# Architecting the Self: Sunja's Negotiation of Identity and Belonging Choices in Min Jin Lee's Pachinko

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## Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the way Zainichi Korean characters negotiate their identity and their belonging as portrayed in Min Jin Lee's novel, *Pachinko*. Through the use of the Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM), it is argued that the strategies of the immigrant characters are not their own free choices but are shaped by the Japanese host's exclusionist and segregationist attitudes. Therefore, the marginalised characters, like Sunja, the protagonist of the novel, strive to maintain their Korean culture while trying to avoid any engagement with Japanese society, which leads to a "problematic" outcome, as it would grant such a character stability yet also result in permanent marginalisation. Thus, concluding that the hostile orientation of a host society is the primary architect of the fate of immigrants, revealing that a true belonging is achieved under the requirement of the host society's willingness to accept, not just the effort of an immigrant to adapt.

# هندسة الذات: تفاوض "سونجا" على خيارات الانتماء و الهوية في رواية "باتشينكو"

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## الملخص

تهدف هذة الورقة البحثية الى تحليل الطريقة التي اتبعتها شخصيات الزينتشي الكورية للتفاوض على الهوية و انتمائها كما صورت في رواية مين جين لي. و من خلال استخدام نموذج التثاقف التفاعلي يهدف التحليل الى اثبات ان الاستراتيجيات التي اتبعتها الشخصيات المهاجرة ليست خياراتهم الحرة بل تبلورت و تشكلت من خلال المواقف الاستقصائية/ الفصلية التي ابداها البلد الياباني المضيف. و بالتالي تصبح الشخصيات المهمشة, مثل سونجا بطلة الرواية, قادرة على المحافظة على ثقافتها الكورية كما تحاول ان تتجنب اي تفاعل مع المجتمع الياباني مما يتتج عنه "اشكالية" حيث تمنح هكذا شخصيات الاستقرار و لكن تكتسب ايضا تهميشا ابديا, ليتبين ان التوجه العدواني الذي يبديه المجتمع المضيف هو المهندس الاولي لما سيصبوا اليه المهاجرون, كاشفا ان الانتماء الحقيقي يتحقق تحت شرط ان يكون المجتمع على استعداد للقبول دون الاكتفاء بالجهد الذي يبديه المهاجر للتكيف.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الهوية , نموذج التثاقف التفاعلي, باتشينكو, الانفصال, ادب الزاينتشي.

# 1. Introduction:

> Save your family. Feed your belly. Pay attention, and be skeptical of the people in charge. If the Korean nationalists couldn't get their country back, then let your kids learn Japanese and try to get ahead. Adapt […]. In the end, your belly was your emperor.
>
> (Lee, 2017, p. 174)

Caught between the demands of two opposing choices. These choices can test the moral and the loyal counterparts of whether pertaining to a homeland or vitalising familial ties. This makes for a rather tough experience, as such judgments are hard to be settled. Therefore, saving one's own family becomes a poignant philosophy of survival. This is especially true when daily lives are at risk, becoming more important than keeping to pride and nationalism. In the Korean author Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* (2017), there exists a dilemma of citizenship. The characters are pressured by their own community to maintain a form of cultural reality. Yet they are worried for their own family as they need to establish a form of legal safety.

Min Jin Lee centres her novel around a specific community. It has lived in Japan for the past decades, known as "Zainichi". It means a "foreign resident" in the Japanese language. It is used to represent those who would have never been fully accepted by the host country (Tablizo, 2022, p. 100). The story of the Zainichi started in 1910, when Korea was colonised by Japan. Many Koreans were forced to migrate for work to find not only poor jobs but also harsh discrimination. Such treatment continued even after the independence of Korea after World War II. Most of the Zainichi chose to stay in Japan, only to have their citizenship to be stripped away and become stateless and trapped in a legal limbo (Tablizo, 2022, pp. 100-102).     Forever being treated as permanent outsiders, the Zainichi were often denied having equal rights. They would even, at times, get vilified. The Japanese viewed their country as a single-race nation, creating thus an identity problem for the newcomers in finding a place for themselves. These foreigners would always be considered as the other and standing against the Japanese (Tablizo, 2022, p. 102).

