



Ear to Asia podcast

Title: *Pachinko*: Korean fates and fortunes in Japan

Description: *Pachinko*, the New York Times best-selling novel and now major TV series, shines a light on the history and plight of the Zainichi – ethnic Koreans long resident in Japan – and their struggle to make lives for themselves despite persistent discrimination and ethnic stereotyping. Zainichi researchers Drs Jon Glade, Cindi Textor and David Roh join presenter Ali Moore to explore the value of popular culture products such as *Pachinko* in illuminating the tangled strands of identity and ethnicity among diaspora communities, and examine what it means to be a perpetual outsider. An Asia Institute podcast. Produced and edited by profactual.com. Music by audionautix.com.

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Voiceover:

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Ali Moore:

Hello. I'm Ali Moore. This is Ear to Asia.

David Roh:

I think that it's arrived at a particular time, in a moment that is right for this kind of production when the soft power of Asia and Korea, in particular, it has kind of broken through the western consciousness. And western audiences are more open to this kind of genre pieces by Asian filmmakers.

Cindi Textor:

Western audiences, I think, have been really primed for something like this. In Korea, I think it will be marketed toward the audience for Korean dramas. The question really is Japan where these issues are perhaps most painful, most real, most raw.

Jonathan Glade:

*Pachinko*, through portraying a Zainichi experience, delves into the ways in which history can continue to affect people from generation to generation in how those memories are passed on, and continue to influence, you know, many years later.

Ali Moore:

In this episode, *Pachinko*: Korean fates and fortunes in Japan. Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialists at the University of Melbourne.

The New York Times bestselling novel, *Pachinko*, follows the lives of four generations of a Korean family who moved to Japan during 20th century colonisation, looming conflict, and post-war economic renewal. Written by Min Jin Lee, a Korean-American, *Pachinko* seeks to portray the lived experiences of ethnic Koreans in Japan known collectively as a Zainichi, and how they struggle to make lives for themselves in the face of persistent discrimination and ethnic stereotyping.

The history and unique plight of the Zainichi, a story that continues to evolve today, are little known outside of Japan. And while the novel, *Pachinko*, may have brought the subject to the attention of many readers, it's likely to get an even bigger spotlight with the release of a major television adaptation also called *Pachinko* on Apple TV+.

In this episode of Ear to Asia, I speak with three researchers who work on the intersection of Korean and Japanese cultures to explore the value of popular cultural productions, such as *Pachinko*, in shining a light on the tangled strands of identity and ethnicity among diaspora communities, and what it means to be a perpetual outsider. My guests are Dr. Cindi Textor and Dr. David Roh, who are both from the University of Utah, and Dr. Jonathan Glade from Asia Institute. Jonathan joined us on a previous episode of Ear to Asia, looking at contemporary Zainichi issues. You might like to listen to that conversation wherever you get your podcasts for more background on this unique group of people. Cindi and David, welcome to Ear to Asia. And welcome back, Jon.

David Roh:

Hi, Ali. Thanks for having me.

Cindi Textor:

Thank you.

Jonathan Glade:

Thank you.

Ali Moore:

Let's start with *Pachinko*, the book. Written in English by Min Jin Lee, a Korean-American with no family connection to Japan, David, can you tell us a little bit about the story and its author? And I'll give a quick spoiler alert here for those who haven't read it. We'll try not to give too much away, but we do need to talk about the plot, don't we, David?

David Roh:

Yeah. It's kind of a sprawling Dickensian tome that follows a family of Zainichi Koreans for four generations starting in Jeju-do, South Korea, and ending up in contemporary Tokyo within the offstage sojourn to New York City. And it chronicles Sunja's, one of the main protagonists, Sunja's romancing and courtship with several other Zainichi Korean characters who embark on this kind of torrid, illicit affair. And she has to make several choices throughout her life to whether she wants to pursue the love path or if she wants to observe social norms. And that leads to these fraught questions that have consequences down the line with her children and her grandchildren. And it ends with her grandson, Solomon, in Tokyo who has been educated at Columbia University and has returned to Japan as an investment banker, I believe. And he still has to grapple with the legacy of colonialism and legacy of the Zainichi in Tokyo. It's really a novel coming to terms with the weight of all that, the weight of history and what that means for their family.

