

# Epilogue

## *Global Zainichi Literature*

If Zainichi literature is indeed reaching its end, it is doing so at a moment when the Zainichi community is more globally visible than at any point in its history. Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* (2017), a widely decorated bestseller in the United States, has been translated into nearly thirty languages. The novel, along with Soo Hugh's television adaptation for Apple TV+, has brought the stories of Koreans in Japan to broader and more international audiences than ever before, albeit through the conduit of English-language media. At the same time, efforts to translate Zainichi literature have ramped up considerably, particularly for South Korean and Anglophone markets.

Translations into Korean have existed at least since Yi Yangji's *Yuhi* was published nearly simultaneously with the original in 1989. Yū Miri and Gen Getsu were translated into Korean upon receiving the Akutagawa Prize, marketed as winners of the same. But the last decade has seen a sharp increase in Korean-language translations of, and research on, Zainichi literature. Kim Sōkpōm's massive *Kazantō* was released in a twelve-volume Korean translation in 2015, followed by the final installment of a five-volume collection of Kim Saryang's work and related secondary scholarship in 2016.<sup>1</sup> Since the *Kazantō* translation, the same press has continued to publish translations of fiction and non-fiction by Zainichi writers, especially those concerned with the Cheju 4.3 Incident, such as Kim Sōkpōm and Kim Shijong. Kim Sōkpōm's *Kotoba no jubaku* and *Mandogi yūrei kitan*, both addressed in chapter 4, were released in Korean translation in 2022.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, in English, the same trend has occurred, both within and outside the academic press. On the academic side, a second anthology of short fiction and other writings by Koreans in Japan was released in 2018, following the first of

its kind in 2011.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, in the popular press, Takami Nieda's translation of Kaneshiro Kazuki's *GO* appeared in 2018.<sup>4</sup> Most notably, Yū Miri's *JR Ueno-eki Kōenguchi* (2014) won the 2020 National Book Award for translated literature as *Tokyo Ueno Station*, translated by Morgan Giles.<sup>5</sup> Giles's translation of *Hachigatsu no hate* was published as *The End of August* in 2023.<sup>6</sup> Possibly due to this increased attention in English, Korean translations of *JR Ueno-eki Kōenguchi* and *GO* were released in 2021 and 2023 respectively, the former titled after the English version, *Tok'yo Ueno Sūtēishōn*.<sup>7</sup>

At this moment of increased visibility for the Zainichi community, one can sense the gravitational pull of South Korean soft power initiatives and the global hegemony of English, as in the relatively belated Korean translations of *GO* and *Tokyo Ueno Station*. Most emblematic of these forces, perhaps, is the Korean Diaspora Literature series, sponsored by the Literature Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea), a state organization whose mission is to increase South Korea's cultural influence by disseminating Korean literature to the world. The 2022 publication of several volumes of Zainichi literature in English translation, through LTI sponsorship, instantly doubled the quantity of texts available in English.<sup>8</sup> These volumes, appearing alongside works by Koreans in China and Russia, are marketed as simultaneously Korean and global, with very little to indicate that these texts were written in Japanese rather than Korean.

Much like the use of *Chainichi'i*, after the Anglophone pronunciation of Zainichi, rather than *Chaeil*, the Korean sinographic equivalent (discussed in chapter 1), this pattern is indicative of the ways that the English language is implicated in the discursive formation of Zainichi literature. If ever it was tenable to discuss these works under the umbrella of Japanese or Korean national literatures—or indeed, a binary opposition of the two—that time is now past. Perhaps *Pachinko* and *Tokyo Ueno Station*, the two prime examples of Zainichi literature's globalization and increased reach, can both be dismissed as failing to fall within the taxonomical boundaries of the genre itself. *Pachinko*, of course, is not written by a member of the Zainichi community, whereas the content of *Tokyo Ueno Station* has nothing obvious to do with the diasporic Korean experience in Japan. Yet even contemporary works that fall more squarely within the purview of Zainichi literature, such as Sagisawa Megumu's "Hontō no natsu" ("The True Summer," 1992), Kim Masumi's "Moeru Sōka" ("The Burning Grass House," 1997), and Che Sil's *Jini no pazuru* (Jini's Puzzle, 2016), introduce what David Roh has called the "tertiary national space" of the United States as a means of teasing out the contours of Zainichi identity in a globalizing world.<sup>9</sup> These texts are interested in the mobile, deterritorialized Zainichi subject, particularly as it travels to and from the United States.

