Trans-boundary and Trans-identity: *Pachinko*

Sojeong Oh

Abstract: Who hasn't questioned one's identity? *Pachinko* is a direct record and testimony of the narrative of Korean-Japanese who is struggling with his or her identity under the discrimination and prejudice that has continued from the past to the present, including the people who wander adrift. In the words of Foucault, we should hold a skeptical view toward ourselves, our present, our appearance and here and today. In this sense, the boundary crossing of Koreans described in *Pachinko* showcases the potential for enabling readers to critically contemplate violent discrimination in the era of multiculturalism and multiracialism, increasing their understanding of minorities and their cultures, and ultimately acquiring ethical insights from new perspectives. Furthermore, *Pachinko* can be seen as contents that present the possibility of acquiring ethics by understanding those who are discriminated against in society. This study examines narratives of discrimination and prejudice as they are represented across media in the novel *Pachinko* and the TV series *Pachinko*. This study also examines various aspects of life that move toward a decolonizing subject through the struggling life of characters. We interpret the existential aspect of characters as trans-identity and illustrate various aspects of identity transformation of characters that appear in narrative contents. Humans cannot be free from their ethical and identity related anxieties through the past, present and future. We are sure that literature, or content can continue to play a role that criticizes and supports those anxieties.

Keywords: *Pachinko*; trans-identity; decolonizing subject; Good Korean; Bad Korean; adrift

Author: Sojeong Oh is Instructor at Kangwon National University and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (Seoul 02450, Republic of Korea). Her recent research is mainly focused on comparative literature and culture between Korea and China including narrative analysis (Email: osj@hufs.ac.kr).

标题：《柏青哥》的越界与身份转换

内容摘要：试问，谁不曾对自己的身份产生过疑问？《柏青哥》是一部记录，也是一部见证录，赤裸裸地再现了在长期以来的歧视与偏见之下，苦苦寻觅身份认同的在日朝鲜人，以及漂浮在世界各地的局外人的故事。借用福柯的

话说，我们确实有必要正视我们自己、我们的现在、我们的现状、我们所在的地方、以及我们所处的时代。从这个意义上说，《柏青哥》可以视作是通过在日朝鲜人的身份构建，对多元文化和多元种族时代中暴力性排斥的一种批判与反思。此外，这部作品还为我们提供了理解他者并将伦理性付诸实践的可能性。本研究考察了小说版和电视剧版《柏青哥》中歧视与偏见叙事的表达。同时，也探讨了人物通过奋斗蜕变为去殖民化主体的存在方式。研究通过“身份转换理论”对人物的生存方式进行解读与图式化，展示了人物身份转换的不同范畴与形式，包括完成身份转换的人物、位于身份转换桥上的人物以及因转换失败后最终选择自杀的人物。无论是过去、现在或未来，人类都无法摆脱关于伦理（性）和身份认同的苦恼。而文学与文化创本，正是对这种苦恼的批判与慰藉。

关键词：《柏青哥》；身份转换；去殖民化；好朝鲜人；坏朝鲜人；漂泊

作者简介：吴笑廷，韩国国立江原大学、韩国外国语大学讲师，研究方向为中韩比较文学与文化研究、叙事学研究等。

1. Why *Pachinko*?

When a writer creates a writing without reflecting his or her self in it, it is destined to fade swiftly. Only writings that breathe the essence of the writer's life can bear the weight of passing time and establish their presence in cracks of the changing world and human society. *Pachinko* is a concrete example of directness in emphasizing the position of Koreans who were deprived of their independent lives and unable to settle in one place. Ethical literary criticism is a field that examines issues on various ethical relationships, such as those between literature and ethical phenomena described in it, between a writer and creation, and between literature and society, by combining the fictional artistic world with the real world.[1] It is said that "true art and criticism serve moral purposes" (Goldberg 23). As such, ethical literary criticism pursues evident integrity and clear ethical objectives. The range of researchers in literature is not limited to literary critics or historians. Moreover, literature is always intertwined with ethical and moral issues. For this reason, it provides the potential for researchers to develop the field of literature-related ethics.[2]

About ethical literary criticism of Nie's approach lies in the fact that he tried

1 See Nie Zhenzhao, *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014, 99; Nie Zhenzhao, "Ethical Literary Criticism: A Basic Theory," *Forum for World Literature Studies* 2 (2021): 189.

2 See Nie Zhenzhao, *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014, 98-99; Nie Zhenzhao, "Ethical Literary Criticism: A Basic Theory," *Forum for World Literature Studies* 2 (2021): 189-190.

to seek to differentiate moral and ethical criticism. The moral criticism "being guided by the need to pass judgement from the mommentator's / reader's current perspective," while the ethical criticism "sets out to understand the specific evolution of literature as a tool of facing and resolving dilemmas around good and evil, duty and pleasure, loyalty and freedom" (Tihanov 560). In this regard, *Pachinko* serves as a record or evidence that directly describes the lives of Koreans who were deeply concerned about their own identity under discrimination and prejudice against them, which would still exist to this day, and who had to move from one country to another as strangers in the world.

