

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**THE ROLE OF CUISINE IN SHAPING PERSONAL
AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN MIN JIN LEE'S *PACHINKO*
BA thesis**

**ANNELY JÜRIÖÖ
SUPERVISOR: *Dr* ERET TALVISTE**

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary literature serves as a powerful tool for representing the experiences of marginalized communities. Min Jin Lee's novel *Pachinko* centers around the Korean diaspora, with an emphasis on the everyday lives of Koreans and Korean immigrants in Japan during the 20th century. This thesis examines the portrayal of Korean cuisine in *Pachinko* with a specific focus on its importance in shaping and upholding the characters' personal and cultural identities during the Japanese annexation of the Korean Peninsula and the subsequent migration of the characters to Japan.

The thesis is divided into four sections: the introduction, the literature review, the empirical analysis, and the conclusion. The introduction positions *Pachinko* within the context of Asian American literature, particularly through the lens of postcolonial theory, and states the aims of this study. The first chapter contains a literature review that provides a concise overview of the interplay between food, culture, and politics, specifically in the context of colonialism, as well as the current research on the novel. The second chapter presents an empirical analysis of the novel, focusing on the importance of Korean cuisine in the story of *Pachinko* by examining its connection with the characters' heritage, use of language, and as a source of empowerment. The conclusion summarizes the findings of the thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, contemporary literature shows the diversity of human experiences across spaces and cultures. Literature can be seen as a powerful tool for promoting social change by introducing readers to a wide range of perspectives and experiences that differ greatly from their own. The matter of diversity and representation holds significant importance in American literature, as the United States prides itself on being a cultural melting pot, yet it struggles to accurately represent the multitude of cultures and ethnicities it encompasses. Although all marginalized communities deserve equal opportunities for recognition and discussion, the present thesis centers on Asian American literature, specifically the novel *Pachinko* by Korean American novelist Min Jin Lee.

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Lee and her family immigrated to the United States in the 1970s. Her subsequent work as a novelist has centered around *The Koreans*, a trilogy of novels about the Korean diaspora, which include her debut contemporary fiction novel *Free Food for Millionaires* (2007), the historical fiction novel *Pachinko* (2017), and the yet-to-be-published novel *American Hagwon*. Lee's second novel, *Pachinko*, follows the story of a poor Korean immigrant family over the course of many decades and throughout various historical events set in the 20th century. The novel's central characters are Sunja, her parents Hoonie and Yangjin, Sunja's former lover Koh Hansu, Sunja's husband Baek Isak, Isak's older brother Yoseb and sister-in-law Kyunghee, and Sunja's sons Noa and Mozasu. *Pachinko* revolves around ordinary people and their experiences. Although historical events are mentioned, *Pachinko* does not aim to explain the background and context of these events. Instead, Lee has conducted extensive research on the daily lives of Koreans and Korean immigrants in Japan throughout the 20th century, and by writing from an omniscient point of view that switches between characters, Lee is able to portray a wide range of experiences and perspectives in her novel.

The present study implements a postcolonial framework (Young 2003: 1–8) to analyze *Pachinko*. Postcolonial narratives explore a wide range of themes, including displacement, cultural hybridity, identity, and resistance, and they illustrate the enduring cultural and social impact of colonialism across generations. In doing so, postcolonial narratives empower marginalized voices to showcase their agency and resilience in confronting oppressive systems, as well as foster empathy, understanding, and critical engagement with the enduring legacies of colonialism. (Madsen 2003: 1; Prabayathy et al. 2024: 5559, 5563) Regarding Asian American literature, Madsen (2003: 5–6) points out that the term “American” being equated solely with the United States is not only a major limitation but also highly problematic. Foreign-born Asians have outnumbered native-born Asians in the United States since the 1980s, and for many Asian Americans, nations and “homes” other than the United States are psychologically just as important. Writers from such cultural backgrounds frequently explore topics of diaspora and postcolonialism in their works, and they can be seen employing a multi-geographical perspective to shift the focus away from the United States. For authors such as Lee, Peepre (1999: 168) notes that this perspective enables them to form new types of connections to their present and their past. Thus, by tracing the narrative of *Pachinko* across four generations and surpassing geographical boundaries, Lee not only depicts the influence of Japanese imperialism on the Korean Peninsula but also presents the experiences of the wider Korean diaspora, whose communities span across the globe.

Pachinko has gained extensive scholarly attention since its publication, particularly in relation to Lee’s depiction of the Zainichi—ethnic Koreans living in Japan—and their search for identity and a sense of belonging (e.g., Huang 2022; Suur 2023; Tablizio 2022). In her work, Nicole R. Tablizio (2022: 108) states that *Pachinko* serves as a bridge between Zainichi literature and Korean diaspora literature, providing a comprehensive portrayal of

the Zainichi experience through a multi-generational storyline. Moreover, the novel is written in English and aimed at an international audience. In doing so, Lee incorporates *Pachinko* into the American literary canon, contributing to the promotion of Asian voices in American literature, particularly those of Korean origin. However, there has been a lack of scholarly focus on an important aspect of Korean culture that has significant importance in the story of *Pachinko*—food, “or more precisely [,] food culture” (Ichijo and Ranta 2015: 2), and its role in creating and maintaining personal and cultural identities. While Ester Suur (2023: 48–50) addresses the role of food as an identity marker within *Pachinko*, discussions on Korean food culture and its importance to the novel have primarily revolved around its portrayal in the recent television adaptation of the novel on the streaming platform AppleTV+.

Taking into consideration this gap in the research on *Pachinko*, the present thesis aims to examine the portrayal of Korean cuisine in the novel, focusing on its significance in shaping and upholding Sunja’s and her family’s personal and cultural identities amidst the Japanese annexation of the Korean Peninsula and the subsequent migration of the characters to Japan. The first part of the thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on the relationship between food and cultural identity, the politicization of food as a tool of oppression by colonizing forces, and scholarly research on *Pachinko* thus far. The empirical part of the thesis focuses on *Pachinko* itself and utilizes three mediums—heritage, language, and power—to analyze how national cuisine influences identity formation and whether food practices can serve as a means of preserving cultural heritage while resisting oppressive forces, such as colonialism.

I INVESTIGATING THE INTERSECTION OF FOOD, CULTURE, AND POLITICS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

As previously stated, Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* is a multi-generational family saga that explores the impact of Japanese imperialism and its aftermath on Sunja and her family, as well as the wider Korean diaspora. *Pachinko* has garnered significant scholarly attention since its publication, but the representation and symbolism of Korean cuisine in the story of *Pachinko* has received less attention. For this reason, this literature review seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the interplay between food, culture, and politics, particularly in the context of colonialism, and provide a concise introduction to the existing research on *Pachinko* to highlight the necessity of the present study.

