

REPRESENTING OF THE ZAINICHI GROUP IN KOGONADA'S "PACHINKO": STUART HALL'S READING

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Abstract

This study analyzes how the Zainichi Korean community is represented in Kogonada's *Pachinko* through Stuart Hall's theory of representation. Using a qualitative content analysis of eight episodes from *Pachinko* Season 1, this research examines the portrayal of Zainichi identity, survival strategies, and power relations within Japanese society. The findings reveal three major representations: (1) Zainichi identity shaped by Japan's colonial legacy and intergenerational trauma, (2) survival strategies developed through family solidarity, perseverance, and selective assimilation, and (3) Japan's continuing dominance that perpetuates social marginalization of the Zainichi. This study contributes to media and cultural studies by providing a critical perspective on how *Pachinko* reconstructs historical memory and challenges dominant narratives of Korean minorities in Japan.

Keywords: Representation, Zainichi, Stuart Hall, Discrimination, Marginalization

INTRODUCTION

Zainichi Studies: History and Identity

Since the Meiji era (1870-1910), Japan had targeted the Joseon kingdom as a target for invasion, starting with the Ganghwa Treaty of 1876 which opened up the exploration and exploitation of natural resources. Thus, the Ganghwa Treaty marked the beginning of Japanese colonial policy that triggered Korean colonial migration and the emergence of the Zainichi. According to Sugimoto, during Japan's imperial expansion in the early 20th century, Korea was annexed and occupied from 1910 to 1945, leading to mass migration of Koreans to Japan. The emergence of the Zai-

nichi community stems from Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, which triggered large-scale migration. Many Koreans were brought to Japan as laborers, forming the foundation of the Zainichi population today (Sugimoto, 2010).

Nobuhiko Ogawa stated that "Zainichi" refers to Koreans, both from South and North Korea, living in Japan. This term arose from Japan's colonial history and subsequent legal regulations. While not all Zainichi wish to be identified solely by this label, discrimination in Japan makes it difficult to avoid (Ogawa, 1993). Many Koreans were brought to Japan as workers or students during the colonial period,

and a large number of Koreans remained in Japan after World War II. According to Yun, Zainichi refers to an ethnic group that immigrated to Japan, primarily the descendants of those who immigrated during the colonial period (Yun, 2016). However, Hongjang mentioned in his journal that another term for Zainichi is Daburu, meaning half-Japanese and half-Korean. In Japanese society, Daburu are also discriminated against, just like “pure” Zainichi (Hongjang, 2016). It can be concluded that the term Zainichi refers to Koreans living in Japan, particularly those descended from those who arrived during the Japanese colonial period. Most initially arrived as workers or students, then settled after World War II. Furthermore, there is also the term Daburu for those with mixed Japanese-Korean heritage. Both “pure” Zainichi and Daburu face discrimination and identity crises in Japanese society. Representations of this are then present in various forms of Japanese media.

Media Representation of Minorities

During the Japanese occupation of Korea, Kim noted in his journal, *bringing class back in: The changing basis of inequality and the Korean minority in Japan*, that a large number of Koreans migrated to Japan. This migration was driven by various factors, including economic hardship and forced labor (Kim, 2008). This marked the beginning of the Zainichi movement in Japan during World War II. Many Koreans were forced to immigrate to Japan to work as manual laborers due to the escalation of World War II. The Japanese government conscripted Koreans into labor to support the war effort, leading to an overpopulation of Koreans in Japan (Inokuchi & Nozaki, 2005). After Japan’s defeat in World War II, many Koreans were repatriated to the Korean peninsula. However, a significant

number chose to remain in Japan, either because of the chaotic conditions in Korea or because they had established a stable life there. Those Zainichi who remained faced significant discrimination and legal challenges, as they were often treated as “foreigners” with limited rights.