Michel Foucault stated that "philosophers have a challenging duty to address current occurrences instead of eternal existence" (Foucault, *Dits et écrits* 581). He emphasized that we should hold a skeptical view toward ourselves, current moments, and conditions as well as existing places and the present day.[1] Foucault's arguments raise questions on why he stressed the skeptical analysis of the present. A clue for such curiosity can be found in human willingness to pose current problems to live as the owner of the future.[2] Foucault also argued that power-knowledge leads to formation of discussions.[3] In this sense, the boundary crossing of Koreans described in *Pachinko* showcases the potential for enabling readers to critically contemplate violent discrimination in the era of multiculturalism and multiracialism, increasing their understanding of minorities and their cultures, and ultimately acquiring ethical insights from new perspectives. In other words, *Pachinko* is the outcome of the writer's intense effort to extend issues on the isolation and identity of otherized boundary-crossers to those on universality in the trans-national era.

Pachinko is a novel by Korean-American Min Jin Lee that follows the lives of four generations of a family, spanning nearly 80 years of modern history from 1910 to 1989. *Pachinko* became widely known in 2019 when Barack Obama quoted the novel's opening line, "History has failed us, but no matter" (3). *Pachinko* was a finalist for the National Book Award. A *New York Times* bestseller, Pachinko was a Top 10 Book of the Year for the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, BBC, and the New York Public Library. And, Lee, the writer of *Pachinko* has received the NYFA Fellowship for Fiction, the Peden Prize from the *Missouri Review* for Best Story, and the *Narrative* Prize for New and Emerging Writers. Its success in Korea is likely due to the resonance of Anglo-American praise with the author's personal

1 See Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954-1988* I&II, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994, 750.

2 See Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954-1988* I&II, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994, 434.

3 See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York: Vintage Book, 1994.

history. The author's personal history is a bold statement of directness. As a person who has moved to another country and made a life for herself, Min Jin Lee is a person who can empathize with the displacement and the subject as a stranger. The directness inherent in the author's life has the power to read the gaps that ordinary people cannot see and imagine new scenes.

Min Jin Lee said in an interview, "I knew important it was to focus on document-based analysis, and I really didn't want to get stuff wrong. Moreover, I couldn't eliminate or disregard the points of view that are so often marginalized or erased in traditional historical works" (Dilworth & Morefoot 22-23). In short, she made efforts to revive the lives of various surrounding people, which are overlooked in most traditional historical novels, based on detailed descriptions in her writing. She also intended to shed light on the existence of unknown individuals and events who and which were placed outside the center of attention. She would have scrutinized the life stories of outsiders, which were removed from the purview of the mainstream, due to her own experience of diasporic identity as a Korean-American.

As shown in the title of her book *Pachinko*, Lee introduced the concept of a pachinko to address a negative perception in Japan and criticize pervasive exclusivity in Japanese society. In other words, the idea behind this gambling machine was used to criticize Japanese society for its lack of understanding of diversity. Additionally, this idea suggests that the operation of pachinko is not a shameful business.

The author's empathy and awareness of diasporic identity is embodied in the story of the Korean people and the Pachinko. Lee explains that the game of pachinko is a metaphor for willpower. "The pinball-like game pachinko, which is deeply woven into the novel's fabric, serves as a metaphor for many things, but for me, it is primarily an idea of responding to an unfair situation with a sense of playfulness and vitality; it is a wish to stay in the game and play anyway, because you choose to live" (Dilworth & Morefoot 22-23). By borrowing Mozasu's insights from the novel, the author's directness toward Pachinko is revealed as a vehicle for instilling new possibilities and hope into a Korean life stained by images of crime and darkness. "Mozasu believed that life was like this game where the player could adjust the dials yet also expect the uncertainty of factors he couldn't control. He understood why his customers wanted to play something that looked fixed but which also left room for randomness and hope" (Min 292-293).[1]

Thus, a pachinko represents the indomitable will of people to survive in a

1 See Min Jin Lee, *Pachinko*, New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2017. All references will be cited hereafter in parentheses.

country ALTHOUGH they are neither recognized as citizens and nor allowed to do anything in this country. It can be inferred that a pachinko is used as a metaphor to imply that people leave their lives to uncertain results and gamble their fate. To put it differently, this gambling machine symbolizes the persistent lives of Koreans who strived to survive beyond challenges caused by historical flow.

Foucault stated that "every desire must be expressed in the pure light of a representative discourse" (Foucault, *Order of Things* 222). As indicated in his quote, modern literature directly addresses history but does not intervene in it. The role of literature is not to take sides but to bear witness. In other words, it whispers to give testimony to a certain event. *Pachinko* is a literary work where the logic of classical representation exists with the contemporary experience of desire. This novel has gained global reputation by conveying not only the life stories of Koreans based on their direct experience in the past but also the narratives of our ongoing experiences.

This study analyzed issues on the isolation and identity of main characters depicted in the literary and dramatic versions of *Pachinko*. To this end, it examined the aspects of existence of Koreans who faced discrimination and violence against them by overlapping images represented in both media. It also investigated the ways of highlighting the diasporic identity of Koreans, who were divided into "good Koreans" and "bad Koreans," and depicting hope in the literary and dramatic versions of *Pachinko*. Moreover, it structured the transformation of main characters by connecting it to the trans-identity of independent characters pursuing decolonization. Accordingly, it analyzed a shift in thinking of Koreans, who were excluded from the mainstream narratives of Korea and Japan, that they made to embrace their identity as boundary-crossers and strive for self-created lives by moving away from their identity stigmatized by racism. Through these analytic processes, it identified the intention of the writer of *Pachinko* who rejected the reproduction and categorization of racial and ethnic stereotypes and sought the possibilities of new identities.