Ali Moore:

Indeed, David, I was going to ask you how much of the story is essentially about colonialism, and what happens after post-colonialism?

David Roh:

I'd say a large part. I even talk about this in a book of mine that Korean-American literature is post-colonial. And so for Min Jin Lee, who is Korean-American, who has to deal with her own inherited trauma and legacy of colonialism that her family has brought from Korea to America, for her to visit the Zainichi diaspora space who are even more directly intimate with the legacy of colonialism, I would say it touches on every fabric of the page in the novel.

Ali Moore:

That's an interesting point that you make that Min Jin Lee didn't grow up in Japan, but had her own experience of colonialism. But, Cindi, can I ask you while she didn't grow up in Japan, she did live there for a while, didn't she? And as an author, she interviewed a number of Zainichi Koreans.

Cindi Textor:

Yes. In reading the novel, you can really tell that this is an author who based the story in a lot of research, partly from her own experience, living in Japan, but she also has a sort of work excited in the back of the novel. And it's clear that she's done a lot of digging into this issue. And I think, not dissimilarly from narratives from the actual Zainichi community, there's a sense in which the novel feels like part of its purpose is to educate people on this area of history and culture that they may not be familiar with. And I think a lot of the questions raised by the novel have to do with what it means to kind of bring that history and culture and knowledge over to a context that's maybe not so familiar with it.

Ali Moore:

So before I get to the question, which is very relevant to what you just said of how historically accurate it is, are any of the characters actually based on real people? Are they traceable to a single person, Cindi?

Cindi Textor:

Not that I know of. I mean, maybe the other guests can comment on this, but as far as I know, they're really very fictional. And while there is a lot of kind of resonance with the realities of everyday life in the Zainichi community, I don't think that there are any direct representations of historical figures.

Ali Moore:

David, is that right?

David Roh:

That's my understanding as well. I know that Min Jin Lee had done extensive research, both academic research and qualitative research during her time in Japan, interviewing a lot of members of the Zainichi community. But I believe the characters are composites.

Jonathan Glade:

Yeah. I think a way to think about it might be that the individual characters are fictional, but the context in a lot of these sort of tangential characters are based on actual historical figures. So you'll see famous events or famous historical figures sort of make cameos, but all of the central characters I believe are basically sort of amalgamations of what the author learned from interviews, her own research, and her own imagination.

Ali Moore:

And, Jonathan, given that, how accurate, how historically accurate is the story? How much creative licence has been taken?

Jonathan Glade:

So that's a question that I always sort of struggle to answer in that I'm very sort of impressed by what Min Jin Lee was able to accomplish with the book. But I also have my own perspective that's very sort of centred in Zainichi studies, which is one area of research that I focus on. And I think one way to think about the book is to sort of frame it as a Korean immigrant experience. And from that perspective, I think it's quite accurate and speaks to immigrant experience of the broader Korean diaspora. But if you're looking at Zainichi in particular, some issues like the way in which Japanese is used, or some of the details about the Zainichi experience in Japan, for example, affiliation with North or South Korea, those circumstances I think are not always necessarily portrayed either accurately, or maybe they're sort of portrayed in a very superficial way.

But yes, I think it's quite amazing what the book was able to accomplish in terms of reaching a very broad audience and conveying this important, at least in my mind, very important part of history to an audience that really is very unfamiliar with that. And in my own personal experience, I first heard about this book from my sister, which is kind of interesting in that I should have known about the book, and I'm guessing Cindi and David were much earlier to the book than I was. I actually didn't read it until last year, but I was talking with my sister and I've talked with my family over the past 20 years about what I'm doing as an academic research, and it can kind of feel very isolating at times in that maybe I'm not very good at explaining what I'm doing researching about the Korean minority in Japan.

Mentioned that multiple times and my sister said to me one day, "Oh, I finally understand what you've been talking about all these years." I was like, "Well, how did that happen?" "I read this book, *Pachinko*, and it really lays it out in a very easily understandable way." And that really piqued my interest, and I looked into the book. At first, I thought it must be a translation from a Japanese book, but come to find out it was written in English by a Korean-American. So just that anecdote really speaks to the way in which the book has reached a very wide audience and many who would not search out learning opportunities to know more about Zainichi Koreans.