Negative views of the Zainichi group remain strong among some Japanese, influenced by a history of colonialism and complex social and political dynamics. This history of colonialism plays a role in shaping public perceptions of the Zainichi, while social and political factors reinforce these views through how people interpret identity and the implementation of citizenship policies in Japan. These three factors make the Zainichi issue a persistent topic of discussion in the public sphere. Chapman stated that the presence of Zainichi Koreans in Japan, dating back to the early 20th century, significantly influenced the identity and social status of the Zainichi in Japan during the Japanese colonial period (Chapman, 2007). In social life, Robillard and Laurent mention that although there are some arguments that anti-Korean oppression is decreasing, Zainichi Koreans still face significant discrimination and marginalization (Robillard-Martel & Laurent, 2020). This is evident in the emergence of ultranationalist groups within Japanese society and hate speech targeting them as a minority group.

In a circulating news story, Kim Wachutka explains in her article, “When Women Perform Hate Speech: Gender, Patriotism, and Social Empowerment in Japan,” that the daughter of a right-wing nationalist, exploited historical memory by referring to the Nanking Massacre and proclaimed her hatred of Koreans. Her words evoked painful memories for Zainichi Koreans across Japan (Kimwachutka, 2019). The Zaitokukai’s display

of contempt for Koreans evoked feelings of exclusion and rejection reminiscent of the colonial era. The incident occurred in February 2013 at the Zaitokukai in Tsuruhashii District, Osaka.

Ongoing issues of history and discrimination keep this topic relevant and frequently discussed in society and the media. Zainichi Korean women, in particular, actively voice their aspirations in the public sphere, combating hate speech and discrimination. Their activism has even set a legal precedent, drawing attention to the Zainichi struggle for social justice. Furthermore, Zainichi Koreans have made significant contributions to Japanese literature and cinema, addressing themes of identity, discrimination, and cultural integration. Zainichi works are increasingly recognized in modern Japanese literary and film festivals, reflecting a broader acceptance and interest in their unique perspectives (Dew, 2016). Furthermore, the community focuses on preserving cultural heritage through education, such as the founding of Chōsun schools that promote Korean language and culture despite facing repression and a lack of support from the Japanese government (Okamura & Hosok, 2023).

Issues concerning Zainichi have traditionally been more prevalent in mainstream media, such as newspapers, magazines, and news reports, highlighting the political, legal, and discrimination aspects experienced by this community. Representations in these conventional media tend to position Zainichi as objects of social coverage, resulting in narratives that emphasize structural problems rather than personal experiences. The development of popular culture and the entertainment industry have opened up new space for more complex representations through film and drama. Popular media has an advantage in conveying social issues because it uses nar-

rative, visual, and emotional language that more easily reaches a wider audience. In the context of media studies, representation not only reflects reality but also actively shapes society's perspectives through discursive practices (Lie, 2001). In other words, popular media not only conveys the story of the Zainichi, but also plays a role in constructing meaning about who they are, how their identity is understood, and their position in Japanese society.

The Pachinko drama serves as an important example of the shift in Zainichi representation, as it not only portrays them as a marginalized minority group but also demonstrates the complexity of identity, emotional conflicts, and aspirations in everyday life. Through this approach, Zainichi issues are more broadly understood as subjects possessing agency and diverse experiences. From a cultural studies perspective, this drama demonstrates how popular media can become a space for negotiating meaning while challenging stereotypes and discriminatory discourses. Media, from newspapers to television to digital platforms, play a significant role in shaping public opinion and culture, in line with Marshall McLuhan's theory of "hot" and "cold" media, which highlights the level of audience engagement (Surahman, 2024).

One medium that represents Zainichi life is the Pachinko drama. Drama itself is a multifaceted concept that can be understood from educational, artistic, social, and cultural perspectives. Drama is a form of learning that helps explore personal dilemmas, social interactions, attitudes, and morality through fiction, while also enabling individuals to understand themselves and others (Kitson, 2018). Drama as an art form encompasses various types, such as comedy, tragedy, tragicomedy, and melodrama, including historical dramas that visualize past events to convey a message (Kanaker

et al., 2022). *Pachinko* depicts the life of a Zainichi woman set against the backdrop of the Japanese occupation of Korea. This story sparked controversy, with Japan rejecting the story's veracity, while Korea considered its presentation unfair. However, this drama has provided a new perspective on the real-life experiences of discrimination against Zainichi in Japan and their identity as part of the Japanese people.