2. The Ink under Fingernails: Indelible Scarlet, Blood

While reading *Pachinko*, it is hard to get Fanon out of the head. "O my body, always make me a man who questions!" (Fanon, "Wretched" 232) Racism in our society remains unresolved, and so do our imperialistic desires. Some questions must be raised with the body in contact with the earth. Who am I? Why do I live? What choices will I make? Each character in *Pachinko* suffers from identity confusion for different reasons, which can be self-inflicted or caused by society.

Pachinko is organized into three parts: Book 1 Gohyang / Hometown 1910-1933 with 17 chapters, Book 2 Motherland 1939-1962 with 20 chapters, and Book

3 *Pachinko* 1962-1989 with 21 chapters. Otherwise, the Korean translation is arranged in two books: Book 1 HOMETOWN 1910-1949 with 26 chapters and Book 2 MOTHERLAND 1953-1989 with 32 chapters. In addition, each chapter in the original is subtitled with the place and year, while the translation sets the main events or key points of each chapter as the subheadings. The author chose specific places and years as chapter subheadings because time and place are important factors in understanding the work. Unlike the titles of Book 1 and Book 2, which are related to places such as "Gohyang/Hometown" and "Motherland," respectively, the title of Book 3, "Pachinko," suggests that the ultimate theme of the novel is the characters' settlement.

Pachinko describes the dichotomous identities of Koreans in Japan as "good Koreans" and "bad Koreans" created by Japanese society. Koreans ultimately choose their attitude toward Japanese society: to remain silent and conform (assimilating under the guise of cleanliness) or to resist (remaining dirty and barbaric). It seems to mirror Fanon's portrayal of racism, which equates black people with ugliness, sinfulness, darkness, and immorality in a white-centered racist society.[1] Japanese society degraded Koreans to anonymity and fixated them to the boundaries it has created, treating Koreans as objects and erasing their individual subjects. The representative example is Noa and Mozasu, the sons of Sunja, the second generation of Korean in Japan.

Noa was a person who thoroughly conformed to the system and sought recognition from Japanese society above all else. He made every effort to become a "good Korean" to survive in a society where the Japanese looked down on Koreans as dirty blood. Having endured discrimination and being derogatorily referred to as a "garlic turd," Noa aspired to transcend his Korean identity and assimilate into Japanese culture. His self-hatred towards his Korean heritage stems from an illusory concept of fixed identity perpetuated by a deterministic Japan that emphasizes "blood." This represents a compliance with societal expectations without challenging its inherent absurdities, embodying a passive acceptance of one's predetermined destiny.

The turning point in Noa's downfall centers on his father. Noa held great pride in his father, Isak, who not only possessed cultural refinement and strong moral values but also met his demise while resisting the Japanese. His father's nobility served as his final support. However, when it is revealed that he is the son of the "scheming" yakuza Hansu, Noa retreats into hiding, driven by self-hatred for his perceived tainted lineage. In his quest to conceal his Korean blood and assume a

1 See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann, New York: Grove Press, 1967, 109-140.

Japanese identity, he discards his previous names of Baek Noa, Boku Nobuo, and Bando Nobuo, adopting the guise of Ban Nobuo. In Nagano, he continues to lead a double life, but deep within him, but "carried the story of his life as a Korean like a dark, heavy rock within him" (358).

Unlike his older brother, Mozasu embodies the image of a "bad Korean." In contrast to Noa, who excels academically and is an exemplary student, Mozasu doesn't feel like he can live up to what Japanese society wants, so he focuses on earning money early on. By immersing himself in the pachinko business, he harbors the belief that acquiring wealth would grant him recognition and equal treatment. In some cases, Mozasu can be interpreted as a movement of resistance to become a bad Korean and to escape from what Japanese society wants a Korean to be, but he is not trying to overcome prejudice. Instead of striving to alter or escape the dichotomous perceptions prevalent in Japanese society, Mozasu embraces the negative stereotypes and lives his life on his own terms. Through his decision to send his son, Solomon, to the United States, he aspires to break free from Japan and embark on a fresh start, diverging from his own unfulfilled existence, instilling in his son the quintessential American dream of a land that promises freedom and opportunity.

The lives of the brothers are predetermined and categorized by their nationality and social class, devoid of individual agency. Like Fanon's description of a "new race" being created by the white gaze,[1] the negative image of Koreans is a colonialist fiction created by Japanese society and its perspective. In the reality of being labeled as Korean residents and placed in that position by others, Noa and Mozasu are deprived of their autonomy and are merely victims of the images imposed upon them. In that sense, their existence serves as emblematic of the alienation and distorted identities resulting from internalizing the ideologies of a racist society.