As the history narrated in this book demonstrates, there is nothing particularly new about this. These forms of movement and contact across intersecting imperial hegemonies have been with Zainichi literature since its beginnings, and even before, in the Korean- and Japanese-language writings of colonial Korea.

Nevertheless, the frameworks through which we have viewed these works have not allowed these transnational, intersectional elements to come into focus. In Anglo-American academia in particular, it is not only the siloed nation-state sectors of area studies that have been a barrier. To reiterate, Zainichi studies has been at the center of successful efforts to explode those siloes, and border-crossing inter-Asian exchange now has a firm place within Asian studies disciplines. The problem, however, is that these transnational phenomena are still ostensibly bounded within the area of Asia “over there,” alienated from the hegemonic English-language production of knowledge “over here.”

What this book has attempted is a move beyond what Donna Haraway has called a “conquering gaze from nowhere,” probing instead the possibilities of a kind of knowledge production answerable and accountable for its own “semiotic technologies for making meanings.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, perhaps its primary concern has been the implication of normative “semiotic technologies” themselves in creating the silence or incoherence of certain voices. Among these voices are those of Koreans in Japan, situated at the intersection of Japanese imperialism, Western (or more specifically American) global hegemony, and now even an ethnocentric South Korean soft power machine. A recognition of this global entanglement, as well as the reader’s own location within it, is necessary for engaging with the sometimes silent, sometimes incoherent voices it produces. After Haraway’s “situated knowledge,” we might call this kind of approach *situated reading*.

In that spirit, I would like to conclude by further suggesting that Zainichi literature in its deterritorialized form can reveal the ways that the American academic “gaze from nowhere” obscures an important truth: that Zainichi stories *are* American stories. Here, of course, I do not mean to imply that Zainichi stories are commensurate to the American experience, wholly knowable as objects of empathy or interpretation. Rather, they are our stories because we are involved, and have been from the start. The struggle of Koreans in Japan for rights, recognition, and representation, often implicitly presented as *paralleling* the struggles of ethnic and racial minorities in the United States (or worse, divorced entirely from Western contexts), is in fact deeply *entangled* with American imperialism, Cold War politics, and global hegemony. That struggle is also imbricated with the history of Japanese imperialism and perhaps, in the twenty-first century, the rise of an appropriative global Korean cultural imperialism.

If this book asks, at some level, what it means for American readers—or *an* American reader—to take up Zainichi literature, then it must first be said that there is no Zainichi literature to take up. Zainichi literature does not cohere, precisely because of these intersectional entanglements, as well as those more typically conjured by intersectionality discourse: race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability. And second, even a single text that has traveled to readers along the pathways enabled by the taxonomical framework of Zainichi cannot be grasped as something that exists in the world *outside*, alien to the American experience.

But even if such a reader recognizes her involvement and entanglement with the text, it does not follow that it appears in a form that is fully legible, assimilated into the modes of expression and representation she expects. Instead, these texts—exemplified by but by no means limited to the works discussed in this book—are often presented as challenges to blithe assumptions of legibility and commensurability within a global literary market, where global equals “in English.”

This radical illegibility or incoherence is more visible through the lens of intersectionality. Such a lens allows for the recognition that barriers to legibility and coherence are erected in part by the intersection of empires and other forms of hierarchy. At the same time, an intersectional framework reveals the entire question of legibility to be a practical one: there is no legibility in the abstract. The question is always: legible *to whom*? Just as there is no coherent Zainichi literature, much less a uniform Zainichi community, there is no representative American reader, no cohesive American experience or history outside those constructed through the suppression of internal difference and transnational entanglement. Recognizing the positioned nature of the reader, with a gaze from *somewhere*, in turn gives rise to an ethical demand for self-consciousness of the ways that a given audience, its modes of listening and reading, are complicit in limiting or producing the possibilities for what can and cannot be said.