It is within this painful stage of the history of exclusion that the characters of the novel are to decide. They are caught between two needs. Either achieving the practical need of surviving in Japan or the powerful pull of retrieving their identity of Korea. The epic novel of Min Jin Lee tells of the lives of one Korean family and the people they encounter over the span of several generations. It starts in the early 1900s in Korea, when ruled by Japan. Then,

moving to Japan as the family changed places. The family face decades of constant discrimination and hardship, resulting in a central question that hovers over their lives: how do people live in a country that treats them as unwanted outsiders? (Lee, 2017).

To better understand these characters, it is important to know how they formed themselves and how they balanced their choices. They need to find a space for survival, and they also need to keep connected to their roots. The latter links them to an old place, which helps them to maintain a sense of self. Two factors that need to be considered and important here. One is their personal choices. The other is the ideologies of that host country. Therefore, a model that studies the relationship between newcomers and their new country is to be used. It is the Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM) by psychologists Richard Bourhis et al. (1997). This model suggests that the way immigrants and the host country get along depends on how their preferences align. They would then result in either "conflictual", "problematic", or "consensual" relationship (De Raad et al., 2013, p. 186).

This paper will use the IAM to argue that the fates of these characters are not randomly determined. Their fates are not the mere result of their own making, whether ending in suffering or success. Instead, they are the direct result of unwelcoming and often hostile attitudes of the Japanese host society. Their stories show us that the architecture of self is a collaborative project.

## 2. Theoretical Lens: The Principles of the IAM

When a group of people move to a new country, they have to acculturate themselves and fit in with the environment/people of that country. Not all people achieve the same adaptation level, as different people make different choices. This individual perspective is powerfully captured in Berry's model of acculturation. It mainly asks two questions. Do these people show and have any intention of keeping their original cultural identity? And do they show and have any intention of having contact with the larger society outside their group? The yes/no answer would determine the type of scheme or "strategy" each person will adopt (Lu & Samaratunge, 2016, p. 16).

When these questions are measured synchronously, the resulting answers or "attitudes" would be four in total. For instance, if the answers were "yes" to keeping culture and "yes" to having contact with the new society, then the attitude would be "integration". When the answers were "no' to keeping original culture and "yes" to having contact with the

new society then the attitude would be "assimilation". When the answers were "yes" to keeping original culture and "no" to having contact with the new society then the attitude would be "separation". Finally, if the answers were "no" to keeping original culture and "no" to having contact with the new society then the attitude would be "marginalization". This model focuses heavily on the experiences and the choices of the people that belong to the immigrant group (Lu & Samaratunge, 2016, pp. 16-17).

However, this model presents an incomplete picture. Its entire focus is on the perspective of the immigrant, while failing to provide a powerful role to the host community adequately in the shaping of the whole process. Such a limitation was adhered to by psychologists like Richard Bourhis et.al. They presented the "Interactive Acculturation Model" (IAM) as an attempt to fix the limitations in Berry's model, adding two adjustments to the latter's work (Duarte, 2007, p. 198).

One of the changes was altering the questionnaires of Berry's model. The original questions heavily focused on the attitude and behaviour of people. Bourhis et.al. changed the focus from a want to "maintain" original culture and an intention to achieve "contact" with the bigger group to focus on the "value" each group has to the individual. The new questions ask the immigrant group two things.  Does it have any value to preserve the group's original culture? And, does it have any value in obtaining the new culture of the new community? (Duarte, 2007, p. 198).

The same team of psychologists also made another change. They noticed that the fourth strategy of Berry (i.e., marginalisation) does not have the same experience for all. Their resolution is to split it into two distinct categories. One is "anomie", which occurs to people who feel themselves being alienated from their culture, leading to a difficult time in adapting. The second is "individualism", which happens when people prefer to view themselves as unique individuals and free from any cultural labelling. This would lead then to low stress (Giles et al., 2012, p. 247).  Moreover, Bourhis et al. (1997) believed that the host is as important as the immigrants. So, he proposed a model for the host society, too. It was similar to Berry's, as it also had questionnaires and had outcoming attitudes or strategies (Giles et al., 2012, p. 247).   In this model the host country is asked to answer two simple questions regarding the immigrant group. Is it permissible for the immigrants to keep possessing their own distinctive culture? And is it permissible for the immigrants to adopt and adapt to the culture of the host? (Bourhis et al., 1997, p. 380)