Immanuel Kant argued that human beings are not free to live according to their own desires, but are bound by a moral law derived from pure reason inherent in every individual.[2] The categorical imperative is that humans should follow their own rules of behavior, a moral law established by pure reason and this moral law should be universally applicable to all human beings. It is also said that when one does a good deed in accordance with one's code of conduct, the motive must be the

1 "White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro. I shall demonstrate elsewhere that what is often called the black soul is a white man's artifact." See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann, New York, Grove Press, 1967, 14.

2 See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, translated from the German by Paek Chong-Hyon, Seoul: Daewoo Classical Library Acanet, 2002, 437-466.

code of conduct itself, and that doing a good deed to fulfill one's personal desires is a violation of the code of conduct. In other words, genuine moral action can only occur when reason is used in a public manner. Saying "I will do something for a certain purpose" is a private use of one's beliefs. Acting on one's desire to assimilate into Japanese society, or to become rich to gain acceptance, is also a private use of reason. This is not a truly enlightened act because it involves aligning one's standards of humanity with the rules of the society to which one belongs.

The brothers' diasporic situation is directly reflected in their names. Like Korean residing in Japan, Mozasu has three names: Baek Moses, the Korean name; Boku Mozasu, the Japanese name; and Bando Mozasu, the Japanese surname on school documents and residency cards. Interpellation is a marker of self-definition, and thus expresses the undefined identity of the Koreans as perpetual outsiders. This places them in a heterotopian space that Foucault describes as "existing outside of all places, dreaming of a land that is nowhere between two or more names and two or more places."[1] This is different from the characterization of Sunja's father, who is "born with a cleft palate and a twisted foot," expressing his unstable identity as a Korean born in a colonized land, struggling to find balance on both fronts.

"Culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them,' almost always with some degree of xenophobia" (Said 8). Edward Said argues against the marginalization and identity issues faced by individuals residing in border regions. He challenges the idea of culture and nation as extensions of colonialism and imperialism. The latent culture of colonialism in *Pachinko* can be summarized as the "Ikaino,"[2] the only space where Koreans live in Japan. Unlike the pristine Japanese residences, it is a slum where "comprised of mismatched, shabby house. the shacks were uniform in their poorly built manner and flimsy materials" (100), and is "place is fit for only pig and Koreans" (100), making it a sub-colony within Japan.

In contrast to Noa and Mozasu, there is also a figure who defies the constructed image imposed by Japanese society and instead fulfills a prophetic calling - Sunja. Sunja, is a third-world woman who destined to endure "endless work and suffering"

1 "Brothels and colonies are two extreme types of heterotopia, and if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that." See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," Architecture/ Mouvement/ Continuité in October 1984, was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec.

2 No one will rent to the Korean; a dozen in a room that should be for two, men and families sleeping in shifts. Pigs and chickens inside home. No running water. No heat. The Japanese think Koreans are filthy, but they have no choice but to live in squalor (119).

and is a "worm" who lives an inferior and barbaric life in the eyes of the Japanese. According to the customs of Joseon at the time, she was not easy to get married; her father was a disability and she got pregnant with Hansu Koh who was already married. Sunja is a woman of many layers of marginalization, intertwined with ethnicity, class, disability, and education. She accepts the fatalism that "a woman's lot is to suffer" (414), but she challenges her fate. She is a vibrant character who does not subscribe to the blood determinism of "bad blood, bad seed" (414), but lives her life as "a pragmatic woman" (222) and as a person "to understand how to survive" (109).

This is the kind of person who overcomes racist and imperialist societies. Sunja presents a life of self-choice and self-making, refusing to conform to predetermined circumstances. Albert Camus said, "It is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (90). No matter how harsh the fate, it can lose its power the moment we recognize it. By understanding the origin of our suffering, we can distance ourselves from it. If we can realize the fate and the blood are not our choices, but something given, then they no longer hold sway over us. The key difference between Sunja and Noa lies in self-awareness. Noa, unaware of his circumstances, continued to live his life according to the expectations of Japanese society, which denied his humanity.

To overcome these challenges, we must be able to face the true enemy. When we know exactly who the enemy is that has kept us from defining ourselves. However, Noa did not know the direct enemy responsible for his anguish. This is because the abstraction of an enemy does not directly shake or resonate with his personal experiences in the world. He could only curse his own tainted blood, and he could not curse the society that had created the situation or slander Japan. His shame regarding his blood prevented him from fully understanding himself, his parents, and his lineage, making it difficult to overcome these obstacles. While he wanted to be the good, sincere human being his father admired, but he was too young to fully embrace his father's ideals.

The lack of clarity about who the enemy is comes from the emotional disconnect between direct experience and pain it inflicts. It should be an intensely agonizing and challenging process, but our perception of the difficulty is shaped by our own imaginations. We cannot fully understand each other because the pain and suffering of the past generations is so deeply incomprehensible to the younger generations. Life becomes wearisome, empty, and devoid of vitality when we lost a tangible enemy to fight against. This can be traced back to the event of Noa's suicide. Shame does not lead to new possibilities. The moment we recognize the

true nature of our pain, we can move away from it.