I want to end, then, by exploring the Zainichi-adjacent text that has resonated most powerfully with American readers and literary circles. Through a situated reading of *Pachinko*, conscious of both reader and writer's respective positions, the ethical demands of reading from somewhere can come into focus. These demands are made all the more poignant by the uncanny familiarity of the novel, presented both as a story that history has excised from the very possibility of coming into global view, yet at the same time as an object for international empathy and understanding. Like so many texts treated in this book, it asks readers who encounter it to recognize the violence they do by ignoring them as well as the violence they do by understanding them, if understanding is only possible on the reader's terms.

#### PACHINKO AND THE FAILURES OF HISTORY

*Pachinko* narrates four generations of a family history, starting from a poor couple in Yeongdo whose first several children die at a young age before their one surviving daughter, Sunja, is born. The novel's story largely coincides with Sunja's lifetime, though the central focus eventually shifts to her sons, Noa and Mozasu, and finally to her grandson, Solomon. Whether at the intimate level of the family or in terms of the grand narratives of nations, *Pachinko* is concerned with history. Better yet, it is concerned with the absence of history, paradoxically telling the stories that have not been told. As *Pachinko* famously begins, “History has failed us, but no matter.”<sup>11</sup> Christina Yi has interrogated this opening line in terms of its

use of “us,” probing the conditions for being included in the “us” whose absent history the novel sets out to narrate.<sup>12</sup> Yi compares the global reach of *Pachinko*, via English, to works of Zainichi literature that have been rendered “untranslatable” by the very Japanese terms for referring to the community inscribed in this “us.”

Following Yi, I would like to consider another kind of “us” that is implicated in this failure of history. After all, for the presence or absence of Zainichi history to come into question in the first place, there must be an audience for that history. Lee’s opening line is enigmatic, perhaps merely meant to convey that the events of history have been cruel to Koreans in Japan. But it could also suggest that history has failed to record or narrate the experiences of Koreans in Japan, though Lee’s own thorough research for the book contradicts this notion. I read this line instead as a declaration that nobody *knows* this history, that it is under- or unrepresented—a problem for which the novel acts as a corrective. Of course, it is not that nobody knows this history, but rather that “we” as global (read English-language) readers are presumed never to have encountered it. Thus, history has failed—or has been failed by—yet another “us.”

Speaking for myself, to read *Pachinko* as an American immersed in the Zainichi literary tradition is to feel an uncanny sense of my own position. In a way, I am not the target audience. The novel seeks to introduce and explain things I already know. Yet at the same time, the story feels out of sync with the texts by Zainichi writers that taught me those things in the first place. Its project is different. This difference arises precisely from the novel’s assumption of an American audience with a particular understanding of the relationships between race, ethnicity, and nation—and here I am very much included in the target audience. What feels so strange about *Pachinko* has everything to do with the problem of representation that this book sets out to critique: like so much English-language knowledge making, it sets out to bring into “our” sphere of vision a history that has been invisible, but it can only do so on “our” terms, even as the ostensible purpose of representing the un(der)represented is to disrupt those very terms.

This problem, as well as the centrality of American modes of thinking through questions of national belonging and racial justice, comes to the fore in Lee’s framing of her own response to Zainichi stories. In an interview with *The Atlantic*, Lee says:

I realized that I was more upset about what had happened to them, in many ways, more than they were. I think I was more upset because, as an American, I feel a sense of indignation at injustice, and I also feel like I can have redress. As a lawyer, I know that I can seek justice in a very specific formal way. Not that these efforts have always had a good outcome in our legal history, and they can require people to take continuous action for a very long time. But in America there have been some wonderful overturning of inequitable things, even if it’s taken 20 years or 50 years or 100 years. As Americans, we know it’s possible. But this was a reminder that, in other parts of the world, there is often no redress for suffering or inequity.<sup>13</sup>