According to the way the host group answers, this group, this time, will be divided into groups of five categories. "Integrationists" are the host group that takes a supportive stance. They believe that it is a good thing for the immigrants to keep their own culture while also joining the new one. "Assimilationists" are the host group that puts a condition on the immigrants. One where each individual in the latter gives up on their own culture and makes a complete attempt to blend in with the host. "Segregationists" are the host group that prefer a separate living.  They do not want to mix with the culture of the host society. "Exclusionists" are the host group that takes a prejudiced stance towards immigrants. They might even support sending them away from the whole country altogether. "Individualists" are the host group that care not for the labels of cultural difference. They show a tendency to treat everyone as a unique individual regardless of the background they hold (Giles et al., 2012, p. 247).

Now, by integrating the modified model of Berry and the one proposed by Bourhis et al. (1997), an interactive model is made. It is the "Interactive Acculturation Model" (IAM), that actually puts these two groups, the host and the immigrants, into conversation with each other.  The relationship between the two depends highly on how well their strategies and attitudes match up, since the most important contribution of IAM is to predict what is going to happen when the preferences of the two groups meet.

The outcome of this relationship depends on either a match or a mismatch of the chosen strategies. For instance, if the members of the immigrant and the host groups choose the same "acculturation preference", the result would be that of "concordance". If the same members of the same aforementioned groups do not choose the same "preference", then the result would be "discordance". Hence, these two lead to the following outcomes: "conflictual", "consensual", and "problematic" (Safdar & Van De Vijver, 2019, p.5).

This model is helpful when studying the way different groups live together. It is built around the simple idea that belonging is relational. The outcome depends on what the two groups want. Thus, showing that a successful integration is not the job of the immigrant, but achieving it is a shared responsibility. Therefore, when the host society adopts integrationist preference towards the immigrant group (i.e. by welcoming its culture while maintaining its distinctive one), the result would be a society that is peaceful and multicultural, where everyone feels a sense of belonging. On the other hand, when the host society adopts an

exclusionist or segregationist preference towards the immigrant group, the result would be a society that is filled with problems and tension.

Such an interactive model is perfectly suited for analysing Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*. It sheds light on architecting the self within the hostile environment. This model helps in revealing how the characters' negotiation of their identities and belonging is not a one-way journey, but rather a two-way voyage that is shaped by both the immigrant's choice and the host's attitude, which would influence the characters' inner battle to figure out who they are and where do they fit in.

## 3. Analysing Strategies and Outcomes: An IAM Reading of *Pachinko*

## 3.1. The Author and the Backdrop of Injustice

Living the experience of adapting to a new culture and actually being part of the immigrant group represents the life story of American-Korean author Min Jin Lee. She was born in the capital of Korea then moved with her parents to America when she was seven years of age. Then she was living in Japan for some years. This altogether made her able to widen her vision. She produces literary works that actually capture the suffering of the Korean people who were discriminated in the host country of Japan. They had a lingering feeling of constant fear of being deported. They felt a "lack of belonging", thus producing the novel *Pachinko* about these Koreans who lived their lives in Japan, dealing with anti-Korean bias (Fishkin, 2017, p. 30).

This novel tells of the lives of one Korean family. It covers four generational periods and spans almost eighty years. It encompasses their immigration to Japan at the time of the imperial rule. It shows their struggles to forge a place which they could call "home". This happens amidst the "Cold War", "World War II", and the "Great Depression". It is an epic tale regarding familial bond, honour and duty in a Dickensian style. The Japanese and Korean characters, the old, the young, the men and women are set to grapple with the pressures as they should follow after their desires and fulfil the demands of the bigger world (Soloway, 2019, pp. 25-26). To comprehend the experience of such a community, the Zainichi, means to be aware of the placement and the misplacement of them as a group.

This is the story of Min Jin Lee; it starts in the 1910s, in a small Korean village of fishing. Lee introduces us to Sunja, a young Korean woman. She is the daughter of a poor but

kind fisherman and an ailing, nevertheless resilient mother. Her identity is circumscribed by her family's boarding house in Yeongdo, Korea, a world of intimate, yet demanding physical labour.