3. Composed Intone and Aggressive Impart: *Pachinko* (2017) and *Pachinko* (2022)

Pachinko is a successful content that has gained significant acclaim as a literary masterpiece and raised a budget close to 130 million dollars per season on Apple TV. It is also remarkable that a Korean-American, skillfully using the story of four generations of Korean Japanese to depict the absurdity of modern Japanese society, was able to resonating with the hearts and minds of the American audience. This can highlight the role of literature in the age of globalization. The life of an immigrant in any country is not easy, but I believe that Americans would have actively sympathized with the author's sense of subject matter, focusing on the uniqueness of Japanese society that cannot be absorbed even after generations.

In terms of authorship and immigrant narrative, *Pachinko* can be introduced as a diasporic work that deals with the hardships of immigrants throughout history. People loves the book because of its generality, but it is more discriminating because it pinpoints the specificity of the maladies of current Japanese society. Above all, the critical mind of this book is along the same lines as Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*. And I would dare to say that *Pachinko* is a novel that mirrors the image of Japan in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, which accurately pointed out Japan's regressive and uncivilized aspects.

Criticism of Japan is more directly expressed in TV series adaptation of *Pachinko*. Unlike the novel, which unfolds in a chronological order along Sunja's trail, the series employs a narrative structure that alternates between her past and present perspectives. For the sake of dramatic impact, its episode crosses between Sunja's past and Solomon's present, making present the lines of discrimination drawn by Min Jin Lee. By superimposing the narrative of Sunja, who has moved from the periphery of imperial colonization and normal family discourse to the periphery of another discriminatory front, marked by "dirty blood (Korean ancestry)," and the narrative of Solomon, who has fallen through the cracks while striving to acquire wealth and rise in status in order to erase the stigma of being a Korean in Japan, the series captures the blood that cannot be erased even after 50 years.

The interesting point is that the TV series made by American staff are much more political and social. And the series was edited to more clearly reflect the societal tendencies prevalent in Japan at that time. Through the lives of Koreans

who were forced to settle in Japan, the series exposes the discrimination and insularity of Japanese society, which is not well known, by incorporating additional episodes not covered in the original novel. The Korean resistance during the Japanese occupation, which was not absent in the source material, drawing parallels to the relationship between Jews and Nazis, while portraying Koreans as a resilient and proud people.

While the novel unfolds its narrative chronologically, the TV series subverts the conventional sense of time by conveying images that intersect past and present. And the intersection of past and present, the intersection of the Sunja's experience and Solomon's reality, is what allows the later generation to understand the earlier generation. In other words, the series makes it possible for us to infer and experience a little bit of the experience of the generation before us.

The Solomon episode shows it in contrast. "All that matters really, is that at the end of the day your own tally defies gravity" (Episode 3 20:23). Solomon's values are "upward." His quest for success is visually represented through the mise-en-scène, with his first appearance in an elevator ascending towards greater heights. When he visits to grandmother's house, determined to acquire it for a Japanese company, begins with a purposeful climb up the stairs. But she does not want to sell her hard-earned home in Tokyo to a Japanese company that pretends to be noble. Everyone (even her children) including Solomon, tells her to let go of the past. Solomon's boss, Kazu says, lacks of understanding, "Why can't people just get over that, you know? It's the past. It's done" (Episode 2 9:22). But when Solomon, who has been told that the past doesn't matter, comes to understand grandmother's words, "the past can't be forgotten," the trajectory of his life takes a downward turn. He throws his tie, a symbol of his success, down the stairs and rushes down the stairs from the top floor where he rode the elevator. This scene is symmetrical to the scene in the past when Sunja and Isak were constantly descending to the lowest compartment on the ship bound for Osaka. Solomon finally settles at the bottom feeling relieved understanding the past of the Korean-Japanese who were treated like cockroaches or pigs and had to live like pigs in a pigsty because no one would rent them a house. In the end, he reaches a point of understanding the pain of history and his people.

Solomon's awakening is depicted very dramatically in Episode 4 of *Pachinko*. The understanding of the past is conveyed through the medium of "water." In a scene where Solomon sits dazed in a conference room after the failed contract, the camera zooms in on a rippling glass of water in front of him, cracking his highly goal-oriented life. At the bottom of the seemingly endless stairs, Solomon is drenched

in the pouring rain. This is in contrast to the Japanese people around him who open their umbrellas. In the very next scene, the Sunja in Busan steps out of the taxi and starts to get rained on. The scene cuts to show Solomon dancing in the rain to the music of a street band, while the Sunja walks into the sea and bursts into tears. In this moment, the deeply ingrained "Han 恨 " that had been lost and forgotten to the force of time, modernization, and capitalization, connects across the past and present. Although they are more connected by blood than anyone else, their frustration at not being able to understand the pain of past generations erupts into Solomon's dance. The repeated intercutting of Solomon and Sunja expresses that the pain of the past must be understood and empathized with by the next generation. Only then will we be able to untangle the knots of previous generations and stand up straight. As the younger generation first draws the pain of the past into the present and soaks it into their bodies like rain, the older generation then sends the pain that has accumulated over the years out of their bodies in waves. This scene conveys the meaning of rain and waves, or the cycle of water, as a way for the younger generation to understand the unforgettable national "Han," ensuring the continued flow and progression of our history.