David Roh:

If I could add to Jon's answer, I think the force of your question, Ali, comes from the danger of misrepresentation, right? Min Jin Lee writing about a community that she's not necessarily a part of. And Korean-American writers have had a tradition of fictionalising the Korean war, for example, when they don't have firsthand experience of the Korean war. One way to think about it is this notion of postmemory. That's Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory, where a second generation diaspora community will start to translate their parents' generations' trauma in a way that makes sense to them in their present context in their destination homelands.

So in that sense, Min Jin Lee's kind of taking part of that tradition, although it's a bit different, because it's in a different space, but I think the danger that you kind of hint at it is very real in that Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* could possibly be considered the authoritative Zainichi text. And that could be problematic if it's just read as ethnography. But my hope is that it'll spur readers and viewers of the TV show to research further, and that'll open a window to the great tradition of Zainichi literature.

Cindi Textor:

Yeah. I would echo what David has just said too. One of the ways I think about this question of how authentic does the novel feel is that in many ways the family depicted is really not typical of the Zainichi experience. They're not involved in organisational politics in Japan, they don't have a strong affiliation with either North or South Korea. The fact that they're Christian is also not super typical, but I think to kind of turn that notion on its head, Zainichi literature or the texts produced by

members of this community is very dominated by that kind of typical experience of being Korean in Japan. And that experience is no more or less legitimate than the one that Min Jin Lee is portraying. So I think one of the exciting things about the novel is that it does sort of force us to question, what does it mean to be Zainichi, and who gets to tell that story? Who's really representative?

Ali Moore:

And, David, how does it compare to other stories on the Zainichi, other stories that are either in Korean or in Japanese, not written in English? And I guess how much does the success of *Pachinko* go to the power of the English language?

David Roh:

It's a hard question to answer because Zainichi literature is quite diverse in terms of their styles, forms, and subject matter. But as an answer, *Pachinko* is very, very different, I would say, because it's coming from a strong Western sensibility. So the style is Victorian in its roots. Min Jin Lee is very open about her influences in crafting the narrative. But I think Cindi had hinted at this earlier. What is useful about *Pachinko* is that it's very different from early Zainichi literature, which tended to be dominated by a lot of first generation male writers. And obviously Min Jin Lee is coming from a very different place.

Ali Moore:

So Jonathan, why is it called *Pachinko*? Which is literally a vertical pinball game that's unique to Japan.

Jonathan Glade:

I don't know the exact reason why the author chose that title, but pachinko in and of itself has a strong connection to the Zainichi community. If you say pachinko, then many people associate that with Zainichi Koreans. So there's that sort of automatic connection that's made within Japanese society. And also, there's pachinko involved in terms of the plot and characters have associations with pachinko. So in a way, you can think of it as a sort of symbolic representation of the family and the struggle they make to survive and thrive in Japan, that it's not really through the sort of idealised career path in Japan of studying hard, going to university, getting a job at one of the larger companies. That sort of narrative's championed in Japan. It's more of a living on the margins, struggling to survive. pachinko is associated with criminality, not something that is really viewed maybe as the best career path by many. So I think it connects to that struggle and the way in which the family has to overcome a lot of obstacles as they live in Japan.

Ali Moore:

So, Cindi, is that living on the margins, is that why the Zainichi were attracted to pachinko because they simply couldn't get employment, they couldn't survive in a more regular pathway or more regular jobs?

Cindi Textor:

Yes, that's exactly right. Pachinko's not unique in this respect, but like some other kind of industries that are associated with Zainichi Koreans in Japanese culture, like yakiniku or Korean style barbecue restaurants or organised crime, as Jon mentioned, were some of the few industries that would actually employ Zainichi Koreans. And one of the main avenues of discrimination or one of the main forms that discrimination has taken in Japan that Koreans have faced is in employment. Because they're not citizens typically, there are a lot of obstacles to holding certain jobs, particularly the types of jobs that are considered high status within Japan.

Ali Moore:

Why was that? Why were the Zainichi and at the time that this book is set in, why were they made to feel so unwelcome in Japan, Cindi?

Cindi Textor:

This is a really rich question. I think it's important to know that this community traces its roots to the period when Korea was a colony of Japan. So pre-1945. Many came over voluntarily, migrating to seek jobs and other things, but some were even forced to come to Japan to work in kind of the military industrial complex during the war. So part of that history informs the current state of Zainichi Koreans, and particularly in the period that Min Jin Lee is addressing in the novel.