Stuart Hall and Representation Theory

The researcher's role is not only to collect data but also to construct meaning, so research methodology can be enriched with a drama approach to strengthen analysis. Drama functions as a representation, presenting social and cultural realities through characters, dialogue, and storylines. This aligns with Stuart Hall's emphasis on representation is the production of meaning through language and images (Hall, 1997). In *Pachinko*, these meanings are encoded by the director through symbols of assimilation, and decoded by audiences through their understanding of discrimination and identity based on Hall's three aspects: the reflective, constructionist, and intentional approaches. The visuals and dialogue reconstruct the history of injustice while challenging stereotypes. Directed by Kogonada, *Pachinko* is approximately 56 minutes per episode and is now entering a new season with 9 episodes. Starring Kim Min-ha, Youn Yuh-jung, Lee Min-ho, Jin Ha, and Steve Sanghyun Noh, this drama through the characters of Sun-ja and Baek Isak shows the experiences of discrimination, alienation, and the struggle to maintain identity as Koreans in Japan.

Watching the *Pachinko* drama provided a profound emotional experience for the author. From the first episode, her attachment to the character Sun-ja was strong, especially when she witnessed the

injustice she and her family experienced simply because of their ethnic identity. This drama is not just entertainment, but a means of understanding history and collective trauma often overlooked by mainstream media. The *Pachinko* narrative builds cross-cultural empathy while emphasizing the importance of fair representation. This prompted the author to make it the object of scholarly study on the representation of the Zainichi communities identity. In the drama, directed by Kogonada, the Zainichi is visualized as a community struggling for their families, even to the point of entering the pachinko gambling business. This characteristic provides a new perspective in various countries, especially Japan, thus gradually changing public perception of them in the economic, educational, social, and cultural spheres.

The drama *Pachinko* presents two socio-economically distinct representations of Korean Zainichi communities. First, those living in poverty, like Sun-ja and her family, who must work hard, open small businesses, or take menial jobs while facing discrimination as a minority in Japan. Second, there are economically successful figures, such as Koh Hansu, a wealthy man with business connections and illegal activities, including gambling. Hansu's success demonstrates that despite coming from marginalized groups, a small number of Zainichi communities can achieve high positions, often with moral compromises. These two depictions emphasize that Zainichi identity is not uniform, but rather complex and diverse, depending on social conditions, life choices, and relationships with the majority society.

In previous research written by Febriani Elfida Trihtarani entitled *Between Zainichi and Pachinko: Representation of Korean Zainichi in Min Jin Lee's Pachinko Novel* explains how Zainichi are represented in

Pachinko novels in literary form that explains the plot of the story (Trihtarani et al., 2019). This research focuses on the dialogue and narrative of the characters that aims to reveal the identity crisis of Zainichi group. This research uses Fukuoka and Tsujiyama's theory which is divided into four parts, including pluralist, nationalist, individualist, and assimilationist. The novelty of the author's research is analyzing the characteristics of the Zainichi group from their ambition to defend the right to live in Japan.

Yuuka Wickstrum's in *Zainichi Koreans' Ethnic Identities and Roles of Ethnic Organization and Community*, the study examines how Zainichi Koreans construct their identities through social networks and individual experiences within the community (Wickstrum, 2019). This study uses the concept of Ethnic Boundary Maintenance, Oppressed Identity and Collective Resistance, and Acquired Ethnicity to explain the dynamics of identity formation. These findings form the basis for analyzing the representation of Zainichi identity in Pachinko dramas. Meanwhile, William James Osborn in *Zainichi: How Violence and Naming Determine Consciousness*, he identifies that post-World War II Zainichi identity was formed amidst uncertainty stemming from Japanese and Korean coercion (James Osborn, 2015). His implicit theory is that identity is a social construct influenced by power and cultural stereotypes. This research is relevant to the author's analysis of the violence in Pachinko representations.