Such early formation is crucial in Sunja's case. Her heroism is not that of delving into a quest or adventure. It is of rooted endurance that formulates her strength to be not in battlefields but in kitchens. It is contrived over the hot steaming pots of rice. It is in the household affairs. It is in that unspoken duty to her family. Her agency is therefore expressed not through what she is to *acquire,* but through what she is to *preserve* and *protect.*

The young Sunja falls in love with a wealthy, mysterious man, Koh Hansu. After becoming pregnant, she discovers that he already has a wife and three daughters in Japan. Sunja marries a sickly but kind and noble Korean Christian pastor. His name is Baek Isak. He was staying at her mother's boardinghouse and promised to give her child his name. Thereby, her choice is of honour, legitimacy. It is a chance at a coherent identity, even though it means serving a life of particular hardship. Here, she runs from shame, from Korea to Osaka, Japan, with her now husband. There she starts a family. This decision of hers is rooted in a strong maternal instinct. It is ingrained in a primal sense of righteousness that would map the path for generations to come.

In Japan, the newly married couple live with Isak's brother, Yoseb, and his wife, Kyunghee. Their family is settled and *placed* in the impoverished Ikaino ghetto. They are forever misplaced as perpetual outsiders. In these slums of Osaka, they are to endure decades of poverty. They also face systemic discrimination as stateless Zainichi foreigners (Lee, 2017).

## 3.2.  Applying the IAM: A Theoretical Analysis of Host and Immigrant Orientations

## 3.2.1 IAM Reading of Host Community: An Exclusionist and Segregationist Framework

Based on the IAM, the attitude of the host society is as important as the efforts of the immigrant community in the acculturation process. It fundamentally argues that a host community is not merely a passive backdrop but an active, powerful one (Tisserant et al.,

2016, pp. 122-123). In *Pachinko*, there is a consistent method of acting by the Japanese host society, which demonstrates an orientation that is consistent and multifaceted.

According to the theoretical framework of the study, the orientation followed by the host is Segregationist, preferring a separate living and no mixing of culture. It is found in the novel in the forms of enforced residential and educational policies. The Zainichi Koreans were legally blocked from living anywhere except for the run-down neighbourhoods, resulting in impossible integration.  In fact, Yoseb, Sunja's brother-in-law, explains the situation saying that: "The Japanese won't rent decent properties to us." (Lee, 2017, pp. 107-108). Such a policy aimed to trap the Koreans in isolated ghettos. They were cut off from the greater mainstream society. This ensured there was a visible yet impoverished underclass, and legally enforced to assume the status of outsiders. In schools, the Japanese community promoted a system of educational segregation and humiliation. It was a system of sanctioning prejudice instead of preventing it (Laurent, 2020, p.51; Prakash, 2024, p. 42). The teachers who are the authority figures in schools, for instance, actively humiliated the Korean children. They insisted on their being inferior. This is devastatingly captured in an incident when Noa Baek, Sunja's son, is punished and publicly shamed by his Japanese teacher. His crime was smelling just like his mother's Korean food, kimchi (Lee, 2017, p. 169).

Simultaneously, an Exclusionist orientation, which is marked by prejudice and a desire to remove immigrants, is also present. This is seen in the state's political persecution and violence. This type of change, which is forced, is a common goal of governments where the state enforces "assimilation ideology [and] expects IM [immigrant] groups to comply fully with the norms and values of the mainstream society" and that "all nation-states are assimilationist in nature", simply wishing everyone to act similar to the host and forget their original culture to make one homogenized society with accelerated shift of language and loss of original one (Extra & Yağmur, 2006, p. 134). One stark example is the persecution of a figure like Baek Isak, Sunja's husband, who was a peaceful Christian minister. He refused to follow the Japanese state religion, thus alerting the Japanese government to consider him a threat. His act was deemed an unacceptable refusal to assimilate. Such a link to a distinct identity "is difficult to accept", making the state respond with force to exclude the outsider (Extra & Yağmur, 2006, p. 134). Therefore, the capturing of the peaceful Isak, his torture and death demonstrate how extreme the state will go to crush down the differences and reach its ideology of homogenization.