But then after the American occupation of Japan, there's a lot of negotiation, back and forth about what's going to happen to former colonies of Japan, and especially those former colonial subjects who still live in Japan, like the over half a million Koreans who remained in Japan after the war. So once that treaty is settled, those former colonial subjects lost their citizenship in Japan.

In the case of Koreans in particular, because in the meantime, the Korean war and the division of the peninsula has happened, there was no unified Korean state that they could be citizens of. So it's not even just being made to feel like they don't belong. They're literally stateless for a while. In 1965, you get normalisation of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan. I think this comes up in the novel a little, but a lot of Koreans in Japan opt for South Korean citizenship after that point. But many in Japan still remain stateless either because they're more aligned with the North or because they hang on to this kind of defunct Korean non-citizenship in order to kind of protest that division in the first place.

But to come back to the actual question about these feelings of non-belonging or discrimination, kind of structural discrimination within Japan, I think a lot of it has to do with a will to forget the colonial period in Japan, and to think of Japan as this kind of mono-ethnic homogenous, peaceful, harmonious place in the post-war and acknowledgement that there is still this legacy of imperialism in the form of the Korean community there is painful and kind of politically fraught within Japan.

Jonathan Glade:

And if I could just add to that, I think that homogenous society that is often the image of Japan, that facing discrimination, being marginalised, all of these sort of issues that show up in *Pachinko* I think are quite common in various immigrant communities, which is probably why the book has so much resonance globally. But in Japan, because Japanese citizenship is based on lineage, then even people who are third, fourth generation Zainichi are not necessarily Japanese citizens, although many do become citizens now. I think you can look at this sort of broader immigrant experience while also understanding the very specific definitions of what it means to be Japanese in Japanese society. Those boundaries, those lines can be quite strict and not allowing for people of different ethnicities to blend in or be a part of Japanese society.

Ali Moore:

And I know that that issue of citizenship and certainly in modern day Japan, we did look at in the earlier podcast that I mentioned in the introduction. But, Jonathan, there is another side to the issue of marginalisation in this context, isn't there? And that's the fact that while the Zainichi were made to feel like outsiders, if they chose to blend in, they could, physically and speaking Japanese, they could pass for being Japanese and many did, including in the book.

Jonathan Glade:

Right. So passing is a central theme to the Zainichi literature in general. And *Pachinko* is kind of refreshing in a way in that it's not necessarily the main theme. There are a lot of different themes

that are explored, but it does show up. And there are instances of characters who decide to pass as Japanese. So this would be something that would be quite familiar to Japanese reading audiences, particularly in terms of adopting a Japanese sounding name, using Japanese language. These are usually seen as the key indicators of ethnicity in Japan, but to demonstrate one's Korean ethnicity one would use a Korean name. Even if you're speaking Japanese, that would mark one as Korean. So by using a Japanese name, a lot of times, one is able to pass as Japanese.

Ali Moore:

David, just as Jonathan was saying, there is huge resonance here of the themes in the book for immigrants and for minority groups everywhere. The story of marginalisation and discrimination is definitely not unique to the Zainichi, is it?

David Roh:

I would say not. And I think that's part of why the novel has found such a receptive audience in that the themes about resiliency in the face of discrimination, in intergenerational conflict, love across rigid social hierarchies and social codes, those are universalist.

Ali Moore:

What about how women are represented, David, in the story and how they're treated? To what extent do you think the theme of the treatment and acceptance or not of women also resonates as a story of many migrants?

David Roh:

Maybe Cindi would have a better answer to this, but my initial read is that Lee was careful to depict Sunja's suffering. And it's almost Jobian in how much she goes through to depict how some of the social norms, especially when it comes to notions about masculinity in Zainichi Korean culture was really self-defeating and it took the women to raise up the family and break the social codes to do what was needed to lift themselves out of poverty. It's an act of recuperation in some ways.

Ali Moore:

Cindi, do you agree?

Cindi Textor:

Yeah, I think in many ways, the place of women in this novel and in the Zainichi community is a little bit in the eye of the beholder. I was reading recently a review of the Japanese language translation of the novel, and the reviewer was saying that the men in the story really drive the events and the women are sort of along for the ride. And I felt, yeah, I was shocked that someone would write this because in my reading it's all about Sunja and the way that she kind of holds the family together, despite all the kind of turmoil that's going on around them. She's the one consistent character that is there throughout the novel. It spans four generations. So she goes from kind of the baby daughter to the grandmother at the end, but she really is the central character.