1.1. Food as a Communal Identity Marker

Besides being a fundamental fulcrum of life, food has an instrumental role in creating both personal and cultural identity. “[Personal identities] are rooted in our cultural and familial pasts, but shaped by our personal and present conditions,” notes Kate Gardner Burt (2022). Personal identities encompass many layers of meaning, and the culinary choices individuals make daily are a part of them. According to Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta (2016: 24), people's eating habits are closely connected to their upbringing, social circles, and cultural environments; thus, people's food choices reveal a lot of information about them, including their stance and engagement with their national identity. When it comes to culture, Jennifer Hasty et al (2022) suggest that food is a malleable tradition that can move between cultures with a certain ease. New culinary practices can be introduced and practiced alongside existing ones while also combining different traditions to create new ones. Additionally, Robert Koehler (2019: 6, 44) notes that people's culture and heritage are the

products of shared history and accumulated experiences, and as cuisine is a fundamental part of this, it can be used to establish and strengthen social ties.

Korean food culture can be described as rich, extensive, and steeped in tradition. While it is difficult to define national cuisine in a clear and concise manner, Korean cuisine predominantly revolves around rice, a staple dish in the Korean diet that has ties to the country's agricultural past. Rice is served with a variety of *banchan*, communal side dishes made of vegetables, fish, and/or meat, along with a soup and stew (Koehler 2010: 6). Another significant part of Korean cuisine is the consumption of fermented foods, such as kimchi, as they enable the geographically and climatically diverse country to keep perishable foods fresh and edible during colder months (Koehler 2010: 18). After the Japanese invasion of Korea in the 16th century, chili peppers were introduced into Korean cuisine, and while the locally grown peppers have since gained a distinct sweet and spicy flavor, the introduction of the chili pepper greatly contributed to the development of the distinct flavor that is emblematic of traditional Korean cuisine (Koehler 2010: 107–108).

In addition to specific foods and flavors that define traditional Korean cuisine, food-related customs and attitudes have had a significant impact on the identity of Koreans. In the highly stratified society of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), a strictly patriarchal social structure took shape due to the influences of Confucianism, and this had a great impact on familial relationships (Koehler 2010: 106–107). While men were seen as the head of the household and the breadwinners, women were tasked with raising children, caring for elderly relatives, and managing household affairs (Kim and Park 2012: 236–237). The responsibility of procuring, processing, cooking, and distributing food, as well as preserving family recipes, fell primarily on the young housewife, even though Korean households had a multi-generational structure with several generations living under the same roof. Along with this, it became common practice to prepare special festive foods in honor of coming-of-age,

marriages, burials, and memorial services for ancestors, and while some practices were carried out by men, they predominantly became the responsibility of the female members of the family. The customs established during the Joseon era have been passed down through hundreds of years, and they continue to be an integral part of Korean culture today (Koehler 2010: 109).

The aforementioned research compellingly argues that individual and communal culinary choices reveal a lot of information about people's upbringings, social circles, and cultural environments. The origins of traditional Korean cuisine, as well as the accompanying customs and attitudes, can be traced back hundreds of years, and they have been shaped by the country's unique geography and climate, agricultural past, and strict adherence to Confucian principles. Therefore, there is substantial evidence to argue that *Pachinko* merits exploration from a culinary standpoint, as the story not only portrays Sunja and her family's relationship with Korean cuisine, but the manner in which they engage with it also provides valuable insights regarding their relationship with their cultural heritage and their homeland.

1.2. The Politicization of Food and the Impact of Colonialism

Food and food culture are not just important for private practice and personal identities but are closely tied to politics. Food culture, which encompasses the preparation, commodification, and consumption of food, constructs and maintains a relationship between an individual and their nation (Ichijo and Ranta 2016: 2). Food-related choices influence whether certain food traditions are followed, discontinued, reconstructed, or reinvented, and these changes are affected by various external factors (Ichijo and Ranta 2016: 8), for example, colonialism. Lucia Frez-Muñoz et al (2021: 2) note that colonialism influences countries and cultures by reshaping geographical boundaries, reconstructing lifestyles, and

affecting the accessibility of food ingredients. Thus, colonialism and food are directly related to one another, as the implementation of the former can have wide-ranging consequences for the latter.

During the 20th century, the two driving forces behind change on the Korean Peninsula were colonialism and war. The Japanese Empire ruled over Korea from 1910 to 1945, imposing a rapid modernization model while also taking advantage of the nation's resources for the colonizers' own benefit. According to Katarzyna J. Cwiertka (2012: 17), Japanese colonial rule viewed Korea as “a breadbasket for the Empire and a consumer market for Japanese manufactured products,” a viewpoint held by many Western empires towards their own colonies as well. Even though Japan's plan for modernizing Korea called for the establishment and development of state-of-the-art food processing factories, the sector was forced to follow a strict Japanese agenda and forego the needs of the local Korean population. The Empire started exporting ever-increasing amounts of rice grown in Korea to feed Japanese consumers as well as military soldiers stationed in Korea and other Asian nations (Cwiertka 2012: 18–19). Therefore, Japanese colonialism was deeply intertwined with Korean food culture, and, as a result, white rice, a staple food in Korea, came to represent Japanese colonialism in the nation throughout the occupation.

While Japanese rule over the Korean Peninsula ended in 1945, the political turmoil in the nation did not. In the same year, the United States and the Soviet Union established a temporary division line on the 38th parallel, dividing the peninsula into two ideologically opposite nations: North Korea and South Korea (The Editors of Encyclopaedia 2023; Lee et al 2023). With the start of the Cold War and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the temporary partition between North and South Korea became permanent. Cwiertka (2012: 79, 117) notes that the mid-twentieth century is widely remembered as a time of great hunger experienced by a significant portion of the Korean population. Locals became highly

dependent on foreign aid, which led to the incorporation of foreign foods and dishes into Korean cuisine. Additionally, the wartime chaos created favorable opportunities for black-marketers and entrepreneurs engaging in illicit trade. This demonstrates the impact of macro-level political and economic decisions on the daily experiences of ordinary people, a subject matter that Lee's *Pachinko* aims to highlight.

Yet, while the Japanese colonial government limited Koreans' access to food and used hunger to exert control over the Korean population, Ichijo and Ranta (2016: 8) argue that food-related choices and decisions can also be used to strengthen "the nation's perceived or imagined history, social traditions, and geography." In doing so, people can essentially use their national cuisine as a form of everyday resistance against colonial powers. 'Cuisines of resistance,' a term coined by Ichijo and Ranta (2016: 8–10), is a means to assert national identity by local communities through which communal boundaries are strengthened, and political identities are redefined through everyday food choices and decisions. The authors claim that through these choices and decisions locals can 'perform their nation' as a form of everyday nationalism that does not have to depend on the occurrence of national events, instead taking place in 'invisible' spaces, for example, the home (Ichijo and Ranta 2016: 8–10). Hence, while colonized nations and their local communities are often oppressed and ostracized, there are some mundane actions and situations where the local population can express their resistance against colonial rule while also maintaining ties to their nation, heritage, and identity. One such means of daily resistance is embedded in food-related practices.