Lee's perspective on injustices faced by the Zainichi community, both here and in the novel, seems unaware of the rich history of Zainichi activism, and the extent to which it has in fact sought and won many forms of redress.<sup>14</sup> Of course, much of this activism has been geared toward reunification and other forms of justice for Koreans on the peninsula, rather than aimed at carving out a space for Koreans in a liberal pluralist Japan. Organized Zainichi politics was supported by and aligned with North Korea for much of its postwar history, and even outside the purview of Chōngryōn, Koreans in Japan have opposed and sought redress for American militarism and imperialism, often in fraught solidarity with the Japanese left. If Lee or her readers set out looking for a history of Zainichi activism that mimics or parallels that of Asian Americans or other racial minorities in the United States, then of course they may find little worth mentioning. But if there is indeed "no redress for suffering or inequity," then surely that is a product of American power itself, not the result of a lack of some uniquely American "sense of indignation at injustice."

Indeed, in many ways, *Pachinko* orients the story toward the United States as a sort of teleological end goal of the Zainichi history it tells in microcosm. The characters idolize the United States, often simply as a status symbol—Solomon's education at Columbia University a case in point—but at times ideologically, as a bastion of justice and freedom. In the end, when Solomon abandons his (or his family's) dream of employment at an American bank to follow in his father's footsteps in the pachinko business, this is perhaps meant to signal what Lee calls, in the interview quoted above, Zainichi "graciousness in response to their suffering."<sup>15</sup> What could easily be read as political quietism is cast as the strength to endure, rather than fight, injustice. In either case, the entire story is couched in the assumption that redress for Koreans in Japan would take the forms it has taken in the United States, and that these forms are perhaps impossible in the Japanese context.

The impossibility of reconciling American multiculturalist views of justice and redress with the Japanese setting in which the novel takes place comes through particularly clearly in the character arc of Phoebe, a Korean American woman introduced as the story is drawing to a close. Phoebe is Solomon's girlfriend, whom he meets in college. She stands in stark contrast to the main female characters, all of whom echo the novel's refrain, "a woman's lot is to suffer."<sup>16</sup> In line with the way Lee describes the Zainichi Koreans she spoke to as part of her research for the book, these women do not respond with indignation to their suffering, but rather find ways to survive and even thrive despite their lot in life. By comparison, Phoebe has no patience for the injustices they face, and has no qualms about saying so aloud. A review of the Japanese translation of *Pachinko* calls her "fortissimo."<sup>17</sup>

The casual misogyny here, from a reader of the novel, echoes that confronted by the characters, including Phoebe, within the story itself. In fact, Kang Yujin

connects Sunja's departure for Japan with a long and ongoing history of Koreans emigrating in an attempt to escape patriarchy and heterosexism.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, as the novel moves forward in time from colonial Korea to imperial and post-imperial Japan, and eventually expands in geographic scope to include the United States, the freedoms women enjoy continually expand. This is one of many ways that the novel sets up an implicit teleology that moves inexorably toward a liberated, idealized America. Within this schema, Japan can be viewed either as a stepping stone toward the real prize of American immigration and assimilation, or as a deviation that hinders the family's smooth journey toward this ultimate goal.<sup>19</sup>

This hierarchical configuration leads to a disconnect for Phoebe, who cannot reconcile the modes of Korean identification she encounters in Japan with her own Korean American positionality. Nor does Solomon's family seem to be able to comprehend Phoebe's experience. This disconnect comes into relief when Solomon brings Phoebe to a family gathering at which Sunja and her sister-in-law Kyunghee are preparing a feast. Kyunghee and Sunja are shocked when Phoebe reveals that her own mother does not cook, and she "grew up eating pizza and hamburgers" because her mother worked as an office manager in her father's practice (449).

'Mom was always working. She did all the medical paperwork at the dining table next to us kids while we did our homework. I don't think she ever went to bed until midnight—'

'But you didn't eat any Korean food?'

Kyunghee couldn't comprehend this.

'On the weekends we ate it. At a restaurant' (449).