From the literature review on Zainichi group, it is clear that previous research has only addressed societal phenomena. This study differs in that it utilizes the theory of ethnic identity, influenced by societal culture, and is analyzed through media, namely drama, using Stuart Hall's representation theory. Pachinko drama is

considered relevant for changing Japanese society's perspective on Zainichi group and visualizing their characteristics in real life. The purpose of this study is to examine how the Zainichi group is represented in Pachinko drama through Stuart Hall's theory. The following sections present the literature review, research method, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a media studies approach to the Pachinko drama. Qualitative methods are used because they allow researchers to deeply understand the meanings, symbols, and social representations contained in the media (Cresswell, 2013). The research stages include selecting the topic and object of study, formulating research questions, collecting data, analyzing data, and compiling the final report. The analysis method used is content analysis, which is an approach to identifying patterns, themes and meanings in texts or media (Krippendorff, 2019). This analysis was conducted by examining elements in the drama such as narrative, dialogue, characters, and visual symbols to find the representation of the Zainichi group. Data collection for this study focused on secondary data with the main media being the Pachinko drama, assisted by phenomena that occurred based on circulating news to support the accuracy of the representation in the Pachinko drama.

Data were collected by watching all eight episodes of the Pachinko drama in depth and noting scenes relevant to the representation of the Zainichi group through coding. Coding was performed manually by the researcher using a three-stage process. The coding process used the technique proposed by Strauss and Corbin, which consists of open coding, axial coding, and

selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). Open coding is the initial stage in which data is broken down into sections, carefully examined, and compared to identify similarities and differences. Disagreements were resolved through repeated viewing and reflexive memoing. Then, the data is reorganized to establish relationships between categories using axial coding. The final stage, selective coding, involves selecting core categories, systematically linking them to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that require refinement. The results of this study's open coding are presented in the table in the appendix.

In the first stage (open coding), each scene in the Pachinko drama was identified and given an initial code to describe the representation of the Zainichi group based on the social, cultural, and historical contexts presented. Each scene containing issues of identity, discrimination, or power relations was coded according to the emerging thematic categories. For example, the scene featuring young Sunja in Yeongdo was coded "IEB1" (Ethnic Identity and Culture – the first scene), the scene of her meeting with Koh Hansu was coded "IEB2," while the scene of Sunja's wedding and departure to Japan was coded "IK1" (Memory and Colonialism, which is the first scene). This coding helped researchers explore how representations of ethnic identity and colonialism are represented visually and narratively.

Next, in the axial coding stage, the initial codes were grouped into six major sub-themes that appeared repeatedly throughout the storyline, namely: (1) Ethnic and Cultural Identity, (2) Memory and Colonialism, (3) Discrimination and Inequality, (4) Social Mobility and Survival Strategies, (5) Power and Authority, and (6) Social and Geographical Marginalization.

For example, the scene where Sunja faces discriminatory treatment in the Japanese market is coded "DK1" (first Discrimination and Inequality), while the scene where Mozasu starts a pachinko business to survive is coded "MS1" (first Social Mobility). This grouping allows researchers to observe consistent patterns of representation in depicting the Zainichi experience across generations.

The axial coding process resulted in more focused code groupings around the research's major themes. Codes related to identity, for example, were grouped under the categories of cultural representation and self-esteem; while codes related to experiences of discrimination were mapped under the category of social marginalization and unfair treatment. Furthermore, codes reflecting life's struggles were grouped under the categories of self-sufficiency and resilience. With these groupings, axial coding not only simplified the data but also clarified the relationships between the phenomena identified, providing a solid foundation for the next stage of analysis, selective coding.

The selective coding stage is the final step in qualitative data analysis using a grounded theory approach. At this stage, the researcher selects the core category that is considered to best represent the main phenomenon of the research, then connects it with other categories that have been formed in the axial coding stage. This process is carried out to produce a conceptual narrative that is complete, consistent, and has explanatory power regarding the research focus. Thus, selective coding helps formulate a big picture of the representation of the Zainichi group in the Pachinko drama. In the selective coding stage, the six sub-themes are then categorized into three main themes that represent a broader structure of meaning, namely: (1)

Construction of Colonial Legacy Identity, (2) Survival Strategies in Discrimination, and (3) Dominance of Power and Marginalization. This categorization process is carried out by reviewing each scene and its social context, to ensure that the resulting meaning is not only textual, but also reflects the social reality faced by the Zainichi group in Japan.