There is ample research that suggests that the relationship between an individual and their nation can be influenced by their food-related choices. These choices, in turn, are affected by various external factors, including colonialism. From 1910 to 1945, the Japanese colonial government implemented numerous economic policies that greatly impacted the

Korean Peninsula. While these policies led to the establishment and development of state-of-the-art food processing factories in Korea, the nation was forced to export ever-increasing amounts of produce to comply with the strict Japanese agenda. To this day, Koreans remember the mid-twentieth century as a time of great hunger. In *Pachinko*, Lee examines this historical period and the politicization of food by focusing on the everyday experiences of Sunja and her family. This not only provides valuable insight into how colonialism affected ordinary people but also offers context to a wide variety of events that subsequently took place on the Korean Peninsula, such as the large-scale migration of Koreans to foreign countries during the 20th century.

1.3. Postcolonial Narratives: Insights into Zainichi Literature

As briefly mentioned, *Pachinko* is a generation-spanning story about a Korean family in Japan that is set against the backdrop of major historic events during the 20th century, such as the Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula (1910–1945), World War II (1939–1945), the Korean War (1950–1953), and Japan’s economic boom in the latter half of the 20th century (Munson 2019). Although the novel begins in Korea, most of the narrative takes place in Japan, which forces the characters to confront their Zainichi identity—a challenge that has different implications for each member of the family. According to Lie (2009: 17), the term Zainichi is used to refer to the ethnic Korean population in Japan who immigrated to the Japanese archipelago during the Japanese occupation of Korea. Though born in Japan and linguistically and culturally Japanese, the descendants of the first-generation Korean immigrants are also regarded as Zainichi because of their ethnic heritage. Zainichi Koreans were considered Japanese nationals during the colonial era, but they ultimately lost their rights and were considered stateless following World War II. The Zainichi also faced severe ostracization by both the local Japanese community and the Korean population back home,

as many decided not to return to Korea following the end of the Korean War, nor did they wish to choose a side between the newly partitioned North and South Korea.

Thus far, academic research on *Pachinko* has predominantly focused on Zainichi identity and the novel's place within the framework of Zainichi literature. According to Tablizio (2022: 105), Zainichi literature is a form of postcolonial literature as it

emerged in the wake of Japanese imperialism in Korea, /.../ it tackles issues and themes across generations of colonial subjects, and gives voice to “post-colonial traumas” that both Korean and Japanese “literatures fail to register individually” /.../. Likewise, post-war Zainichi literature focuses on “people negotiating an existence in Japan or as Japanized within Korea” /.../.

Given the subject matter, *Pachinko* fits within the framework of Zainichi literature, as it gives a voice to the Zainichi Koreans and offers an intergenerational overview of the Zainichi experience. What sets *Pachinko* apart from other Zainichi authors, however, is that the novel is written in English by a Korean American author. Accordingly, not only does *Pachinko* bring attention to Zainichi literature within the wider Korean diaspora, but it also transcends language barriers and introduces the experiences of the Zainichi Koreans to a wider audience (Tablizio 2022: 108). This demonstrates the significance of *Pachinko* in a transnational postcolonial context, as well as Lee's other novels set in her *The Koreans* trilogy, confirming the need for further research into her works.

While the Zainichi's search for their identity and sense of belonging within *Pachinko* has sparked scholarly discussions, less attention has been given to the importance of food as an identity marker within the novel. Ester Suur (2023: 47–48) notes that the Zainichi use food as a material identity marker to create space for themselves among Japanese society, while also using food to bond on a communal level and hold their community together. Besides Suur's input on the matter, discussions regarding the significance of food in *Pachinko* have mainly centered around the recent television adaptation of the novel. Based on Lee's story, the streaming platform AppleTV+ released the first season of *Pachinko* in

2022, and the second season of the show premiered in August 2024.¹ When it comes to food, the presence and symbolism of Korean cuisine have been maintained, but with the availability of a visual medium, the television series has given it a central role in the adaptation. In *Pachinko*, food is a representation of “the transmission and loss of identity within one Korean family” (Kirshner 2022) as well as a symbol for love and the expression of wealth (Jackson-Glidden 2022). In addition, both the novel and television series explore the deeper connection expatriates may develop to their country’s national cuisine after they have left their home country (Kirshner 2022). Yet, despite the television adaptation presenting Korean cuisine as an indispensable aspect of the story as well as an important marker for identity, there is a noteworthy gap in the current research regarding the importance of food in Min Jin Lee’s novel itself, and the present thesis aims to provide some valuable insight on this topic.

The aim of this literature review was to provide an in-depth discussion on the relationship between food, culture, and politics, focusing specifically on Korean culture and cuisine, and present a concise overview of the existing research on *Pachinko* within the context of postcolonialism. This chapter provides compelling evidence that personal and cultural identity encompass many layers of meaning, and they are shaped, among other things, by everyday culinary choices. The origins of Korean cuisine, as well as food-related customs and attitudes, go back hundreds of years, and they have been greatly influenced by the country’s geography, climate, and history. While Korean cuisine has become an integral

¹ Though wishing the production team the best, Lee did not partake in the writing or creating of the series (Chow 2022), and adapting the 500-page novel to the small screen has required making some noticeable changes. While showrunner Soo Hugh has kept the main characters and narratives intact, she has replaced the chronological structure of the novel with a dual timeline that encompasses both present and past events simultaneously, and she introduces certain characters earlier than the novel (Fienberg 2022; Chow 2022). According to Hugh, these changes allow recurring themes, such as the many layers of generational adversity, to be presented in a more suitable manner (Fienberg 2022).

part of Korean culture and a source of immense pride for Koreans, food and food-related policies have historically also been exploited by Japanese colonial powers to oppress both native Koreans and Korean immigrants in Japan. Taking into consideration the complex and multifaceted nature of Korean cuisine, the present theoretical chapter provides substantial evidence that *Pachinko* merits exploration from a culinary standpoint, and the following empirical chapter aims to provide a comprehensive analysis to illustrate these observations and reaffirm the necessity of the present study.

II CULINARY NARRATIVES IN *PACHINKO*: ANALYZING HERITAGE, LANGUAGE, AND POLITICS THROUGH KOREAN CUISINE

Min Jin Lee's novel *Pachinko* follows the story of a poor Korean immigrant family during the Japanese annexation (1910–1945) of the Korean Peninsula and the family's subsequent migration to Osaka, Japan. Spanning across four generations and nearly 80 years, *Pachinko* shows Sunja and her family during good times and bad, and a common thread in all these experiences is the family's reliance on Korean cuisine to not only strengthen their bonds with each other and the wider Korean community in Osaka but also to ensure their survival in both Korea and Japan. Previous studies on the intersection of food, culture, and politics, specifically within the framework of colonialism, have compellingly argued that national cuisine has an instrumental role in establishing and maintaining personal and cultural identity while also serving as a powerful tool of resistance among ordinary people. The following analysis builds on these findings and utilizes heritage, language, and politics—three key themes identified through a close reading of the novel—to examine the representation, symbolism, and influence of Korean cuisine in *Pachinko*.