And I think that as Jon alluded to, within the context of the way the Zainichi community has been represented, mostly within Japanese language, literature, Zainichi women are really portrayed as victims a lot of the time, either of domestic violence or they don't really have a voice in a lot of these texts. And so it's been really refreshing to see in more recent narratives that women have more central, more represented, more active role in these stories. And that's something that I think Min Jin Lee does a really fantastic job of is allowing those female characters to shine through and be seen as agents rather than passive victims.

Ali Moore:

And, Cindi, I mean, when David was giving us the potted synopsis if you like, it's very clear that it is her decisions that the forks in the road and the decisions that she makes that drive the narrative. But while Min Jin Lee clearly made a very conscious decision to make her protagonist female, in the context of women of that period, is it accurate?

Cindi Textor:

I mean, it's hard to say precisely because we have so few representations or texts from the perspective of Zainichi women.

Ali Moore:

But doesn't that in itself say something?

Cindi Textor:

Yes, absolutely. But based on what we do have of narratives from this same period, it does ring really true, I think, the way the women go to the market to sell pickles or sweets or what have you, in order to keep the family together, while the men are maybe engaged in political or ideological struggles. The women kind of behaving in this very practical way to keep their immigrant family together and surviving I think rings true not only in the Zainichi community, but as David and Jonathan have mentioned, within immigrant communities across the globe.

Ali Moore:

You're listening to Ear to Asia from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. And just a reminder to listeners about Asia Institute's online publication on Asia and it's society's politics and cultures, it's called the Melbourne Asia Review. It's free to read and it's open access at [melbourneasiareview.edu.au](http://melbourneasiareview.edu.au). You'll find articles by some of our regular Ear to Asia guests and by many others. Plus you can catch recent episodes of Ear to Asia at the Melbourne Asia Review website, which again, you can find at [melbourneasiareview.edu.au](http://melbourneasiareview.edu.au). I'm Ali Moore, and I'm joined by Cindi Textor, David Roh, and Jonathan Glade. And we're examining the lives of Zainichi Koreans through the lens of the bestselling novel and now television series, *Pachinko*.

Ali Moore:

David, we touched on this earlier, the fact that the author of *Pachinko*, Min Jin Lee is a Korean-American, but how do Americans of Korean descent view Japanese colonisation? And I guess, how do they view how the Zainichi are treated in Japan?

David Roh:

That's a good question. It depends on which generation of Korean-American immigrants you're talking to. You talk to the first generation, my parents generation, and the legacy of colonialism is still very fresh in their minds. It's not something they can let go of quite so easily.

Second generation, I think it is less prevalent, at least in a conscious way, but I think some people have argued and I include myself in amongst them that the legacy, the scars, and the trauma of colonialism has reverberations even in the second generation. And so in a lot of Korean-American novels, you'll see some writers gravitating towards comfort women, the sex slaves during the Japanese colonial period, during which Korean women were forcibly conscripted into labour in these army bases during war time. And that's something that has been meditated upon quite a bit in the literature.

Regarding Zainichi Koreans, I think a lot of Korean-Americans, the vast majority are completely ignorant. And I might include myself again amongst that number. And Min Jin Lee even admits in an

interview that she was completely ignorant until I think a college course or a college lecture by someone who had been over in Japan had mentioned them or talked about them. So it's not really discussed or talked about in any meaningful way in the Korean-American community. And I think that is what is really exciting about *Pachinko* is that for the first time in an explicit manner, we are bringing these two diaspora communities into a conversation that I think could be really quite enriching.

Ali Moore:

Is that reflected in the book, that Korean-American view at all?

David Roh:

Depends on who you talk to again. But my view is that the novel has a very strong Korean-American perspective. Even though it is about a Zainichi Korean family in Japan, I would say the framing and the sensibility, and there are even characters in the novel who quite bluntly introduce Korean-American discourse into the Zainichi space.

Ali Moore:

Well, of course, as we said at the outset, our podcast is very timely because as we record this, Apple TV+ is about to release an eight part series based on the book. All good books get to the screen one way or another. Jonathan, it's going to be a pretty big undertaking isn't it?