As the conversation continues, Phoebe is almost dismissive of Kyunghee and Sunja's seeming obsession with Korean food, which for them has been a source of pride, income, and community throughout the novel. At the same time, the gap in their respective Korean immigrant experiences is couched precisely in terms of the roles for women, with Phoebe's mother "out of the kitchen," so to speak, suggesting the beginning of a more complete liberation that Phoebe appears to enjoy. As the scene concludes, this is all made more explicit through Sunja's inner monologue: "Her mother used to say a woman's life was suffering, but that was the last thing she wanted for this sweet girl who had a quick, warm smile for everyone. If she didn't cook, then so what?" (451).

Phoebe clearly stands in contrast to the long-suffering Zainichi women in Solomon's family, but is nevertheless connected to them via Korean ethnicity, which is what seems to count. In the same scene, it is noted that Solomon feels pressure from his grandmother and aunt to marry a Korean woman, and Sunja's narrated train of thought goes on to mention that "she hoped that Phoebe wanted children." Even if Phoebe does not share the family's particular immigrant experience, she belongs to the same "imagined community" of the global



Korean diaspora. Min Jin Lee goes out of her way to frame the diaspora as such, using an extended quotation from Benedict Anderson as the epigraph to Book III (which contains this scene and the entirety of Phoebe's arc), following the Book II epigraph, "I thought that no matter how many hills and brooks you crossed, the whole world was Korea and everyone in it was Korean."<sup>20</sup> Much like the South Korean soft power machine, Lee is interested in the Korean diaspora as a global entity, bound together by connections imagined rather than real.<sup>21</sup> But at the same time, I would maintain that forging even spurious connections across these disparate communities might nevertheless be productive, along the lines of what Andrea Mendoza theorizes as "nonencounter," a means of contesting the bounded and ostensibly coherent siloes of knowledge production that render illegible non-Western modes of thinking race, gender, sexuality, and so forth.<sup>22</sup> Ironically, the entire conversation takes place in Korean, a language Phoebe shares with Sunja and Kyunghee, but not Solomon. Her Korean, like English, connects her to the global Korean diaspora in a way that is inaccessible to Zainichi Koreans who speak only Japanese.

This is not to say that the bridge between Korean Americans (or the broader Korean diaspora) and a globalized South Korea is erected via suppression of the history of Japanese colonization. If anything, the reverse is true, as exemplified by Phoebe. Living in Japan to be close to Solomon, Phoebe becomes more and more disillusioned with Japan, and eventually their relationship deteriorates as a result. When Solomon accuses her of bigotry against the Japanese, she responds, "You're going to say that I've been reading too much about the Pacific War," suggesting that Solomon resents her constant reminders of the atrocities committed by the Japanese empire (470). In fact, Solomon offers as a rebuttal a reminder of Japanese victimhood during the same period: "The Japanese have suffered, too. Nagasaki? Hiroshima? And in America, the Japanese Americans were sent to internment camps, but the German Americans weren't. How do you explain that?" (470). He thus repeats the rhetoric of victimhood and defeat that is so often leveraged in Japan to avoid reckoning with the victims of Japan's wartime aggression, including colonial Koreans. If only one of these histories can be relevant at once—in other words, without attending to the intersection of Japanese and American imperialisms—then the history of Koreans in Japan becomes impossible to articulate.

Positioned at this intersection, Solomon's frustration with Phoebe becomes a bit clearer. As noted above, part of what is difficult about Solomon's situation arises directly out of the history of Japanese imperialism, particularly his alienation from the Korean language. But it is largely the history of American imperialism—leading to the division of the peninsula, the suppression of Korean ethnic schools and activist organizations in occupied Japan, and the precarious and limited citizenship status of Koreans in Japan—that causes the issues that Phoebe finds so



inscrutable. In one moment, it is the internal division of the Zainichi community itself that sets her off:

'In America, there is no such thing as a *Kankokujin* or *Chosenjin*. Why the hell would I be a South Korean or a North Korean? That makes no sense! I was born in Seattle, and my parents came to the States when there was only one Korea,' she'd shout, relating one of the bigotry anecdotes of her day. 'Why does Japan still distinguish the two countries for its Korean residents who've been here for four fucking generations? You were born here. You're not a foreigner! That's insane. Your father was born here. Why are you two carrying South Korean passports? It's bizarre' (435).