2.1. Caring for Food as a Means to Preserve Cultural Heritage

In traditional Korean culture, the expression of love frequently relies on subtle modes of communication and nonverbal cues rather than overtly expressing emotions or engaging in public displays of affection (Merkin 2009: 3–5). In *Pachinko*, Lee predominantly employs food as a means for Sunja and her family to express their affection and concern for one another. Food, or more specifically, practices around food, are deeply intertwined with the

characters of *Pachinko*, and these food-related practices have a pivotal role in the depiction of various events in the novel.

The depiction of love through food in *Pachinko* is directly linked to Sunja's upbringing in the small fishing village of Yeongdo. Prior to Sunja's birth, her parents, Hoonie and Yangjin, had three boys who all passed away in infancy. Following each birth, crippled Hoonie takes it upon himself to obtain seaweed for Yangjin (Lee 2017: 8). This practice is a customary tradition in Korean culture, where a traditional seaweed soup called *miyeok-guk* is prepared for mothers after giving birth and during the postpartum period (Pettid 2008: 71). To regain her strength, Hoonie also brings Yangjin sweet rice cakes (Lee 2017: 8), a special treat that was difficult to obtain during the early years of Japanese rule due to the limited availability of rice. When it comes to his daughter Sunja, Hoonie is a doting father who "[makes her] dollies out of corn husks and [forsakes] his tobacco to buy her sweets" (Lee 2017: 8). The family manages a boardinghouse in Yeongdo, and it is customary for the head of the household to dine with the guests and be served his meal before the female members of the family. However, Hoonie deviates from this tradition by choosing not to eat with the guests; instead, he prefers to have his meals alongside his wife and daughter after the guests have finished. Furthermore, as a gesture of fondness towards his wife, Hoonie always makes sure to equally divide the meat and fish with her (Lee 2017: 70–71). Sunja takes great pride in having a compassionate and thoughtful father, and she views his love for his family as valuable as another family would view "numerous bags of rice and piles of gold rings" (Lee 2017: 71). This high standard of love and care also influences Sunja's expectations for her suitor, Koh Hansu, and it has a profound impact on her life as well as the lives of her family members.

While Hoonie's dedication to his daughter and wife is evident in his actions that involve food, Yangjin's love for her daughter plays an equally significant role in developing

Sunja's understanding of motherhood and maternal love. Though pregnant with his child, Sunja refuses to continue her relationship with Koh Hansu after he confesses to having a wife and daughters in Japan. In an effort to protect her child and provide them with a better life, Sunja instead marries the visiting Christian minister Baek Isak, and Yangjin becomes determined to purchase white rice to celebrate the occasion. In the 1930s, white rice was considered a luxury that only a few people, mainly well-off Japanese, could afford. Despite having to pay the same high price as Japanese customers, Yangjin is willing to pay it because she wants her daughter and son-in-law to experience the taste of homemade white rice once more before they depart for Japan (Lee 2017: 86). While preparing to join Isak's brother Yoseb and sister-in-law Kyunghee in Osaka, Japan, Yangjin takes it upon herself to pack Sunja's belongings. She also makes sure to include a variety of pantry items, such as "dried jujubes, chili flakes, large dried anchovies, and fermented soybean paste" (Lee 2017: 91), for her new relatives in Japan. Years later, when mother and daughter are once again reunited in Japan, Yangjin continues to show up and take care of Sunja by assisting her in managing Sunja's kimchi and confectionary businesses, as well as helping to look after Sunja's sons, Noa and Mozasu. This communal endeavor also enables Yangjin to develop a relationship with Kyunghee, Sunja's sister-in-law, and aids her in finding a place for herself within the family's life in Japan. Although Hoonie and Yangjin are not very vocal about their affection, they demonstrate their love for their daughter by taking care of Sunja in the best manner possible, and this dedication often manifests in their choices and decisions regarding food. The enduring impact of their care can be seen in Sunja's subsequent role as a mother and the primary breadwinner for her family.

While Sunja and her family are the main protagonists in *Pachinko*, the importance of food as a symbol of affection is also evident in the actions of the other characters. It can be seen in the rice seller who sells Yangjin a small portion of white rice, as he "[works] hard

and [does] the bidding of any Japanese customer [who pays] the top price because he [can] not imagine not providing for his family” (Lee 2017: 86–87). Ayame, the wife of Mozasu’s childhood friend Haruki Totoyama, also demonstrates her fondness for Daisuke, Haruki’s younger disabled brother, by purchasing his favorite snacks and expressing an interest in learning to bake so that she can make cakes for Daisuke, who loves them (Lee 2017: 362–363). Koh Hansu, Sunja’s former lover and the biological father of her son Noa, also engages in various food-related practices as a means of expressing his care for Sunja and Noa. Early in the novel, when Hansu is courting young Sunja, he frequently presents her with different foreign delicacies, such as American hard candies and English butter biscuits (Lee 2017: 39). This enables Sunja to get acquainted with a world beyond her small fishing village. As their relationship becomes more complicated and strained over time, Hansu frequently expresses remorse for not being able to share a proper meal with Sunja and his son (Lee 2017: 208, 265). He later tries to make up for the missed opportunity by becoming Noa’s benefactor during his university studies and regularly treating his son to sushi dinners (Lee 2017: 268, 276). *Pachinko* not only illustrates the gendered disparity in food-related behaviors with men buying ready-made food or raw ingredients for their lovers and wives, while women prepare homemade traditional meals for their loved ones, but the novel also provides a look into the role of food as a medium for expressing affection, which is not only unique to Sunja and her family but also deeply ingrained in Korean culture and the identity of its people.

As mentioned beforehand, Yangjin provides Sunja and Isak with a serving of white rice as their final meal at home in Korea. Subsequently, Kyunghee warmly welcomes them to their new home in Osaka, Japan, with a serving of white rice (Lee 2017: 104). This gesture symbolizes the significance of rice in Korean culture, as well as the role of food in fostering familial bonds. As women are tasked with taking care of their families and managing their

households, Sunja and Kyunghee spend a significant amount of time in the kitchen, diligently cooking meals with the limited amount of food they can procure. This also enables them to form a strong sisterly bond between the two of them. In 1939, a pivotal moment occurs for Sunja and her family when Isak is wrongfully detained for engaging in actions against the Emperor and the Japanese government. Sunja diligently prepares daily food parcels for Isak as a means of expressing her care and support for him while also being aware of the possibility that the parcels may not reach him (Lee 2017: 156). Isak's imprisonment also forces Sunja into the workforce, and like many other Korean women, Sunja utilizes the skills she was expected to have as a wife and mother, namely cooking, and starts selling homemade Korean dishes, such as kimchi, at the popular Tsuruhashi station in Osaka to relieve Yoseb's burden of being the family's sole provider. Although Sunja's efforts and sacrifices are primarily motivated by her desire to support her sons, *Pachinko* demonstrates the role of food in shaping personal identities for Korean women, particularly in the context of motherhood. This is subsequently illustrated through the character of Phoebe, the girlfriend of Sunja's grandson Solomon. Phoebe discloses that her Korean American mother has no interest in cooking and instead prefers to either order in or dine at restaurants (Lee 2017: 449). Though they attempt to understand Phoebe's mother and her actions, both Sunja and Kyunghee have been conditioned to see food and cooking as a means of expressing affection for their loved ones. While *Pachinko* highlights the importance of homecooked meals and their communal nature in upholding Korean culture at home, the novel also introduces Korean American characters such as Phoebe and her mother to explore the changing attitudes toward cultural expectations in immigrant families. Specifically, the novel examines the exhausting nature of unpaid care work, i.e., activities that contribute to the well-being of individuals and/or families, and its unequal distribution between women

and men (Ferrant et al 2014: 1–2).² Through Phoebe and her mother, Lee seems to challenge the conventional and outdated perceptions of women within the Korean diaspora, and she examines how food plays a role in perpetuating these perspectives.

