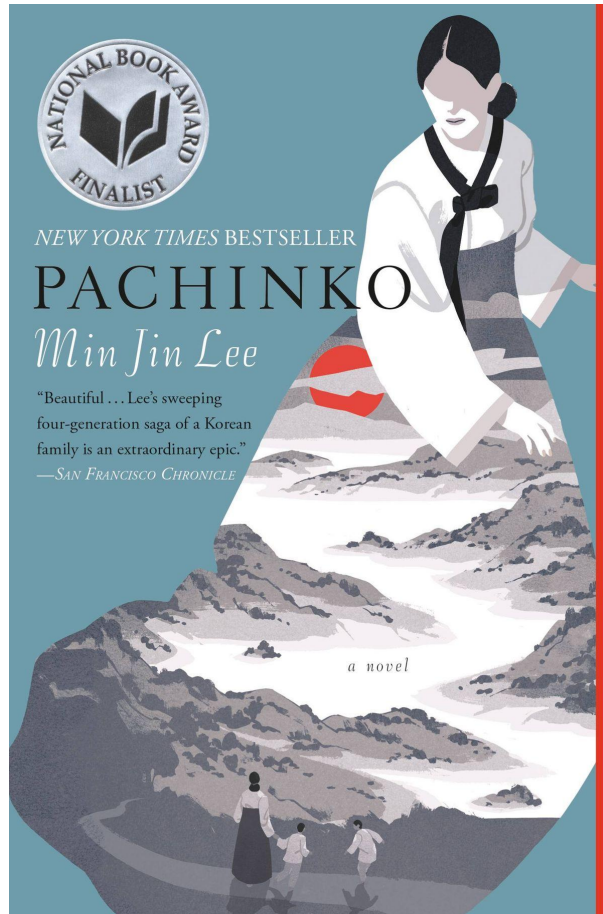


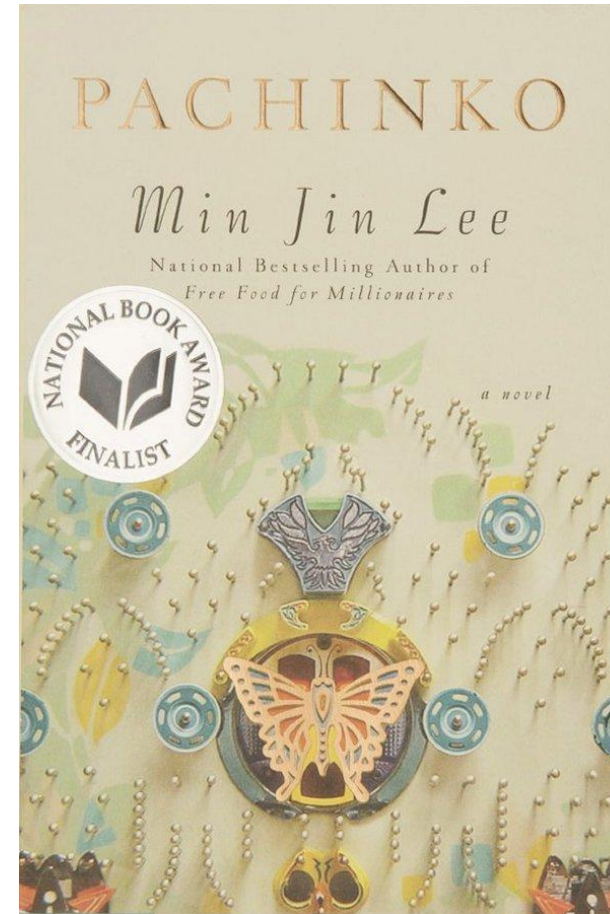
White Rice, Human Capital, and (Post)colonial Exploitation in *Pachinko*

“Sunja-ya, a woman’s life is endless work and suffering.”