Other examples of enforced segregation exist. The host society adopted an ideology of Japanese racial superiority. This justified their exclusion policies. They believed that the Koreans are inherently inferior, supporting thus the ideology for exploitation, economically, and segregation, socially (Lee, 2017).

This ideology coincided with criminalising Korean identity. The police viewed the Zainichi not as citizens to be protected, but as suspects to be monitored and controlled (Chung, 2020, pp. 114-115). They were an everlasting threat. Such biased treatment is clearly shown when Mozasu, Sunja's second son, was harassed and wrongly accused daily. The law enforcers always believed him and his people guilty based on their ethnicity.

Moreover, the Japanese host did not leave the language untouched, as it enforced a linguistic oppression alongside the cultural oppression. Speaking in the Korean language in public places called for suspicion. It demanded a command of speaking in Japanese. By belittling the way they dress, eat, and sound, the host becomes successful in severing the ties between these subjects and their homeland. It generated shame, showing just how the Host's prejudice can invade even the private aspects of an immigrant's life. In hopes of escaping bullying and erasing the smell of his culture, "Noa asked his aunt for snacks and meals that didn't contain garlic, hoping this would keep the children from saying bad things to him" (Lee, 2017, p. 169).

Thus, the strategy that is employed by the host society towards the minority is one of exclusion and segregation/separation. They treat the Zainichi as perpetual foreigners. They are used for labour causes but never treated as equals. Such a strategy was possible to be executed through the manifestation of a combination of laws and economic policies. It used social practices, institutional prejudice, violence and ideological warfare. (Lie, 2009, p. 18). The dominant group, by virtue of its position and control, answers "no" to both of IAM's core questions. The first, is it allowable for the immigrants to maintain a distinctive culture of their own. And the second is whether it is allowable for them to adopt parts of the host's culture. This dual rejection maintains power. It ensures the Zainichi to stay at their place; some goals are achieved by exploiting the Korean labourers and making use of their presence while at the same time ensuring them not achieving any social, cultural or legal equality. Consequently, maintaining a form of rigid hierarchy with the Japanese at the top.

As Bourhis et al. (1997) posit, the host's attitude is responsible of the outcomes of the acculturation as well to the attitude of the immigrants. Through having exclusionist and segregationist orientations, the relationship created with the Zainichi is none other than "conflictual". Their desires, whether to assimilate, separate, or integrate, are all thwarted away by the host society, which makes a demand of their utility but denies their humanity.

This proves that the architecture of the self for each character is constructed within a space that is so narrow, extremely hostile and confining. It demonstrates how belonging was never a fair negotiation. The host country is the one that holds all the power, therefore making all the rules, while leaving immigrants with little to no choice. Scholar Aura Lounasmaa (2023, pp. 113-114) explains, this is what takes place in a "hostile environment", where the system is designed to be difficult through the use of laws and politics in the limitation and control of immigrants' lives. Therefore, the self they can build is confined to small and difficult spaces that this hostility allows.

Regardless, when the Zainichi characters acculturate themselves, they do not all follow a straightforward path. It is a game of luck, mirroring the pachinko machine game that gives the novel its name. Just as the player, in this game, can guide the balls but cannot control where they head, as their destination is random. It is due to the hidden mechanics of the game. The characters choose the strategies they can manoeuvre, but they cannot control their finale and fate in the rigged system of a foreign country.

## 3.2.2 An IAM Reading of Immigrant Orientations of Acculturation: Constrained Responses

Faced with this hostile framework, the Zainichi characters adopt various strategies as defined in the theoretical lens. According to Berry's model of acculturation (1997, p. 9), Sunja's approach exemplifies the strategy of Separation as it is a result of saying "yes" to the question of keeping her Korean culture, and "no" to building a relationship with the bigger host society. On the other hand, the IAM shows that the outcome was "problematic"; since both groups show "partial agreement and partial disagreement", adding thus a bit of stability to their relationship. Sunja's desire to separate correlates with the Host's preference for the immigrant to be kept out of sight and separate as well (Bourhis et al., 1997, p. 383).