Despite the unequal gender dynamics involved with culinary care-work, food, or more specifically, practices around food, are deeply intertwined with the way the characters of *Pachinko* demonstrate respect and devotion toward one another. Sunja's experiences with love, whether it be as a daughter, lover, wife, sister-in-law, or mother, are all influenced by food, as it enables her to express her feelings for her loved ones through procuring, preparing, and providing them with nourishing meals. After moving to Japan, Sunja and her sister-in-law, Kyunghie, continue preparing traditional Korean dishes for their family as well as selling them to Koreans in their local community, and this act can be seen as their way of showing pride in their Korean identity and heritage, particularly in light of the intense scrutiny that ethnic Koreans faced in Japan. Thus, the use of food as a means of expressing affection reinforces the characters' relationships within their own family, while simultaneously fostering relationships with their community and preserving their cultural identity.

2.2. Food as a Form of Communication

Personal and cultural identities are shaped by a multitude of internal and external influences. A significant factor that greatly impacts individuals' perception of themselves and their surroundings is the language they use and the way they interact with others. Cornelia Gerhardt (2013: 3) observes that the languages spoken around the world exhibit

² The specific gendered aspect of unpaid care work needs to be examined further, but it remains out of the scope of this thesis.

considerable diversity, and similarly, there are notable variations in the food-related customs and practices among different cultures. Food and language, whether observed together or separately, help human beings make sense of the world, and the way food is spoken about can communicate cultural norms, identities, moralities, and social statuses, which Lee tries to illustrate with *Pachinko* as well.

When considering the relationship between food and language, Kathleen C. Riley and Jillian R. Cavanaugh (2017) note that both inhabit a wide array of contexts, one of which is how different food-related situations facilitate unique language use and influence the structure and purpose of specific interactions. In other words, the language spoken *around* food can influence the outcome of situations and can motivate individuals to acquire suitable discourse for different food-related scenarios. In *Pachinko*, Lee explores the significance of language used in relation to food by portraying the conversational customs in marketplaces. Ever since she was a child, Sunja regularly visits the open-air market in Nampo-dong, where she becomes accustomed to the loud hawking and exaggerated chitchat of the market *ajummas*³ (Lee 2017: 25). Her knowledge of the right forms of communication in marketplaces comes in handy when Sunja herself starts working at a marketplace in Osaka and selling the kimchi that she and Kyunghee have prepared at home. On her first day at the market, Sunja recalls frequenting the nicest *ajummas* at the market back home, so she starts greeting and smiling at passersby while enthusiastically shouting, “Kimchi! Delicious kimchi! *Oishi desu*⁴! *Oishi* kimchi!” Sunja realizes that “[this] sound, the sound of her own voice, felt familiar, not because it was her own voice but because it reminded her of all the times she’d gone to the market as a girl /.../ The hawking of women had always been with her, and now she’d joined them” (Lee 2017: 160–161). Sunja’s childhood visits to the fish

³ In Korean, *ajumma* is an informal way of saying *ajumeoni*, an appellation for middle-aged women.

⁴ *Oishi desu* is Japanese for “It’s delicious”.

market provide her with valuable knowledge regarding marketplace language, which eventually enables her to establish herself as a skilled market vendor. Furthermore, she attributes her ability to sell kimchi as a source of strength following Isak's imprisonment (Lee 2017: 161). Despite never envisioning herself as a street peddler, Sunja's childhood visits to the local open-air market provided her with valuable insights into the effective use of language in selling food.

Just as food can either nourish or deprive the human body, language and communication can be seen as either providing intellectual nourishment or causing intellectual deprivation. Riley and Cavanaugh (2017) argue that engaging in conversations can nourish a person's intellect, mental well-being, and social identity, while a lack of discourse can be interpreted as a form of deprivation. Within families, shared mealtimes provide the space and opportunity for communication, whether it be polite conversations, recaps of the day, or in-depth discussions. In *Pachinko*, Lee tries to combine the concept of language as sustenance with the significance of communal meals in Korean culture. Throughout the novel, Sunja is shown sharing her meals with her parents, husband, brother- and sister-in-law, and children. When considering the meals the family shared, they were predominantly Korean dishes, and it has been previously established that traditional Korean meals often include a variety of *banchan*, or communal side dishes that are meant to be shared among diners. Thus, the communal nature of these meals not only plays an important role in nurturing and preserving familial bonds, but it also helps to uphold cultural heritage and identity. In contrast, Lee utilizes Sunja's former love interest, Koh Hansu, to examine the implications of being isolated from one's family and without the opportunity to partake in these shared culinary experiences. Hansu frequently expresses remorse for his inability to share a meal with Sunja and his son Noa (Lee 2017: 208, 265), so when the opportunity arises, Hansu establishes a monthly lunch tradition with Noa throughout the latter's

university studies (Lee 2017: 276). By doing this, Hansu is able to share his knowledge about Japanese culture and cuisine, as well as foster a deeper connection with his son over a shared meal. It is worth noting that while some characters are occasionally shown eating alone, such as Noa having lunch by himself while reading an English novel during his break from work (Lee 2017: 380), *Pachinko* does place focus on shared mealtimes, and through it, Lee seems to emphasize the importance of food and communal meals as opportunities for conversations and as a way to establish and preserve familial and cultural bonds among Koreans who had to or wanted to flee their homeland.

Another means to understand food as a form of communication, particularly regarding immigrant households, is by observing the shifts in food preferences that take place in different generations due to personal, societal, and/or environmental changes. As previously stated, while *Pachinko* does make references to historical eras and events, they are not the central focus of the narrative. However, the food choices made by all three generations of Sunja's family can still be regarded as a means of communicating the wider societal changes taking place in their lives. The first generation of Zainichi—Sunja, Isak, Yoseb, Kyunghee, and Yangjin—prefer to adhere to a predominantly Korean diet. While they are occasionally seen eating foreign snacks or dishes (Lee 2017: 77, 351), the first generation continues to prepare and consume traditional Korean dishes throughout the story of *Pachinko*. Since the women of the family were responsible for cooking, it is clear that the children of the family—Noa and Mozasu—grew up eating mainly Korean food; however, a shift in culinary preferences can be seen in this Zainichi generation, particularly in Noa. At school, Noa, along with other Korean students, experiences relentless teasing and mistreatment due to the distinct aromas of his Korean meals, such as kimchi. As a result, Noa asks his aunt Kyunghee to prepare snacks and meals for him that do not contain garlic and also requests Japanese-style lunchboxes (Lee 2017: 164). Later in life, Noa begins to

present himself as Japanese, and this is also reflected in his food preferences, as he chooses to consume only Japanese cuisine (Lee 2017: 356). Lastly, Sunja's grandson Solomon, representing the third generation of Zainichi, is "an international man of the world" (Lee 2017: 403), and he is seen embracing foreign cuisine freely, for example, having an American-themed birthday party with dishes prepared using an American cookbook (Lee 2017: 398, 407). For this reason, the shifts in food preferences within Sunja's family serve as a nuanced reflection on the societal and environmental changes they experienced throughout the 20th century, emphasizing the significance of food as a means of conveying these changes.