FINDINGS

The selective coding stage is carried out after the open coding and axial coding processes to organize research findings into main themes that best represent the overall meaning of the data.

Table 1. Mapping of themes regarding Zainichi life based on the results of content analysis.

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Frequency
Construction of Zainichi Colonial Heritage Identity	Zainichi Identity & Culture (IB)	16
	Memory & Colonialism towards Zainichi (IK)	
Survival Strategies in Discrimination Against Zainichi	Discrimination & Inequality against Zainichi (DK)	15
	Zainichi Social Mobility & Survival Strategy (MS)	
The Domination of Japanese Government Power and the Marginalization of Zainichi	Power & Authority over Zainichi (KO)	5
	Zainichi Social & Geographical Marginalization (KG)	

Based on table 1, it can be concluded that the main themes that emerge from the Pachinko drama are 3 (three) main themes with 6 (six) sub-themes.

The first main theme is the Construction of Zainichi Colonial Heritage Identity which consists of two subthemes including: Zainichi Identity & Culture (IB) and Memory & colonialism towards Zainichi (IK). The second theme is Survival Strategy in Discrimination against Zainichi which consists of two subthemes including: Discrimination & Inequality against Zainichi (DK) and Social Mobility & Survival Strategy of Zainichi (MS). The third theme is the Domination of Japanese Government Power and Marginalization of Zainichi which consists of two subthemes including Power & Authority towards Zainichi (KO) and Social & Geographical Marginalization of Zainichi (KG).

The three major themes and six sub-themes resulting from this categorization process represent how ethnic identities are shaped by colonial legacies, how minority communities adapt and survive structural discrimination, and how power relations create ongoing marginalization. Therefore, the following discussion will explore each theme in more depth to demonstrate how representations of the Zainichi group are constructed in Pachinko dramas.

DISCUSSION

Construction of Zainichi Colonial Heritage Identity

This central theme illustrates that Zainichi identity is inextricably linked to the legacy of Japanese colonial rule over Korea. In Pachinko, the construction of Zainichi identity emerges through collective memory and cultural symbols that signify the unequal relationship between colonizer and colonized. The ethnic and cultural identities held by the Zainichi community

in the Pachinko drama are inextricably linked to the long legacy of Japanese colonialism in Korea. This colonial legacy forms the initial framework for how their identities are perceived, both by themselves and by the Japanese majority. In this context, identity is not static, but rather a constant negotiation between pride in Korean origins and demands for assimilation from Japan, the colonial power.



Figure 1. Scene when Sun-ja, who is in Osaka, has difficulty adjusting to Japanese social and language norms. Source: Pachinko (2022).



Figure 2. A family flashback scene shows how past trauma continues to be passed down to the next generation. Source: Pachinko (2022).

In the Zainichi Identity & Culture subtheme data, a scene is shown where Sun-ja, who is in Osaka, struggles to adjust to Japanese social norms and language. Then, in the Zainichi Identity & Culture data, a family flashback scene shows how past trauma continues to be passed down to the next generation. In this context, Pachinko illustrates how Zainichi identity (Koreans born and raised in Japan) is a complex legacy of Japan's colonial period over Korea. They are not only legally "foreign" citizens, but also experience an existential struggle

between assimilation and the preservation of cultural identity. According to Stuart Hall's theory of representation, identity is not fixed, but is formed through a discursive process. Pachinko shows that media acts as a space where Zainichi identity is negotiated between two conflicting cultures: inherited Korean traditions and the demands of Japanese modernity.

General Data Base Report shows that in the case of job applications submitted by Park Jong-Seok's use of a Japanese name and Japanese address could lead to concerns about rejection during document screening if he uses his original Korean citizenship identity (National Institute of Korean History, 2021). This confirms that the construction of Zainichi identity remains influenced by both colonial legacies and contemporary discrimination to this day. This phenomenon parallels news reports highlighting discrimination against Koreans in Japan, particularly in employment and education, where ethnic identity is often concealed in order to be accepted by Japanese society. In these reports, many Zainichi choose to use Japanese names to avoid being treated differently.