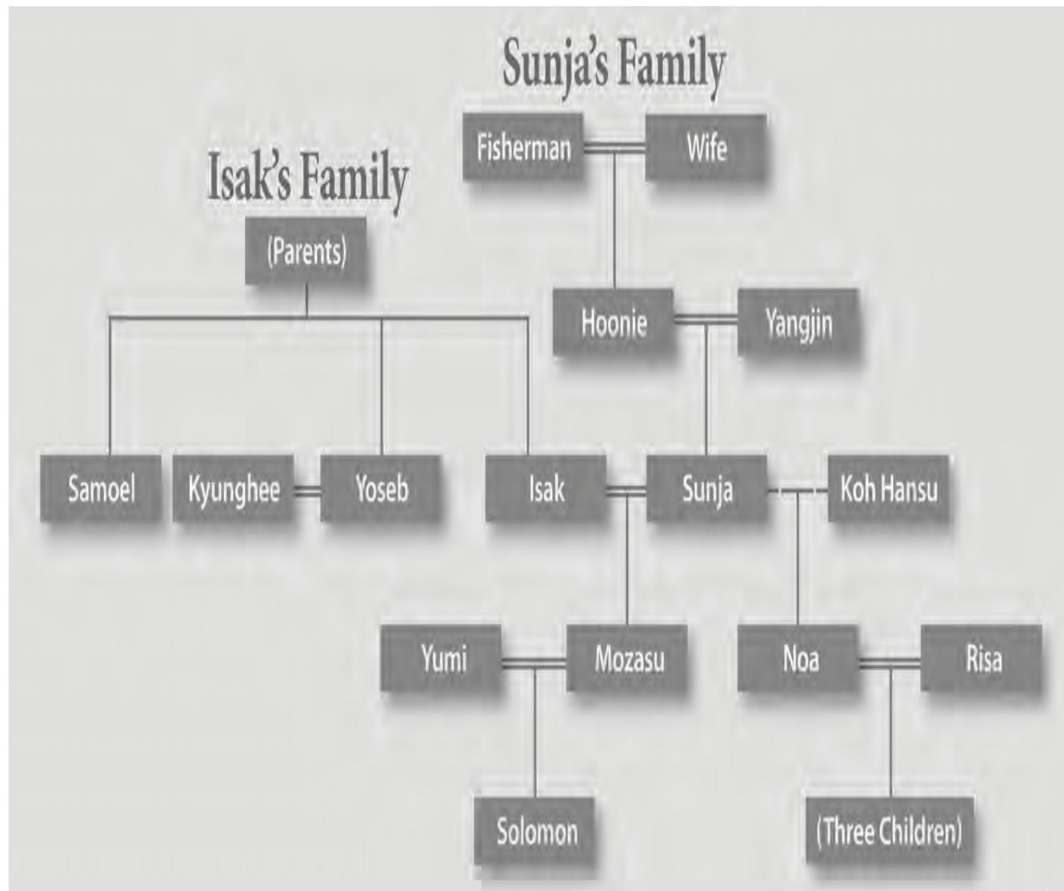
Grand Central

“Man, life’s going to keep pushing you around, but you have to keep playing.”