It is notable that the situation that Phoebe decries as "insane" and "bizarre" is also the one that she cannot articulate strictly in English. She must resort to the terms *Kankokujin* and *Chosenjin*, left somewhat opaque, though vaguely understood as referring to South and North Korea respectively. She neglects to mention that there is no neutral term outside the Anglophone "Korean." Suggestively, in the Korean translation of the novel, these terms are rendered as *Kangkokkukujing* and *Chosenjing*, transliterating into Korean the Japanese pronunciation of the terms rather than translating them into their Korean equivalents, *Hangugin* and *Chosŏnin*.<sup>23</sup> The translator understands the illegibility here as vital to Phoebe's position. If the two terms are fully legible, then the difference between them is fully legible, and the insistence on distinguishing can hardly be described as "insane."

Indeed, so much of what remains illegible in *Pachinko*, despite its overall success in representing Zainichi Koreans and correcting the history that has "failed" them, are all the ways that the United States is implicated in that very history. Instead, it is portrayed a sort of paradise on the horizon, "this magical place so many Koreans in Japan idealized" (336). The few characters who might be inclined to criticize the United States, such as those aligned with Chŏngryŏn, are portrayed as misguided, and bound for a North Korea that functions as a black hole in the novel, where people go to disappear. And yet, the broader Cold War politics in East Asia, responsible for so much of the injustice that Lee sets out to narrate, warrant barely a mention. This is the part of the story that Phoebe—and likely most readers of *Pachinko*—cannot see.

Perhaps it is this unspoken difference in perspective that ultimately alienates Phoebe from Solomon. As he decides to end their relationship, at essentially the same moment he chooses to abandon his career in global finance for his father's line of work, Solomon muses that he "was Japanese, too, even if the Japanese didn't think so. Phoebe couldn't see this. There was more to being something than just blood. The space between Phoebe and him could not close, and if he was decent, he had to let her go home" (471). In this way, Solomon's story eventually undermines the teleological march of the family toward success and liberation in the United States, and the importance of their location in Japan is

reasserted over the globalized Korean (ethnocentric) identity that Phoebe stands in for. It falls to Solomon, the character most deeply entangled with the United States itself, to insist on the unbridgeable chasm between the Zainichi experience and the American perspective.

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Perhaps it is strange to end a book on the representational impossibilities faced by Zainichi writers with a reading of a bestseller overtly aiming for Zainichi representation. And of course, some readers may object that Min Jin Lee's work, like that of Yi Kwangsu and perhaps even Kim Saryang, is not "Zainichi." By now I hope it is clear that this distinction can only matter if we begin from the assumption that Zainichi literature is a coherent and knowable entity "over there," removed from the production of anglophonic knowledge. Instead, I have argued that the more salient function of literary taxonomies, such as Zainichi literature, is to create encounters. The textual encounters narrated in this book can enable an ethics that goes beyond empathy and understanding.

In this sense, when nations, cultures, languages, and other modes of taxonomizing literature come into question, perhaps it is more important to describe the location of the audience than the author. It is through situated reading that the ethical potential of literature is unlocked. What is exciting about reading Zainichi literature from somewhere rather than nowhere is that it reveals the ways that the same intersecting power relations that define Zainichi positionality also define our own. It allows us to be affected by the texts, rather than constantly seeking to know them as something over there, not here. Properly situated as such, the reading of *Pachinko*, in places and languages all over the world, has this potential as well.

Indeed, it is only by suppressing the myriad ways that the United States is implicated in Zainichi history that it becomes possible for American readers to experience *Pachinko* at a distance, to empathize with characters facing an injustice "over there." Its release coincided with the start of the Trump presidency, and its popularity continued into the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought further attention to racial inequities, particularly anti-Asian hate crimes and police killings of black Americans, including George Floyd in May 2020, sparking massive protests in the summer of that year. In the midst of this heightened awareness of American racism, the novel perhaps provided an outlet for readers to engage with issues of race and national identity in the abstract. American readers could sympathize with Zainichi Koreans, secure in the knowledge that they have nothing to do with "us." But as the very narrative of *Pachinko* tacitly reveals, and as this book has argued, Zainichi history has everything to do with us.