The Minority Rights Group's newsletter states that limited opportunities to learn Korean language, culture, and history, coupled with the stigma of being a minority group, have led many Koreans in Japan to disconnect from their cultural heritage. This condition is often rooted in a deep sense of shame about their origins and intense pressure to assimilate into mainstream Japanese society. This bulletin aligns with the data on the Zainichi Identity & Culture subtheme where the cause of the Zainichi identity crisis is due to being entangled in the legacy of trauma from the first Zainichi generation.

According to Stuart Hall's theory, this representation can be viewed reflect-

tively because it depicts a historical social reality: the Zainichi's position, born of colonial structures and never fully accepted in Japanese society. However, the playwright intentionally seeks to emphasize that Zainichi identity is not simply a "colonial product" but rather a form of cultural resistance. Through symbols such as Korean food and the mother tongue, *Pachinko* demonstrates that identity cannot be completely erased by colonial power.



Figure 3. Hansu's flashback of witnessing the massacre of Koreans by Japanese citizens. Source: *Pachinko* (2022).

Colonial memory is a crucial element in the formation of Zainichi identity in *Pachinko*. The trauma of the colonial period, exile, and Japanese rejection of Korean immigrants is passed down across generations. In the subtheme of Memory & Colonialism for Zainichi, Hansu flashbacks to witnessing the massacre of Koreans by Japanese citizens who were suspected of being escaped Korean prisoners and causing unrest. Through narrative visualization, this drama emphasizes that colonialism did not only occur in the past but continues to live in the social memory of the Zainichi. In the context of Hall's theory, *Pachinko* represents the "production of meaning" where colonial memory is used as a discourse to understand the social position of minority groups. Zainichi identity, therefore, is the result of the clash between historical memory and contemporary social construction.

According to the *1923NEWS* article, the memory of colonial history that was

deeply imprinted at the time of the Kanto earthquake (1923) emerged. Rumors claimed that Koreans had poisoned wells, lit fires, and incited riots. As a result, many Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese became victims of mass murder (Lee et al., 2022). The common narrative about the massacre states that the rumor spread in the post-earthquake confusion and that these incidents occurred as a result. Conversely, under martial law, Japanese authorities disseminated the rumor as "fact." The Japanese military's involvement in leading the massacre made the rumor seem even more credible and believable to the public. From the perspective of Stuart Hall's theory of representation, colonial memory visualized in *Pachinko* demonstrates that Zainichi identity is not a static entity, but rather the result of a constantly negotiated process of social and historical construction.

Thus, the *Pachinko* Series was produced not only to represent colonial historical events, but also to reveal how collective memory and social trauma are inherited and reproduced in public consciousness. The Zainichi identity that emerges in this narrative is the result of the clash between colonial historical memory and ongoing social constructions, ultimately reflecting the complex dynamics of the process of producing meaning about minority groups in Japan.

Survival Strategies in Discrimination Against Zainichi

This second main theme highlights the social and psychological strategies developed by the Zainichi community to survive the discrimination and social limitations they experience both in the real world and in its representation in *Pachinko*. Generally, discrimination is the act of treating an individual or group unfairly or differently based on certain characteristics such as

race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, or social status. Discrimination against the Zainichi community in the Pachinko drama is depicted as an experience inherent in almost every aspect of life, from access to education, employment, marriage, and even daily social interactions. However, amidst these structural pressures, the drama also highlights the various survival strategies developed by Zainichi individuals and families to maintain their existence. One such strategy is family solidarity. Family ties serve as a primary bulwark, providing emotional and economic support when the external environment restricts mobility. Through this solidarity, Zainichi families not only maintain continuity but also transmit values and identity across generations.