While the story of *Pachinko* primarily takes place in Korea and Japan, centering on the experiences of Korean immigrants in Japan, the novel also alludes to the shifting attitudes regarding food within the wider Korean diaspora, specifically among Koreans who have relocated to the United States, and Lee delves into these changes through the character of Phoebe, Solomon's Korean American girlfriend. During one of their visits to Solomon's family home, Phoebe shows interest in Sunja and Kyunghee's cooking, which sparks a conversation about Phoebe's Korean American family and their relationship to Korean food (Lee 2017: 448–450). While Mozasu points out that "[his] mother and aunt have been cooking all week" in preparation for Solomon and Phoebe's visit, Phoebe astonishes Sunja and Kyunghee by revealing that her mother never cooks. Although Phoebe explains that her mother was constantly working and lacked the time to cook, Sunja and Kyunghee have been conditioned to view food and cooking as a means to show affection and care for their loved ones; therefore, the idea that a Korean mother did not prepare meals for her family is unimaginable for them. Phoebe and her siblings grew up eating pizza, hamburgers, "and lots of Kentucky Fried Chicken" (Lee 2017: 449). Korean food was only consumed on the weekends and while dining out, and the family did not keep dishes such as kimchi in the

house due to its pungent smell. Though she does not mention it out loud, Phoebe muses that the women in her family took pride in not cooking Korean food, and Phoebe's mother and aunts "tended to look down at women who cooked a lot and constantly tried to make you eat" (Lee 2017: 450). Furthermore, Phoebe finds Sunja and Kyunghee's shock and disbelief about a mundane detail of her childhood amusing, and she does not understand why they find it so important for women to be able to cook, thus challenging long-held expectations that cooking is a woman's duty and deeply tied to a woman's role as a wife, mother, and caretaker. It is important to stress that Phoebe and her family's relationship with Korean food does not represent all Korean Americans' relationship with Korean cuisine. Instead, Lee uses these characters to demonstrate how freeing and empowering it can be to leave behind long-standing and outdated cultural expectations. Furthermore, Lee draws attention to the impact foreign nations and cultures can have on people's attitudes toward their own national cuisine, particularly in highly diverse Western countries like the United States, where there is a wide variety of cuisines available.

Food and language are instrumental in shaping and communicating personal and cultural identities in *Pachinko*. Sunja and her family utilize shared mealtimes to strengthen their familial bonds and preserve their Korean heritage, particularly after emigrating to Japan. Additionally, they make use of Sunja's knowledge about the language and manners of marketplaces to establish their own street food stall selling kimchi at a local market in Osaka. *Pachinko* also examines the shifts in food preferences across different generations of immigrants due to personal, societal, and environmental changes, particularly focusing on the influence that culturally diverse Western countries, such as the United States, might have on the culinary traditions within the wider Korean diaspora.

2.3. The Relationship Between Food, Power, and Empowerment

Besides having an instrumental role in creating both personal and cultural identities, food is also a powerful political tool, particularly in the context of colonialism. Colonial powers use food to exert control, exploit resources, suppress cultural autonomy, and perpetuate systems of inequality and oppression among colonized peoples. Paradoxically, food can also serve as a powerful symbol of empowerment by providing a way to maintain cultural identity and regain autonomy in the face of oppression. In *Pachinko*, Lee delves into the politicization of food by demonstrating how Imperial Japan utilized food-related policies to exert its power over the Korean Peninsula and its people while also depicting how ordinary people, such as Sunja and her family, found empowerment and expressed their resilience through their everyday food choices.

Throughout the thirty-five-year-long Japanese rule, the colonial administration enforced numerous economic policies in Korea that affected traditional livelihoods and exacerbated poverty and food insecurity (Park 2022: 230, 250–251). In *Pachinko*, Lee illustrates the effects of these policies on Korean families through the financial hardships experienced by the Baek family. Prior to the Japanese occupation, the Baek family possessed lands in Pyongyang, and they were able to employ many servants as well as caretakers and tutors for their sickly youngest son, Isak (Lee 2017: 54–55, 119). Additionally, Yoseb and Kyunghee were able to buy a modest home in Ikaino with the assistance of his father when they moved to Osaka, demonstrating the family's prior prosperity (Lee 2017: 100). Yoseb, who was ten years old when the Japanese annexed the Korean Peninsula, has witnessed a free Korea in his lifetime, and he recalls "how good it was before the Japanese came" (Lee 2017: 106). Following the establishment of the colonial government on the peninsula, significant changes occurred in the country. Isak's family, along with many others, had to sell their lands to pay taxes from land surveys (Lee 2017: 106, 120). According to Isak,

Yoseb's decision to relocate to Osaka had been heavily influenced by seeing honest Koreans lose their properties and struggle to make a living in Korea (Lee, 2017: 111). Yoseb aspired to achieve financial success in Japan but faced challenges in securing a job. Consequently, he had to work multiple jobs to support himself and Kyunghee in Osaka, as well as their families in Pyongyang (Lee 2017: 61, 106, 120). In depicting the struggles of the Baek family, Lee illustrates how the policies implemented by Imperial Japan in Korea, particularly those related to food production and distribution, affected a significant part of the population, regardless of their economic status or social class. While Yoseb and many other Koreans fled their country to seek better living conditions for themselves and their families, *Pachinko* explores the different challenges faced by both those who chose to leave as well as those who could not.

After the Japanese annexation of Korea, many Koreans emigrated to other countries in search of better living conditions and work opportunities. Displacement and the struggle to survive in new environments are often explored in literary works by Asian diaspora writers (Peepre 1999: 169), and *Pachinko* specifically focuses on the experiences of those Koreans who left their homeland for Japan. Although driven by the desire to improve their lives and provide for their families, Koreans such as Yoseb, Kyunghee, Sunja, and Isak face even greater challenges and adversities upon arriving in Japan. While many Japanese characters depicted in Lee's novel are fair-minded and principled, they tend to be guarded and distrustful around foreigners (Lee 2017: 95, 331–332). Due to the prevailing stereotypes surrounding Koreans in Japan, the *Zainichi* face prejudice and discrimination in various aspects of life, including housing, employment, education, and access to food. The price and lack of availability of various food items initially astonish Sunja, and she realizes that while she and her mother had to scrimp back home, their lives were much easier in the boardinghouse than in Osaka (Lee 2017: 128). Their limited resources force Sunja and

Kyunghee to become creative and resourceful, for example, pickling radishes, garlic, carrots, and eggplants when there are no cabbages at the market to make kimchi (Lee 2017: 161).