Jonathan Glade:

Right. So I'm extremely curious about the TV adaptation. I've read reviews and looked at the trailer, watched interviews. And it's very interesting to think about how the TV adaptation will treat things like language. From my understanding, it will be mostly in subtitles using Korean and Japanese with some English. So how that transformed from the pages of a book, which is written mostly in English to something on screen that is mostly in Korean and Japanese, probably more Korean, it'll be very interesting to see. And from what I can tell, I get the sense that there is a sort of strong Korean/Korean-American perspective that is even more pronounced with the TV adaptation, but I look forward to seeing how that plays out.

Ali Moore:

David, how much do you know about the series? I mean, I guess the one thing we do know, it's going to be a truly cross-cultural production.

David Roh:

That's true. And like, Jon, I don't have much knowledge. It's just based on interviews I read about the production, but my read is that it is going to be, yes, infusion between American and Korean aesthetics and sensibilities. The show runner mentioned in an interview that she was really inspired by The Godfather films and Min Jin Lee is inspired by Trollope and Dickens. And so there's that sort of Western framing. But if you see the trailers for the show, it has a kind of K-drama-esque aesthetic to it. So I'm very curious to see how that fusion works.

Ali Moore:

And, David, how well do you think that the story and I guess the cultural aspects, the nuances and all those differences will translate for a global market?

David Roh:

I think that it's arrived at a particular time, in a moment that is ripe for this kind of production when the soft power of Asia, and Korea in particular, has kind of broken through the Western consciousness and Western audiences are more open to these kind of genre pieces by Asian filmmakers. And they can take some risks here because the Western audiences have been primed and prepared by being exposed to Korean films, like *Parasite* and Korean dramas are quite popular on Netflix, like *Squid Game*. It's not really drama, but you know what I mean. So I'm really curious to see-

Ali Moore:

Oh, there's plenty of drama in it. I think that's fair.

David Roh:

Sure. But it's not overly sentimental and syrupy, and that's that tradition, but I'm actually more curious to see what the receptions going to be like in Korea and Japan rather than the West, given that the source materials is so strongly American and Korean-American. I'm really, really curious to see what they think of it.

Ali Moore:

So, Cindi, how do you think the series or the book will translate for the screen? And what does it say about the globalisation of culture that we're getting this series?

Cindi Textor:

I mean, I think something that's really exciting about it is that it is going to be shot in the original languages. I mean, I think one of the obstacles that Min Jin Lee had in telling this story is that she clearly recognises that language is really important in this context. It's something that other Zainichi writers have talked about at length, not only in their fiction, but also their criticism and essays is this question of how to remain true to one's ethnic heritage or to Korea as a nation, which is also a big theme of *Pachinko* without access to the Korean language.

So I think that that fidelity to language is something that's really exciting to me about the series, and I think may come through better in this medium. Whereas Min Jin Lee had to do things like adding little snippets of Japanese into the largely English narrative of book in the series. We'll get to hear that language as it is, which is something that should be really interesting.

And I think as David mentioned, Western audiences I think have been really primed for something like this to come out. We've had a lot of Asian and other foreign language media achieve a lot of success in the US. So I share David's curiosity about how this will go over in Korea and Japan. In Korea, I think it'll be marketed toward the audience for Korean dramas. Lee Min-Ho, the main actor who's going to play Hansu is really popular in Korea. I think the question really is Japan, where even the novel in Japanese translation was markedly less successful than its English language or Korean language versions. So I'm wondering how it'll be marketed in Japan, whether it'll achieve a big audience. And that does go back, I think to these questions of who speaks for the community, how the community gets represented, that's in Japan, where these issues are perhaps most painful, most real, most raw, there is maybe less of an appetite for this story. And so I think that says something interesting about how an audience maybe displaces what they're thinking about onto different media.

I think in the US, part of the appetite for this story, if I'm being a little cynical here, is that it depicts issues that we know are very salient, like racism and discrimination, but they're so far away, and in some ways it's exoticized in the novel that we don't have to feel them as something that's really close to home. And so I wonder if that is part of what explains the relatively lower interest in this story in Japan, where it does confront these issues that are really impactful in people's daily lives.