Furthermore, the drama also depicts efforts at social mobility as a form of resistance against discrimination. For example, Zainichi characters strive to obtain better jobs, despite facing stigma and legal restrictions. This mobility is often not only for personal gain, but also as a way to prove their ability to be equal to the Japanese majority. On the other hand, survival strategies are also manifested through cultural assimilation. Some characters choose to conceal their origins by adopting Japanese language, names, and even customs. This choice illustrates a difficult identity dilemma: whether to maintain Korean cultural heritage or adapt to avoid marginalization. Pachinko demonstrates that although structural discrimination creates limitations, the Zainichi community is not simply passive victims. They develop survival strategies that are both adaptive and resistive, reflecting the dynamics of the struggles of ethnic minorities amidst social injustice.



Figure 4. Scene of Sunja being given an expensive gift by Hansu. Source: Pachinko (2022).

In the subtheme data Discrimination & Inequality towards Zainichi shows a contrasting visual narrative between the luxury of Hansu and the simplicity of Sunja's life. This demonstrates the real-life inequality between different types of Zainichi. Some Zainichi in Japan are successful in their careers, while many still struggle to find work. As mentioned in the Diachronic Report, in 1976, Kim Kyung-deuk passed the Japanese bar exam and, with the support of a group of applicants, primarily Japanese academics and lawyers, petitioned the Supreme Court of Japan requesting that he be employed as a judicial candidate while retaining his Korean citizenship. Surprisingly, the Supreme Court quickly granted this request. In 1977, Kim Kyung-deuk was appointed a trainee judge and became a lawyer in 1979 (National Institute of Korean History, 2021). This shows that through his hard work in fighting for the basic rights of Zainichi citizenship, he achieved his career compared to Zainichi who resigned themselves to discrimination without resistance.

The current reality also shows a similar trend. A survey by the Chosun Scholarship Association noted that approximately 80% of Korean students in Japan had witnessed or heard about hate demonstrations, and approximately 30%

of them experienced racial discrimination when searching for housing, including in renting apartments (Jin-Hwan, 2021). Furthermore, several media reports also revealed forms of discrimination in the field of education. Jin Hirakawa in his article in *The Asahi Shimbun* wrote that although the free education assistance program applies generally to high schools in Japan, including public schools and some private schools, as many as 10 “Chōsen gakkō” schools affiliated with the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon) are excluded from the program due to political reasons and ties with North Korea (Hirakawa, 2025). This policy sparked protests by Korean students in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, on March 7, 2025, demanding that the free education policy also be implemented in Korean schools in Japan. Children of Korean descent in Japan still face barriers to education due to their citizenship status, with some forced to attend ethnic institutions with minimal government support. This aligns with the representation in *Pachinko*, which depicts family solidarity and cultural assimilation as survival strategies that have persisted from the colonial period to the present day.



Figure 5. The scene where Sunja opens a kimchi business in Japan as a means of survival. Source: *Pachinko* (2022).

Despite facing pressure, Zainichi try to create survival strategies to build a decent life. In the sub-theme data of Discrimination & Inequality towards Zainichi in the drama *Pachinko*, there is a scene where Sunja opens a kimchi business in Japan as

a way to survive after losing her livelihood. This representation parallels the social reality in modern Japan, where many Zainichi make traditional foods as a symbol of pride and a means of survival in a system that rejects their existence. However, this practice also creates internal conflict, as they must negotiate the balance between social acceptance and the loss of identity.

This context is closely related to an article in *Anthropology News* that discussed an annual cross-cultural event where kimchi played a significant role in changing long-standing discrimination. Through the Zainichi community’s kimchi-making and introduction, Japanese people have become increasingly interested in other Korean dishes and, more recently, South Korean media products (Demelius, 2019).

Within Stuart Hall’s theoretical framework, this representation can be interpreted from two angles: reflective, as it realistically reflects the marginalized socio-economic conditions of the Zainichi people in Japan; and intentional, as the director wants to show that behind suffering lies resilience, resilience, and a survival strategy born of solidarity and ethnic pride. *Pachinko* thus showcases not only discrimination but also the cultural strength that persists amidst an oppressive system.

Thus, according to Stuart Hall’s constructionist perspective, *pachinko* becomes a space for constructing and negotiating meanings about Zainichi. This drama not only depicts the reality of discrimination but also shapes new perspectives on the resilience and identity of minority groups in Japan.