"[…] it was reckless, it was dangerous, He should never have been trusted. He made a fool of us" (Episode 4 55:35). The arrogant Japanese chairman continues his dismissive attitude towards Korean. The image of the Japanese avoiding the rain is a metaphor for the Japanese tendency to hide the past and distorting history. In contrast, the moment Solomon understands and sympathizes with what happened in the past, Sunja looks much relieved than ever on the screen. The tears that were shed between Sunja and her mother before she left for Osaka are resolved through Solomon's empathy.

Narratives that criticize the intolerance of Japanese society do so in a variety of ways. The first time a character appears on screen, in particular, the writer or director has done a lot of work for the careful portrayal. One such significant scene occurs with introduction of Hana. Hana is Etsuko's teenage daughter and Solomon's first love. She was discriminated against in Japanese society because of her mother's dating history with multiple men. The scene in which she makes a noise of scratching the fence, the boundary of the school, is an expression of Hana's frustration at not being able to enter the mainstream of Japanese society, but only touching the edge. Hana desired America, the land of the free, a world where she would be treated equally unlike Japanese society from her childhood to her death. However, as she became an adult and fell ill, her utopia of freedom from discrimination became unattainable. Her unfulfilled dreams and hopes for

that place are represented by a scene in which the Coke she drinks in her hospital room, symbolizing America, disappears completely. The three scenes, Hana's death, Sunja's grieving face, and the flashback to the past depicting Sunja on the day her husband was arrested are intercut. At the moment of Hana's death, she watches a bird flying in the sky. The bird flying out of Japanese society, where it was trapped by discrimination and boundaries and into the open sky, is a metaphor for her destiny, granting her freedom through death. The bird flying into the sky connects the ends of Hana and Noa, who were unable to overcome discrimination and scorn, and Isak, who dreamed of a new world but was unable to fulfill it. In the TV series, the sky and the birds are connected to the death of a character who longed for equality. After Kyunghee, Isak's sister-in-law was dead, the two metaphors also appear when scattering her ashes into the sea.

In the TV series, the sea serves as a symbolic representation of Sunja's "*Gohyang* /Hometown." For Sunja, the sea is not only the source of her family's livelihood but also a place where she healed from the loss of her father. In Episode 4, when Sunja returns to Busan, the ocean is also the place where she cries her heart out. For Koreans who could not even eat rice from their own land, the sea is described as a space like a mother who gave away everything she had. It used to protect the lives of people who had everything taken away by the Japanese government. Moreover, the sea is a medium for expressing the profound "Jung 情 " of our nation, as Sunja's family relies on it for their livelihood, and maintains connections with their neighbors. The sea of our homeland, which was the last place to remain purely ours while everything on the ground was being trampled by Japan, can be interpreted as a maternal figure that embraces us. That is why Sunja chooses to bury Kyunghee's ashes at sea, rather than on land.

Sunja gives Solomon the watch, which she had received from Hansu, can be seen as a transfer of subjective agency to Solomon. There are two different life style. One is the life of Hansoo, who aimed to "live well" after enduring the tragedy of the Great Kanto Earthquake, and the other is the life of Sunja, who aimed to "how to live well" without compromising her integrity. Sunja lost Isak due to Japanese oppression in the 1930s and Hana due to Japanese society's discrimination against the socially disadvantaged in the 1980s. The intersection of the past and present events, which shows that Japan's barbarism and discrimination still persist, gives Solomon a crucial choice regarding his own life in Japan. The two belief, Hansu's belief in guiding Noa to take the "shortcut, not the path where the music is heard" and Sunja's belief in "raising you up right" were passed on to Solomon through the watch. This leads to the inference of Solomon's fate: will he choose between

the two options of Hansu's life and Sunja's life, or will he create a new life of his own? The upcoming season of *Pachinko* is expected to delve into the results of the character's variations/choices and how they have shaped their lives.

4. Decolonizing the Subject and Trans-identity

Finally, here expands the understanding of the character by connecting Franz Fanon's concept of decolonizing the subject and its relevance to trans-identity. The term trans-identity refers to the ever-changing nature of identity, but more importantly, the intention is to move beyond fixed perceptions of the world and the problems that arise from one's incomplete identity. In the real world we live in, the question of identity is high on the agenda; past and present even future. This is because human existence itself revolves around the search for self-identity within the context of surrounding world, interactions with others, and the larger societal framework.

Daegeun Lim, who had a discussion about identity, explains the value of the prefix "trans-" as "a critique of a system of perception that treats the world as a separate object, but one that interferes with, penetrates, traverses, and transcends each other in various ways" (Lim, "Concept" 139). Dichotomous ideas, binary oppositions, necessarily lead to hierarchies between two distinct realms. These dichotomies, such as center/periphery, subject/other, right/wrong, hierarchy/column, good/evil, and so on, assume certain domains as universal while relegating others to a particular status, leading to oppression and exclusion. In the realm of identity itself, there is a constant clash between the two perspectives of what we perceive ourselves to be and what society defines us to be, raising the perpetual question of which perspective holds the essence of our being. Humans are forced to choose a category and try to fit their identity within its boundaries. However, the concept of "trans-" criticizes the dichotomous thinking that dominates the world, and seeks diverse perspectives and freedom of thought. Humans are constantly trancing (traversing). To pursue personal happiness and seek answers to existential questions about our own identities, we must transcend societal perceptions that are confined within a binary framework. The socially constructed identities arbitrarily impose and oppress one another. This conflict of identities is very evident in the characters of the narrative. And *Pachinko*, which weaves a narrative centered on Japanese blood, is a more dramatic example of this than any other.