The plot starts with Sunja, the matriarch figure of the family, and ends with her. This makes her at the heart of the acculturation struggle. Her name has the Chinese character "sun"

in her name, which many Koreans have, providing the literal meaning of "obedience" (Choi & Yang, 2023, p 40). This functions as a strong symbol of ironic subversion within the body of the novel. Apparently, her name suggests passivity and compliance, yet the reality is enduring, resilient and defiant. The irony of having such a name highlights the strength of Sunja in the face of what is yet to come. She possesses untiring obedience, not to the outside social expectations, but to her own internal compass of cultural protection, familial duty, and honour (Lee, 2017). Sunja is not a mere protagonist of the first act of the novel (which has three), but she is a foundational axis upon which the entire story rests. Her character is a paradox for being both an utterly ordinary and a profoundly heroic. Her few crucial decisions cause momentous consequences that would define the destiny of her lineage to come. To analyse Sunja is to analyse the very themes of the novel where negotiation of identity is tested, the burdens of sacrifice are manifested, and the resilience of dignity is proven.

Sunja's life in the host country is defined by working relentlessly. She is constantly treated as an outsider who is looked at with inferiority. Upon her arrival at the Baek family house, her hardships begin when she is forced, along with her husband, to accept life in the slums. Accordingly, establishing the kind of economic oppression that would forever be the backdrop to her harsh daily life (Lee, 2017, pp. 107-108).

After the death of Isak, the story continues with Sunja, who becomes a definitive outsider for being not only poor and Korean but a female one too. She now has two sons, Noa and the younger Mozasu. She struggles for the coming decades, in keeping her family safe through the times of poverty and war (Lee, 2017). Lee makes use of Sunja's body as a site for this struggle. Her strength is channelled through the unending work. This work is required for her family's survival. The life of Sunja becomes, therefore, a testament to the existential plight of a Zainichi Korean. She is forever to be in a state of suspension. She is between a homeland, which is reduced to a memory, and a host nation, which refuses acceptance. Lee embodies the nation of the dispossessed within Sunja. By that, she is making her character's body a vessel, not of pleasure, but of an instrument dedicated to labour whose endurance is the main measure of success.

Although the discriminatory treatment that Sunja faces is indirect, it is always present due to multiple reasons that actually cast a striking signalling light at her as an outsider. One reason is her way of dressing, which is that of the Korean clothing, known as the hanbok, leading to strange stares and exclusion whenever she leaves the Korean territory. This is

clearly shown when, on one occasion, while going with Isak to a noodle shop, she was the only woman wearing the hanbok. The Japanese owner felt relaxed only when Isak started to speak in perfect Japanese. This highlights that to become accepted is a conditional and uneasy path to follow. Clearly, Sunja felt this lingering otherness deeply and took it to the heart. She describes this prejudice as "the chill" that was only set against all Koreans (Lee, 2017, p. 131).

This feeling gained her an entrance to a social circle of only Koreans, which was one of the rules set by her brother-in-law as to "avoid talking to the neighbors" (Lee, 2017, p. 109). Even in her attempts to support her family, like selling kimchi, Sunja chose to be tied to serving the Korean community. Therefore, by being forced to such living circumstances, of lingering in the poor neighbourhood and facing persistent discrimination, she does not try to become like the Japanese. Instead, she directs her energy to building a small, safe Korean world inside Japan. Her main goal is to survive, not to fit in. She keeps her community intact by speaking the Korean language and consuming Korean food. Hence, she actively chooses to always stay separated from the hostile society around her, making her life altogether be defined by a strategy of separation.

This separation was not entirely her choice, but was actually forced upon her as the host society was exclusionist in nature. After all, she finally realises that:

> For the first time in her life, Sunja felt aware of her unacceptable plainness and inappropriate attire. She felt homely in Osaka. Her well-worn, traditional clothes were an inevitable badge of difference, and though there were enough older and poorer Koreans in the neighborhood who wore them still, she had never been looked upon with scorn with such regularity, when she had never meant to call attention to herself. Within the settled boundaries of Ikaino, one would not be stared at for wearing a white hanbok, but outside the neighborhood and farther out from the train station, the chill against identifiable Koreans was obvious (Lee, 2017, p. 131).