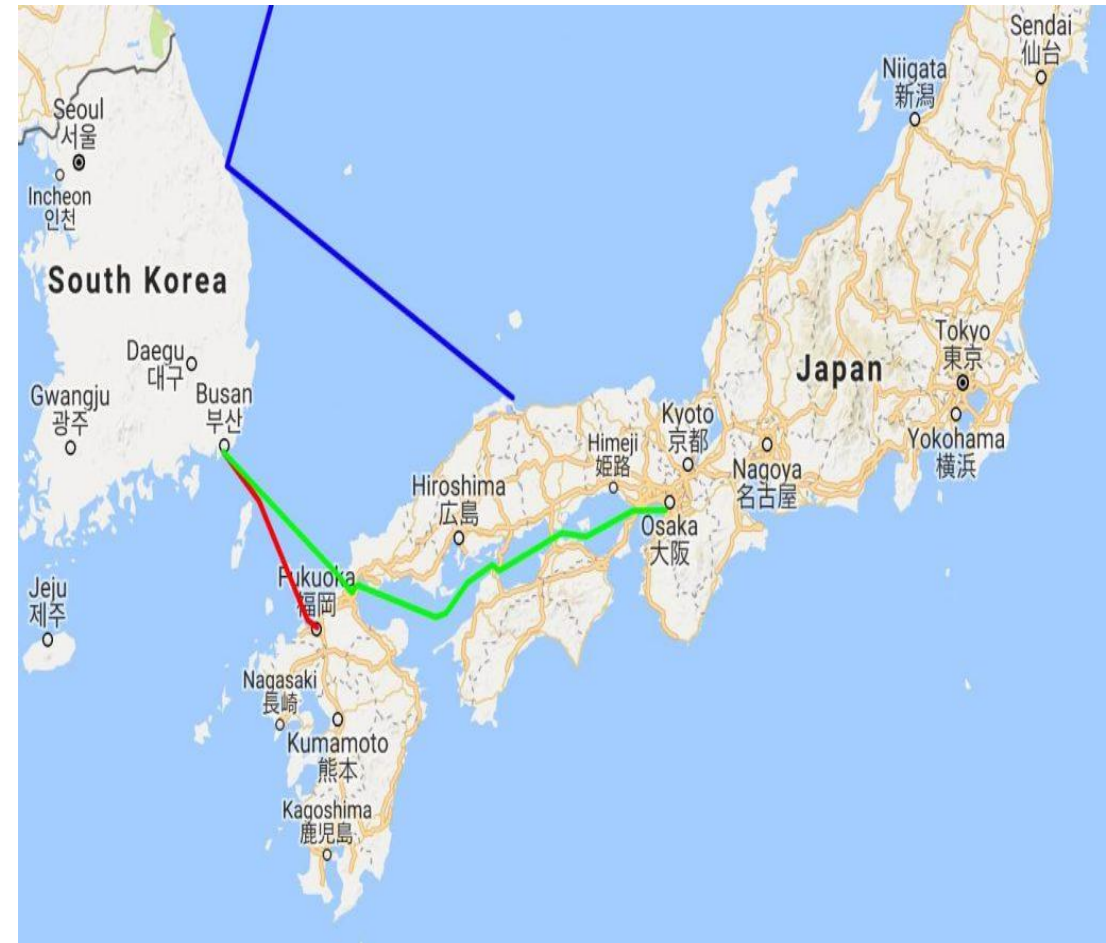


B&N

plot summary



Pachinko Family Tree. Chart created by the author and Willa Davis.



Japanese Empire

- *Cold War Ruins*
- “Both Japan and the United States, as empires, emerged into modernity out of a parallel mid-nineteenth-century history of military expansion, annexation of territories, and their colonization... the Japanese empire was as **multiracial and multiethnic** as the American empire claims to be” (Yoneyama 57).
- *Asia as Method*
- “The war divided Asia into capitalist and socialist blocs, and as a result, capitalist East Asia was pressured to avoid conflict within the anticommunist camp. **Historical issues of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan and Korea could not be tackled because the Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese states were locked into the pro-American side**; to address such historical issues would have entailed confronting internal contradictions within the capitalist bloc” (Chen 121).

Thesis

- Jun, the coal delivery man in Yeongdo, vents his frustration: “That Hirohito-seki took over our country, **stole the best land, rice, fish, and now our young people**” (Lee 22).
- *Pachinko* portrays the prevalent rice scarcity in Korea, highlighting Japan’s deliberate plundering of Korea’s natural resources. However, Koreans are depicted not as helpless victims resigned to starvation. Instead, they tap into their connection to and intimate knowledge of the land to combat the hardships of scarcity. Moreover, *Pachinko* employs various marks of strenuous labor on Korean bodies—oil beneath fingernails, burns on bodies, and soil in cuticles—to illuminate Japan’s simultaneous exploitation of Korean human capital. The subjugation of colonial subjects persists into the postcolonial period, where Zainichi Koreans play a vital role in Japan’s economy but are denied full citizenship rights and political autonomy.

White Rice Deprivation

- Korea as the “breadbasket of the Empire” (Cwiertka 17)
- “For decades black-coated policemen kept order and helped ‘bring in the harvest,’ manning the ramparts of the rice production circuit from paddy field to middlemen to storehouse to export platform, and thence to Japan” (Cumings 152).
- “Starvation exports” serves as “a classic example of imperialism—sacrificing the livelihood of colonized people for the imperial interest” (Kimura 559).

Rice Deprivation in *Pachinko*

- “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. **Satisfied with the boardinghouse’s comfortable situation in a country growing steadily poorer**, the matchmaker was certain that even Hoonie could have a healthy bride, so she plowed ahead” (Lee 8).

white rice as parting gift pp.87-9

“Could you sell me some white rice?”

“Waaaaah, you must have an important guest staying with you. I’m sorry, but I don’t have any to sell. **You know where it all goes,**” he said.

“I have money to pay,” she said, putting down the drawstring purse on the counter between them. It was Sunja who had embroidered the yellow butterflies on the blue canvas fabric of the purse—a birthday present from two years back. The blue purse was half full, and Yangjin hoped it was enough.

Cho grimaced. He didn’t want to sell her the rice, **because he had no choice but to charge her the same price he would charge a Japanese.**

“**I have so little stock, and when the Japanese customers come in and there isn’t any, I get into very hot water.** You understand. Believe me, it’s not that I don’t want to sell it to you.”

“Do you need enough rice for a wedding party?” he asked, unable to fathom how the woman would pay for such a thing.

“No. **Just enough for the two of them.**”

Cho nodded at the small, tired woman standing in front of him who wouldn't meet his eyes.

“I don't have much to sell,” he repeated.

“**I want only enough for the bride and groom's dinner—for them to taste white rice again before they leave home.**” Yangjin's eyes welled up in tears, and the rice seller looked away. Cho hated seeing women cry. His grandmother, mother, wife, and daughters—all of them cried endlessly. Women cried too much, he thought.

“A small bag if you have it. I want them to eat their fill. Whatever’s left over, I’ll make them some sweet cake.” Yangjin pushed the tray of money toward him. If he still said no, then she would march into every rice shop in Busan so her daughter could have white rice for her wedding dinner.

“Cakes?” Cho crossed his arms and laughed out loud; how long had it been since he heard women talking of cakes made of white rice? Such days felt so distant.

Apple TV+ 2022 adaptation of *Pachinko*







- Foraging in the forest
- Korean cheap laborers
- Pachinko livelihood

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