According to Fanon, the decolonization of the subject requires a constant critique of Eurocentric values and worldviews, as well as a constant vigilance against their naturalization. It aims not to mimic European achievements, technologies, and forms,

but to "create new human beings (subjects)" that Europe cannot imagine.[1] The new history of humanity must be a history of struggle against the enemies that dehumanize human beings, that is, the struggle to create a society in which human beings are not oppressed, exploited, and discriminated against by fellow human beings. This identity shifting is reflected in the narrative of the human's constant self-doubt in the characters. "The transition of identity can begin with the denial and departure of the old identity and end with the acceptance and arrival of the new identity, with a myriad of functional relationships occurring along the way. This process is accomplished by crossing an identity bridge that connects the departing and arriving identities, but it does not happen in a straight line or in one direction. It is a function of a myriad of phenomena, including forward and backward movement, progress and stopping, concealment and exposure, obstacles and overcoming" (Lim, "Some Representations" 276).

In the process of decolonization, Fanon always situates the problem of the subject in relation to socioeconomic realities. In The Cursed of the Earth, the problem of race cannot be detached from the problem of class. The process of modern colonization was a globalization expansion of capital, whereby non-Western peoples were colonized and victimized as the absolute other, representing barbarism, in order to delay the crisis of Western capital accumulation. The globalization of capital and colonial racism entails the dehumanization of the proletariat and black (colonized) people. Western humanism, which claims the inherent equality of human beings, is a bourgeois ideology and a political ploy to cover up the oppression of others. Instead, Fanon argues that the new humanism should not be a humanism formally declared to justify the superiority of Western civilization and its colonization, but rather a process of decolonization for individuals to liberate themselves and become new human beings. In other words, political decolonization can only be completed when it is linked to the decolonization of the subject and its consciousness. This decolonization intersects with Lim's shift in self-awareness to trans-identity.

1 "Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth." See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington, New York, Grove Press, 1963, 313.

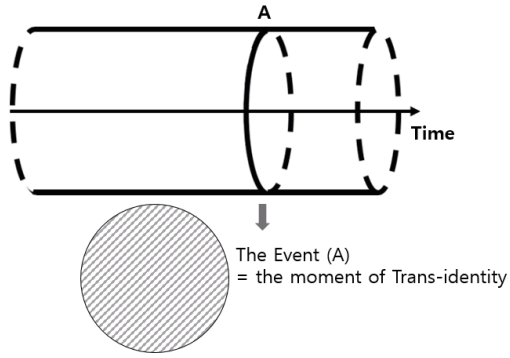

Figure 1 The Mise-en-Scène of Trans-identity

Imagine a large cylinder as an imaginary stream of time. If you cut off a section of the long cylinder and unfold it, you can see a scene in the stream of time. In this cross-section, the character bends and shifts identities according to events. The moment of transition can be fleeting, or it can linger, lamenting the cylinder. The elongated structure of the cylinder depicts a character drifting on an identity bridge. Being neither fully Japanese nor Korean, they are heterotopian in their very existence as foreigners living in Japan, unable to belong to any category. They are separated by blood and space.[1]

Sunja, portrayed as a strong-willed character. She embarks on selling kimchi to support herself, and eventually builds a life with her roots. “This is the kimchi my mom taught me. It’s the best kimchi in Osaka.” It’s a gritty scene that shows a determination to survive on the land. To live a life is to take control of one’s life. Sunja’s business is seen as a step towards self-reliance as a human being, and it is a scene that reveals the power of her being an agent in her own life, a moment that shouts out her presence in Osaka, a city where she has been forced to be passive. She stood tall as a new person-the head of the family. The adept who gains that power does not care what others define her as; she establishes herself as a mother and as the head of the family. Sunja This has no implications for Sunja’s recognition as Japanese. She has achieved subjective independence and has established her own position; she is a figure who can be named a decolonized subject, just as Solomon is portrayed in the TV series as a figure headed for a new fulfillment.

1 Their space was named Ikaino, which means “the place where pigs are beaten.” After moving to Osaka in 1933, Sunja and Isak gathered in a Korean community called Ikaino. Ikaino is a colony within Japanese imperialism in that it is adjacent to the burakumin settlement, an untouchable people in Japan, and unlike the Japanese settlement. The hierarchy and segregation of human species is a continuation of Ikaino’s colonial society and an institutional reflection of Japan’s racist society.