Sunja's reaction to the host's attitude of being pushed into slums, denied good jobs, and treated as inferior, was turning inward onto herself. She focused on the things that she could control, not the system that controls her. She needed a strategy of survival that would keep her holding on to her dignity and identity. One powerful act that became a symbol of connection to her homeland was eating the white rice from her mother.  It was a gift before her betrothal to Japan. By eating the Korean rice in Japan, she is vitally and actively preserving her culture. The rice is not merely viewed as food. It is a sacred gift of a mother's

love and a tangible form of connection with both home and mother, which she chooses to cling to when facing the uncertain future of being in hostile Japan.

In contrast to her, other characters like her eldest son, Noa, adopted a strategy of Assimilation. He tries desperately to get rid of his Korean identity by adopting the Japanese name Nobuo, avoiding garlic, and excelling in Japanese language and culture. However, his assimilationist desire clashes directly with the host's exclusionist reality, which is seen when his heritage and ethnicity are discovered, resulting in him being utterly rejected. Such a mismatch leads to the conflictual and tragic outcome, which eventually culminates in his suicide.

While the strategy of Individualism, where one seeks to be seen beyond the current ethnic labels, can be seen in Sunja's second son, Mozasu. He is one of the few characters who find success in pachinko parlour business. In that sphere, money can sometimes bypass prejudice, however, he can never rid himself of the harassment of police due to his ethnicity (Lee, 2017), showing thus limits of this strategy. The novel portrays no successful Integration, since it is the orientation of the host that makes such strategy impossible. The predominant feeling among characters caught between these worlds is no other than Anomie, or cultural alienation.

The researcher views Sunja's experience as a powerful demonstration of how the strategy of an immigrant becomes a direct response to the conditions set by the host society. Assuming a separatist approach is not a freely chosen path but a survival mechanism. It is a necessity that preserves what is left of her dignity, which eventually puts her at conflict with the outer dominant group, thereby finding herself on the margins. She is always disregarded as a subject and gains very few opportunities in the broader society. Thus, her journey is proof that for the Zainichi, to architect the self within a systemic rejection, a defensive structure is to be used. The host society's orientation is the most powerful architect of an immigrant's fate.

This character is successful, and her success is to be understood within these specific terms of the oppressive world she lives in. Her success is not to be measured by external achievement. It is measured by internal and moral ones, which are defined by an unwavering ability to preserve her dignity, core identity, and her family against the overwhelming outside forces. She, in fact, develops a successful character arc where, in her case, the change or

transformation is "internal" due to having a "revelation of inner strength" whenever she is found under pressure. She rejected Hansu's offer of being a secured concubine mistress and instead accepted Isak's proposal of honourable hardship. For decades to come, she keeps her core identity and dignity safe and protected through absolute force of will and labour. (Beiman, 2010, p. 220).

Thus, while the fates of characters are not randomly maintained but a direct outcome of the discordance between their own preference in acculturation and the host's orientation of exclusion and segregation, Sunja stands as a symbol of defiance in the midst of such pressuring circumstances. Like her namesake, she embodies the ability of any ordinary person who can architect their own identity and bigger destiny against the vast, overwhelming forces of segregation

## Conclusion

Sunja's journey in *Pachinko* serves as a profound case study of the negotiation of identity under pressuring circumstances, while Berry's model helps in labelling strategies like hers and other immigrants as "separation". The IAM, which fully exposes the power dynamics of her and others, demonstrates how such strategies are not mere personal and free choices but are direct and forced responses to the orientations of the host society. The exclusionist/segregationist policies of the bigger society are evident in the economic discrimination, social prejudice, and the execution of ghettos, which altogether create a hostile environment, in which true integration is impossible; resulting in ruling that any outcome of every acculturation strategy is predetermined by the host society, which serves as the architect of the whole immigrant experience.

Consequently, the Zainichi characters' fates are not random. They are the result of discordance between their own desires and the exclusion of Japan. According to the IAM, these relational outcomes are categorised as problematic or conflictual. This makes stories of immigrants like Sunja's to be not that of successful integration but about resilient survival. It is within the narrow space that is only allowed and permitted by that bigger segregationist system.

Thus, to build an identity that is stable, characters like Sunja would prefer to separate themselves. It is a form of resistance, making it a victory achieved within the severe constraints of the host society. Lastly, *Pachinko* proves that belonging is a two-way street. It

requires not only the efforts of immigrants to adapt but, more importantly, the willingness of a host society to accept.

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