Through their association with Koh Hansu, Sunja and her family are also indirectly involved in the thriving black market in Japan. As a member of the second most influential yakuza family in the Kansai region, Koh Hansu is entitled to create a restaurant job for Sunja after Isak's imprisonment, preventing the family from starving (Lee 2017: 196, 200, 421). Furthermore, prior to the 1945 bombings of Osaka, the family is able to relocate to a sweet potato farm under the management of Japanese farmer Tamaguchi, who has business connections with Hansu. Tamaguchi exploits the family's strong work ethic to boost his sweet potato production during the war, capitalizing on the high demand for sweet potatoes by the Japanese government for airplane fuel and the black market for food and alcohol in cities facing shortages (Lee 2017: 199, 203–204, 207). While Sunja and her family attempted to flee the challenging circumstances of Japanese-occupied Korea, they faced even tougher conditions as ethnic Koreans in Japan, and in both cases, the difficulties they faced were related to food as well as the politics and policies that surrounded the growing of and access to food. With *Pachinko*, Lee attempts to demonstrate how the Japanese colonial forces employed food as a strategic tool to manipulate and exert control over the Korean population in both the Korean Peninsula and Japan, and with it, she draws attention to the politicization of food, especially in times of conflict and war, and the impact it has on the daily lives of ordinary people.

While Japan used food to exert power over the Korean Peninsula and the local Korean population in both Korea and Japan for decades, food can also be used to express immense pride in one's culture as well as a form of indirect daily resistance against oppressive forces. In the first part of the novel, Sunja and her mother Yangjin run a small boardinghouse in Yeongdo, Korea, where they look after their boarders by providing them

with regular meals and clean bedding, mending and laundering their clothes, keeping the house clean, tending to the vegetable garden and animals, and making necessary repairs to the old house (Lee 2017: 10–12). The boardinghouse is considered to be in a “comfortable situation in a country growing steadily poorer” (Lee 2017: 6), as observed by a matchmaker who visits Hoonie’s mother and attempts to arrange a marriage between Hoonie and Yangjin, the youngest daughter of a local tenant farmer. Regarding the state of the boardinghouse’s kitchen and provisions, the matchmaker (Lee 2017: 5–6) notes:

“From all appearances, the neighborhood talk of their stable situation could be confirmed. In the kitchen garden, ponytail radishes, grown fat and heavy from the early spring rain, were ready to be pulled from the brown earth. Pollack and squid strung neatly across a long clothesline dried in the lacy spring sun. Beside the outhouse, three black pigs were kept in a clean pen built from local stone and mortar. The matchmaker counted seven chickens and a rooster in the backyard. Their prosperity was more evident inside the house.

In the kitchen, stacks of rice and soup bowls rested on well-built shelves, and braids of white garlic and red chilies hung from the low kitchen rafters. In the corner, near the washbasin, there was an enormous woven basket heaped with freshly dug potatoes. The comforting aroma of barley and millet steaming in the black rice pot wafted through the small house.”

After Sunja’s father, Hoonie, passes away, Yangjin’s primary concerns are caring for her daughter and earning money, and she credits her ability to do so with being fortunate enough to have the boardinghouse business (Lee 2017: 10). Yangjin and her family’s ability to grow their own food reduces their dependence on external food sources, especially considering the high cost of produce due to Japanese food regulations, while also helping to preserve traditional farming practices. Thus, *Pachinko* exemplifies how food and practices revolving around food may be used to empower and sustain the lives of ordinary people in times of suffering, as Yangjin runs a business that heavily relies on her abilities to take care of her home and offer nourishing meals to her family and boarders.

To further demonstrate the importance of food as an agent of empowerment, Lee utilizes Sunja’s experience entering the Japanese workforce to explore the relationship between food, cultural identity, and women’s place in society. In traditional Korean society, women were expected to manage the household, raise children, and support their husbands; working for money was the responsibility of the man. Sunja’s experience running the

boardinghouse with her mother already allows her to challenge long-held cultural expectations for women, and by capitalizing on the skills expected of her as a woman, Sunja demonstrates that women are just as capable as men of supporting their families financially. As a result, soon after moving to Japan, Sunja decides to become a street peddler to support her family financially following Isak's imprisonment (Lee 2017: 157). With the help of Kyunghee, Sunja starts selling homemade Korean dishes on the street and in marketplaces to support her family, utilizing the skills she was expected to have as a wife and mother. Sunja is not alone; there are numerous other Korean *ajummas* selling *gochujang*⁵ and *doenjang*⁶, fried wheat crackers, dried anchovies, and seaweed at the market (Lee 2017: 157–158). Though many of her customers just pass by, Sunja's clients are also other Korean women “who [work] in factories and [don't] have time to make their own *banchan*” (Lee 2017: 162). Through Sunja's efforts, Lee showcases how women's traditional caregiving responsibilities, particularly those related to food, can attain political significance. By selling their homemade dishes, Korean *ajummas* directly contribute to sustaining and sharing Korean cuisine, as well as helping local Koreans maintain their ties to their culture and homeland. In addition to selling Korean dishes at the market, Sunja and her family continue to consume Korean food at home. This is particularly evident during their stay at Tamaguchi's sweet potato farm, as Kyunghee always prepares two separate dinners: a Japanese one for the Tamaguchi family and a Korean one for her own family (Lee 2017: 208). So, while the family could adapt to Japanese food styles, such as Kyunghee preparing carrots and eggplants without garlic or chili paste to please their Japanese customers (Lee 2017: 161), they nevertheless prefer to consume Korean dishes, especially during times of

⁵ *Gochujang*, also known as red chili paste, is a savory, sweet, and spicy fermented condiment commonly used in Korean cuisine.

⁶ *Doenjang*, also known as soybean paste, is a fermented bean paste that is commonly used in Korean cuisine.

scarcity. Whether it was out of necessity, preference, or indirect resistance, Sunja and her family's decision to adhere to a Korean diet enables them to maintain ties with their motherland while also building and strengthening bonds with their own family and the greater Korean community in Ikaino.

In *Pachinko*, Lee explores how food can serve as a tool for exerting influence and authority, as well as a source of strength and self-determination. Following the annexation of the Korean Peninsula, Japan implemented strict food-related policies that forced many Koreans to flee their homeland. Moreover, the Koreans who fled to Japan encountered prejudice and discrimination from the local Japanese population, which included restricted access to food supplies. However, despite these limitations, the characters of *Pachinko* demonstrate that cultivating one's own food, upholding traditional culinary practices, and preparing traditional Korean dishes for their loved ones and community can be seen as a source of empowerment and as a means of resistance against colonial forces. These practices also serve as an instrumental tool in preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of community in a foreign land.