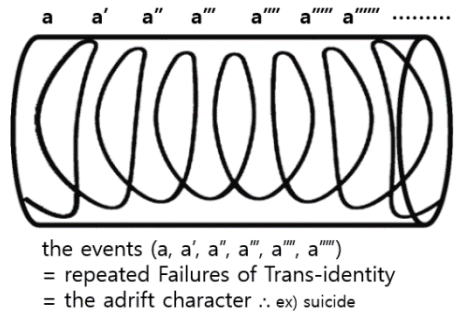

Figure 2 The Shape of Failure in Identity Transitions: Adrift

Noa admires the renowned writer Dickens, whose brilliance shone despite growing up without a father. For him, the role of a father carries significant weight in life. He believed that if he lived a good person, the world, which was hostile to him, would accept him as Japanese. However, his naive ideals were blinded by the structural problems rooted in Japanese society. The moment he discovers that his biological father was Hansu, whom he perceives as having "dirty blood," he falls into a state of self-loathing, disowning his family and running from his life.[1] He works as a bookkeeper at Pachinko and pretends to be Japanese. His aspect is a different transition from Sunja's struggle to make a life in a new land. He has not reached the destination of his desired identity. He ends his life lost and adrift, lost in the process of crossing identities to become Japanese.

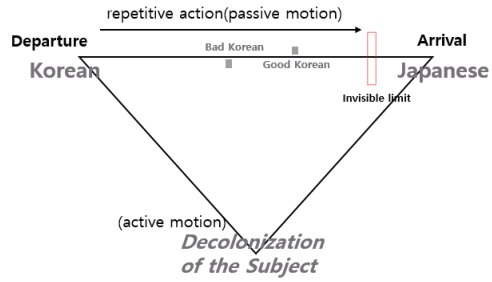

Figure 3 Trans-identity Triangle: Decolonization

The behavior of Noa and Mozasu, which attempt to define them as either "a good Korean" or "a bad Korean" fail to establish their identity as Japanese regardless of the process involved. Perhaps even the starting identity of being a

1 Reiko Tamura, a cheerful middle school teacher who had been kind to him, was from Nagano, and for some reason, he'd always considered her hometown as a place populated with gentle, benevolent Japanese (325). He was anxious and hurt enough to head to Nagano for that reason.

Korean in Japan is ultimately indefinable due to the prevailing intolerant centrism within Japanese society. People might feel happy when one can live among the people where the person was born and raised. They were born and raised in Japan, but because of their BLOOD they treated as the most inferior person and perceived as a foreigner. It gives the person the motivation to continue to think about and consider the discrimination that is perpetuated against socially marginalized people, who are not able to stand as subjects in society and are constantly forced to be the other. The feeling of not being welcomed by those around you, the feeling that your very existence is ostracized by others, can inflict profound suffering. This is not a fictional occurrence but a poignant reflection of our present-day society.

Pachinko depicts several types of human beings. The first is the one who stays on the bridge as a floating figure, unable to find his/her place, unrecognized by the community to which he/she belongs. There is also a person who struggles to occupy a new position, who wants to pioneer a different path. There are also several types of people who long for recognition but are frustrated by the challenges of navigating societal barriers. We can sense and relate to others through literature as a material that can crack open an entrenched society. Also "ethics is a discourse that should be discussed in the multi-layered power relationships" (Lim, "Academic Value" 197), and the criticism in our society can be understood as the activity of literature.[1] One might question why, in the 2020s, we continue to promote outdated notions of racism or nationalism. But the reality is that we are still in the midst of naming it, and it is unresolved. And as a means of communicating the past and the present, content *Pachinko* plays a powerful role.

Works Cited

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated from the French by Justin O' Brien. New York: Vintage books, 1991.

Dilworth, Dianna and Addie Morefoot. "Rewriting History: Cristina Garcia and Min Jin Lee." *Texas Book Festival Publishers Weekly* 42 (2017): 22-23.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

—. *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963.

Foucault, Michel. *Dits et écrits 1954-1988* I&II. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994.

—. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.* New York: Vintage Book, 1994.

—. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." Translated by Jay Miskowiec. *Architecture /*

1 See Sojeong Oh, "The Ethics of Empathy: Subversion of the Gaze and Performativity in *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* and *It's Okay, That's Love*," *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature* 2 (2021): 209-210.

Mouvement/ Continuité 5 (1984): 46-49.

Goldberg, Samuel Louis. *Agents and Lives: Moral Thinking in Literature.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Kant, Immanuel. *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, translated by Paek Chong-Hyon. Seoul: Daewoo Classical Library Acanet, 2002.

Lim, Daegeun. "Concept and Types of 'Trans-Identity': Character, Storytelling, and Discourse." *Studies in Foreign Literature* 2 (2016): 131-146.

—. "Some Representations of Transidentity Characters." *Comparative Literature* 1 (2020): 271-292.

—. "The Academic Value of 'Chinese School' Ethical Literary Criticism." *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature* 2 (2021): 191-204.

Lee, Min Jin. *Pachinko*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2017.

Nie Zhenzhao. "Ethical Literry Criticism: A Basic Theory." *Forum for World Literature Studies* 2 (2021): 189-207.

—. "Ethical Literary Criticism: Sphinx Factor and Ethical Selection." *Forum for World Literature Studies* 3 (2021): 383-398.

—. *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*. Beijing: Peking UP, 2014.

Oh, Sojeong. "The Ethics of Empathy: Subversion of the Gaze and Performativity in *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* and *It's Okay, That's Love*." *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature* 2 (2021): 205-218.

Pachinko (TV series), Apple TV+, 2022.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage books, 1994.

Tihanov, Galin. "On the Significance and Originality of Nie Zhenzhao's Ethical Literary Criticism." *Forum for World Literature Studies* 4 (2022): 559-562.