The Domination of Japanese Government Power and the Marginalization of Zainichi

In general, marginalization is the process of removing or pushing a group

to the margins of a social, economic, or political structure, thereby losing access to the resources, opportunities, and power held by the dominant group. According to Chambers, marginalization occurs when a particular group is pushed out of the mainstream socio-economic system and loses its ability to fully participate in society (Chambers, 1983). This is the distinction between discrimination and marginalization. Broadly speaking, discrimination is an act carried out, while marginalization is the result of a continuous process of exclusion due to discrimination.

This third main theme highlights the power relations between the Japanese majority and the Zainichi minority, which continue to reflect the hierarchical structure inherited from colonial rule. In the Pachinko series, Japanese control over Korea is represented through social, economic, and legal institutions that relegate Koreans to second-class status. Zainichi characters often lack full legal rights, illustrating a form of inequality that persists today.



Figure 6. Visual scenes of Isak being verbally abused in detention for allegedly opposing Japanese nationalism. Source: Pachinko (2022).

In the data on the sub-theme of Power & Authority towards Zainichi, a scene is shown in the form of a visual narrative of Isak being verbally tortured in prison because he was considered to be against Japanese nationalism. Hall's theory through reflective representation is evident in the true story of Lee Sang-ho (whose Japanese name is Sugiura Shogo), which depicts the

complexity of Zainichi identity amidst the political tensions of East Asia after World War II. Lee, who was recruited as a civil servant of the Japanese military and later became a prisoner of war until finally being deported to South Korea, reflects on how Zainichi are caught between loyalty, nationalism, and alienation of identity (Hyun-kyung, 2020). In the context of Stuart Hall's theory, this representation reflects how the media constructs social reality by showing that power works not only politically, but also symbolically, namely through language, images, and narratives that normalize the subordinate position of minority groups.

Pachinko also shows the physical and social marginalization of the Zainichi through their isolated residential locations from Japanese society, as well as through their experiences of social exclusion in public spaces. This represents the marginalization experienced by the Zainichi group in the real world, such as the case example in the General Data Base Report, Kim Hee-Ro in 1968 who shot dead a gangster with a shotgun over a debt dispute and then held him hostage in a Japanese-style inn in the mountains. At the time, the Japanese media denounced him as a "Korean killer" and an "inhuman gun demon." At that time, acts of discrimination against Korean citizens in Japan, who were poor and of low social status, were widely considered normal in Japanese society although Koreans in Japan strongly oppose discrimination, they often feel that protesting it within Japanese society is pointless (National Institute of Korean History, 2021). This has resulted in the marginalization of the Zainichi group in Japan, who are considered the lowest and poorest social class. As a result, the Zainichi group is denied access to resources and power.



Figure 7. Visual Narrative Showing Social Separation Between Japanese Citizens and Korean Communities. Source: Pachinko (2022).

In the data on the Zainichi Social & Geographical Marginalization subtheme, a visual narrative is shown that shows the social separation between Japanese citizens and the Korean community. This scene highlights discrimination in the form of social exclusion from the central region and the lack of social support. Through Hall's theory of representation, Pachinko successfully demonstrates how media becomes an arena where marginalized groups can use it to voice individual suffering in negotiating their identities and social spaces.

This study is limited to one drama series, which may not represent all portrayals of Zainichi group. Researcher interpretation may also reflect cultural bias. Future studies could compare multiple media or audience reception.

CONCLUSION

The drama Pachinko represents the identity of the Zainichi group formed by the legacy of Japanese colonialism against Korea that is still felt today. Through the life stories of its characters, especially Sunja and her family, this drama shows that Zainichi identity is not fixed, but is formed from the struggle between past memories, feelings of loss of homeland, and efforts to survive in a Japanese society that often discriminates against them. Using Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Pachinko

asserts that identity arises from social and historical processes from how a person is perceived by others and how he understands himself in the midst of an oppressive culture.

The study contributes to understanding how visual media shape minority representation in Japan and can influence public awareness of discrimination.

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