Ali Moore:

Jonathan, do you agree with that? And I suppose we've not looked at it from the perspective of the Japanese, but is it too raw, too close to the bone? Do you think that explains the interest or relative lack of in the story?

Jonathan Glade:

Yeah, it's really hard to say. The perspective that both the novel and it seems like the television adaptation will take is there's sort of a gap or a disconnect with the ways in which Zainichi experiences have been represented in Japanese language culture. So there's definitely something to what Cindi was talking about, but I also think it may just be that it's seen as something that doesn't really connect to the Zainichi experience as understood in Japanese culture.

And the reason why I say that is there are quite a few films. There have even been television dramas, books, all sorts of Zainichi related culture that has been quite popular or has gained a significant audience in Japan that with Japanese language origins. So something that starts in English and comes to Japan, there may be some wariness to that, that this is not something of the past for Zainichi Koreans, or even for Korean-Japanese immigrant communities throughout the globe. There's a lot of contention over the history, who gets to represent this history, what is emphasised. This shows up all the time, even now with issues like comfort women and comfort women's statues, or which books are read in high schools in the United States, for example. So there are all sorts of instances where this history is still being contested.

Ali Moore:

So, Jonathan given that, that ongoing, I guess, resentment, it's a huge issue of great contemporary relevance. Against that background, today, how are the Zainichi viewed by the Japanese?

Jonathan Glade:

Yeah, that's a very difficult question with no simple answer in that I think just like there is a diversity of narratives about Zainichi experiences, there's also a huge range, a huge spectrum of the ways in which ethnic Korean minority in Japan is viewed. And at this point, and this is similar to the narrative in *Pachinko*, in the novel, the community I think is quite fragmented and there's various different types of what you could label Korean minority or ethnic Koreans in Japan. It's not just one unified community.

So there are a lot of different perceptions, but just like the Korean wave has seen huge global popularity throughout various countries, Korean popular culture has also enjoyed overall positive reception in Japan, although there have been detractors and those who are critical of it. But I think right now, the discrimination, at least in terms of actual laws and practises, a lot of that was done away with in the 1970s and '80s and maybe early '90s. So you see a very different picture in Japanese society now than what is depicted in the book, particularly the first two parts of the book.

Cindi Textor:

If I could add to that, there's undoubtedly been a lot of progress in terms of the legal and political status of Koreans in Japan. And I think culturally as well, there's really quite broad acceptance. But I think in another aspect of this story that resonates with contemporary America and maybe communities across the globe is that as that acceptance has grown, the backlash to that in terms of hate speech and far right resistance to the acceptance of ethnic minorities has gotten louder in Japan in recent years. So that's something that is really concerning and prevents us from saying full throatedly that things are better for the Zainichi today.

Ali Moore:

Cindi, how does that fit with examples like Masayoshi Son, for example, who is a Zainichi tech investor. He is a billionaire, now a Japanese citizen, but with that sort of huge business success, does that have an impact on how ethnic Japanese regard the Zainichi?

Cindi Textor:

Yeah. I don't know a tonne about Masayoshi Son's story, but I think that one way to think about him, as you say, he's massively successful, very wealthy. And I think like the characters in the story in *Pachinko*, some of them are very successful. I think we could point to Hansu in particular, but as the generations go down from the colonial origins, you do see the family kind of break into Japanese corporate life a little bit, but part of the problem, as Min Jin Lee alludes to in her story, here I might even compare something like *The Great Gatsby* that there's that difference between wealth and class, that they can never quite break into total acceptance despite that ability to break into wealth.

Ali Moore:

David, do you agree with that? It does seem in the book that the regardless of wealth, they're portrayed as, well, perpetually other, but also so perhaps never really quite finding the ultimate happiness.

David Roh:

Yeah. I think that's the point that the book is trying to drive forward, but yet there's always going to be exceptional individuals in any oppressed community or minority group, but they are not perceived as the norm or there's no racial uplift project with exceptional people like Masayoshi Son. So to hold one person as being representative of an entire community, I mean, there's a long history of racialization and internalisation of tropes and narratives about the Zainichi that's very, very hard to overcome. So I wouldn't put too much stock into several people who are quite exceptional, somehow reversing or producing some kind of counter discourse.

Ali Moore:

Is there any sense of how the Zainichi now view themselves and the extent to which that's changed, Cindi?

