going Home

The characters in *Pachinko* often grapple with the idea of returning to their ancestral homeland, Korea, which represents a sense of belonging and identity. The concept of the "myth of return" holds great importance in classical diaspora literature, as it is thought to be ingrained in the consciousness of immigrants from the moment they arrive (Cakmak, 1).

The "myth of return" (Answar, 1) refers to more than a mere demographic movement. In sociological and anthropological literature, while there are nuances, almost all immigrant communities are depicted as people motivated by the idea of returning to their homeland, while simultaneously struggling to maintain links with their place of origin. The myth of return represents a powerful emotional tie that diasporic communities maintain with their homeland, which serves as a cohesive force for consolidating the kinship boundaries of the community and renegotiating their identity. This concept, as highlighted by Dahya, is central to the experiences of immigrant communities, who are often motivated by the idea of returning to their place of origin while simultaneously struggling to maintain connections with it.

In *Pachinko*, the myth of return is a recurring theme that shapes the lives and decisions of the characters. For Hansu, the idea of return and the notion of 'home Korea' is dismissed as he thinks that they are "living for a dream of a home that no longer exists" (Lee, 203). While Yoseb believes that Korea is still considered home because his parents are there, Hansu tells him that they are not and that

They were shot. All landowners who were foolish enough to stick around were shot. Communists see people only in simple categories

Yoseb wept and covered his eyes.

The lie had to be told, and Hansu did not mind telling it. If the parents weren't dead already, Yoseb's and Kyunghee's parents would starve to death or die of old age inevitably. They could have very well been shot. The conditions in the communist-occupied North were awful. There were numerous landowners who'd been rounded up, killed, and shoved into mass graves. No, he didn't know for certain if Yoseb's parents were alive or not, and yes, he could have learned the

truth if he didn't mind risking some of his men to find them, but he didn't see the point of it. He didn't see how their lives could be useful for his purposes. (Lee, 203)

While it was indeed economically tough for Koreans to survive in South Korea, the communist-occupied north wasn't necessarily any better, as many landowners were killed for owning lands. This left the Zainichi with few to no ties to their homeland and a frail sense of returning, complicating the myth of return with the realities of a homeland torn apart by colonial and post-colonial legacies.

V. CONCLUSION

The Korean experience in Japan is understood well through a number of thematic lenses such as marginalization, liminality, alterity, cultural syncretism and the myth of returning home. The novel powerfully portrays the ongoing problems that these Zainichi face including institutionalized racism and social alienation. Their life as "in-betweeners" who are both Korean and Japanese accentuates cultural negotiations' intricacy as they live with an alienating sense of otherness. On another hand, the blending of Korean and Japanese cultures is analyzed through cultural syncretism and exilic consciousness. Although there is a glimmer of hope for returning home in the future, this is not possible for most characters since they are part of Zainichi's past political realities. Generational changes in Zainichi experience can be observed through intergenerational *Pachinko* narrative which will also examine their identity formations and ongoing search for belonging amidst adversity. A more profound comprehension of the Koreans in Japan may be achieved if we see how underlining ideas like displacement or identity formation are represented within this text.

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