CONCLUSION

Literature serves as a powerful tool for gaining insight into the experiences and challenges faced by marginalized and underrepresented social groups. While diversity and representation are important aspects of any literary canon, this matter is particularly pertinent in American literature, as it grapples with the challenge of accurately representing the multitude of cultures and ethnicities that constitute the United States. In her 2017 novel *Pachinko*, Korean American author Min Jin Lee presents readers with a comprehensive account of the Korean diaspora's history through the multi-generational story of a Korean family set during the 20th century. While *Pachinko* has garnered extensive scholarly attention for Lee's portrayal of the Zainichi, ethnic Koreans living in Japan, the present thesis examined how *Pachinko* employs Korean cuisine to shape personal and cultural identity, and whether food-related practices can preserve cultural heritage in the face of colonial forces.

This thesis has aimed to demonstrate that food-related practices in *Pachinko* are deeply intertwined with the way Sunja and her family, as well as various other characters, express their affection and devotion for their loved ones. While the characters rarely express their feelings for each other directly, they can still be discerned through their actions, such as Hoonie giving up his tobacco to purchase sweets for Sunja, Sunja and Kyunghee preparing nourishing meals for their family, or Koh Hansu sharing a meal with Sunja and their son Noa. As their acts of service for one another often revolve around food and food-related practices, such as communal mealtimes, Sunja and her family are able to strengthen their relationships with each other. This becomes particularly important following the family's move to Osaka, Japan, as the traditional Korean meals prepared by Sunja and Kyunghee not only bring their family together and evoke memories of their homeland but also contribute to the preservation of their cultural heritage. This became especially prominent once Sunja

and Kyunghie established their kimchi and confectionary stand and, through it, became an integral part of upholding their Korean heritage among the wider Korean community in Ikaino.

Besides being a medium through which Sunja and her family express their feelings for one another, food can be considered a form of language. Being exposed to the conversational customs of marketplaces since she was a child, Sunja utilizes this knowledge as a street vendor by altering her demeanor and manner of speaking to appeal to her customers. The communal nature of mealtimes in Korean households provides the space and opportunity for communication, which can be a form of nourishment for a person's intellect, mental well-being, and social identity. Conversely, the lack of it can be seen as a form of intellectual deprivation. While the story of *Pachinko* takes place in Korea and Japan, centering on the experiences of Korean immigrants in Japan, Lee also uses Sunja and her family to illustrate the shifts in food preferences that take place within immigrant households across different generations, as well as alluding to the shifting attitudes regarding food and food preparation within the wider Korean diaspora, particularly in highly diverse Western countries like the United States, where there is a wide variety of cuisines available.

In *Pachinko*, food and food-related practices are also depicted as powerful political tools that can either be used to exert influence and authority, particularly by colonial forces, or as a source of empowerment and resilience. Through the financial downturn of the Baek family, Lee demonstrates the consequences of the strict food-related policies that Japanese colonial forces implemented after the annexation of the Korean Peninsula. Many Koreans fled their homeland in search of a better life, but the Koreans who relocated to Japan, such as Yoseb, Kyunghie, Isak, and Sunja in *Pachinko*, encountered even harsher prejudice and discrimination from the local Japanese population, including restricted access to food supplies. However, despite these limitations, Sunja and her family also demonstrate how

food can be a source of empowerment. By running her own boardinghouse and growing their own food, Sunja's mother, Yangjin, takes care of her family despite the harsh regulations implemented by the Japanese government. Her mother's drive and resourcefulness prove to Sunja that women are just as capable as men of supporting their families financially, so following Isak's imprisonment, Sunja decides to capitalize on her cooking skills and become a street vendor, reliving Yoseb's burden as the family's sole provider, as well as challenging long-held cultural expectations for Korean women.

It is apparent that food, specifically Korean cuisine, has a central role in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*, especially in terms of its impact on shaping the personal and cultural identities of Sunja and her family and helping them preserve their Korean heritage. While it is important to acknowledge that the way in which food is depicted in *Pachinko* should not be generalized to describe the relationship the entire Korean diaspora has with Korean cuisine, Lee's contribution does highlight the importance of food among marginalized communities, and it paves the way for further discussions both within Korean American literature as well as in literary works by other Asian diaspora writers.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Annely Jüriöö

**The Role of Cuisine in Shaping Personal and Cultural Identity in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*
Rahvusköögi roll isikliku ja kultuurilise identiteedi loomes Min Jin Lee romaanis "Pachinkos"**

Bakalaureusetöö

2024

Lehekülgede arv: 39

Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on mõista, milline on rahvusköögi roll isikliku ja kultuurilise identiteedi loomes Min Jin Lee romaani „Pachinko“ näitel. Antud töö rakendab postkolonialismi teooriat, et analüüsida korealaste, Korea jaapanlaste ja Korea ameeriklaste kogemusi ja perspektiive 20. sajandi Koreas ja Jaapanis, tuues seeläbi tähelepanu vähemusrahvuste kirjandusele ja selle käsitlemise tähtsusele Ameerika kirjanduses. Töö koosneb neljast osas: sissejuhatus, kirjandusülevaade, empiiriline analüüs ja kokkuvõte.

Esimene peatükk hõlmab kirjandusülevaadet ehk uurimistöö teoreetilist osa. Antud osa eesmärk on avada teoreetiline taust empiirilises analüüsis käsitletavate teemade mõistmiseks. Peatükk on jaotatud kolmeks alapeatükiks ning see sisaldab ülevaadet rahvusköögi, kultuuri ja poliitika vahelistest seostest lähtudes kolonialismi raamistikust. Lisaks sisaldab antud peatükk ülevaadet varasematest uuringutest, mida on „Pachinko“ põhjal läbi viidud.

Teine peatükk sisaldab kirjandusteose analüüsi ehk uurimistöö empiirilist osa. Antud osa eesmärk on eelnevas peatükis käsitletud teoreetilist tausta illustreerida ja analüüsida lähtudes „Pachinko“ tegelastest ja sündmustikust. Peatükk on samuti jaotatud kolmeks alapeatükiks ning see tugineb rahvusköögi ning rahvuspärandi, kommunikatsiooni ja poliitika vahelistele seostele.

Uurimistöös selgub, et korea rahvusköögil on keskne roll Min Jin Lee „Pachinkos“. See toetab nii Sunja kui ka tema pereliikmete isikliku ja kultuurilise identiteedi loomet, ent võimaldab neil ka säilitada ja süvendada seost oma kogukonna, rahvuspärandi ja kodumaaga, eriti pärast perekonna migreerumist Jaapanisse. „Pachinko“ käsitleb nii korealaste, Korea jaapanlaste kui ka Korea ameeriklaste kogemusi ja perspektiive ning antud töö teoreetiline kui ka empiiriline osa kinnitavad, et Sunja ja tema pere lugu peegeldab paljude immigrantide lugusid, demonstreerides seeläbi „Pachinko“ universaalsust ning vähemusrahvaste kirjanduse jätkuvast tähtsusest.

Märksõnad:

Kirjandusanalüüs, Min Jin Lee, Pachinko, ameerika kirjandus, rahvusköök, kultuur, identiteet, postkolonialism

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