Cindi Textor:

Yeah, I think Jon kind of mentioned this a little bit earlier, but the community is increasingly fragmented. There's this long history of internal division within the Zainichi community over alignment with North versus South versus kind of rejecting that binary altogether. Nowadays you'll increasingly see Zainichi Koreans refer to themselves rather than Zainichi Chosenjin or Zainichi Kankokujin, the kind of signographic versions of the different terms for Korea, you'll see this kind of anglicised Zainichi Korean in recognition that maybe that division is outmoded or not so relevant to Koreans in Japan. But there are other models as well that have been put forward, kind of an Americanized hyphenated model. You'll see some community members refer to themselves as Korean-Japanese rather than as Zainichi.

And Min Jin Lee, I think in some of her interviews talks about how this term Zainichi itself is kind of problematic in that in it's literal Japanese sense, implies a kind of temporary to Korean residents in Japan rather than indicating that Koreans in Japan could be something that belongs to the overall fabric of Japanese society.

So those are some of the ways that relatively recently, people in Japan, particularly Koreans in Japan have started to rethink the status of the Zainichi community. Others are increasingly amenable to naturalising as Japanese citizens and kind of letting go of this heritage that's so important to other

members of the community. So if it ever was appropriate to kind of paint the Zainichi community with a broad brush, and I would argue it never was, especially today, there are so many different ways of thinking about the community and who belongs and what it means to be Korean in Japan.

Ali Moore:

Jonathan, as we draw our conversation to a close, are there universal lessons, do you think, from the Zainichi experience as portrayed in the book?

Jonathan Glade:

Great question. Universal lessons. So the thing that I really like about the book and its success is that it portrays in a very engaging way that history and that memory over multiple generations, which I think is a story that everyone should read. And in fact, I'm assigning the book for a class that I'm teaching this semester. I just think that's a really powerful thing that everyone should read, understand, reflect on and think about, because it has so much relevance to the ways in which our societies are structured now. Those post-colonial remnants still exist everywhere that I have lived. And I think that the book really, through portraying a Zainichi experience, really addresses those issues and delves into the ways in which that history can continue to affect people from generation to generation, how those experiences and memories are passed on and continue to influence many years later.

Ali Moore:

David, it does go to the power of the story, doesn't it? And the power of the written word.

David Roh:

Yeah, it certainly does. And these stories are important to give space to and to carve out space for, because they've always existed, but haven't always been recognised or given enough room to breathe. And that enriches our cultural understanding and expands and complicates our worldviews and helps us to create empathy for our fellow community members. But within these stories are these universalist themes, which all readers can relate to. And so I think that's what's really powerful. As Jonathan pointed out, his sister just could not wrap her head around what he was studying until she read this story.

Ali Moore:

Which does say a lot. Cindi, are we richer for *Pachinko*?

Cindi Textor:

Yeah, absolutely, I would say. It's a really rich and powerful novel. I think there think for everyone in it. There are so many stories represented that the author really deftly weaves together. So yes, I would certainly encourage our listeners to pick up the novel and maybe check out the series.

Ali Moore:

Perhaps we should recommend people read first, watch later, and then make their own judgement . A huge thank you to our guests on this Ear to Asia episode, it's been an absolutely fascinating conversation, and certainly I think has piqued the interests of many if they haven't read this book to go and find it. Thank you, Cindi, David, and Jonathan.

Cindi Textor:

Thanks so much, Ali.

David Roh:

Thanks, Ali. It's been a pleasure.

Jonathan Glade:

Thank you, Ali.

Ali Moore:

Our guests have been Korean and Japanese culture researcher, Dr. Jonathan Glade, Asian American literature specialist, Dr. David Roh, and scholar of contemporary Japanese and Korean literature, Dr. Cindi Textor. And for more on this subject, Cindi and David have a new website, which you can find at [zainichistudies.com](http://zainichistudies.com).

Ali Moore:

Ear to Asia is brought to you by Asia Institute. You can find more information about this and all our other episodes at the Asia Institute website. Be sure to keep up with every episode of Ear to Asia by following us on the Apple podcast app, Stitcher, Spotify, or Google Podcasts. If you like the show, please rate and review it on Apple Podcasts. Every positive review helps new listeners find the show. And please help us by spreading the word on social media.

Ali Moore:

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