

# Ethnic Education and Multicultural Coexistence in Zainichi Korean Literature: On Che Sil's *Jini no pazuru*

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**Abstract** | This study analyzes the function and significance of Zainichi ethnic education in the era of multicultural coexistence through an exploration of *Jini no pazuru* (Jini's Puzzle), a novel published in 2016 by Zainichi Korean author Che Sil, and its treatment of ethnic education. Against the backdrop of "Chosŏn schools" (*Chōsen gakkō/Chosŏn hakkyo*), which are Zainichi institutions of ethnic education, *Jini no pazuru* deals with multiple issues pertaining to Zainichi Koreans, including ethnic education, North Korea and the North Korean repatriation project, and anti-Korean sentiment. The novel focuses on Jini, a student at a Chosŏn school, and the personal turmoil she undergoes in her experience of this school. In particular, the novel highlights the difficulties faced by Zainichi Korean schoolchildren, who are doubly marginalized figures in Japanese society. In this process, the novel questions the function of ethnic education, and mounts a critique of North Korea and Japanese society at large. At the same time, by innovatively incorporating the geographical space of the US, it moves away from the cliché of existing Zainichi Korean literature, which usually tends to circle around the subjects of Japan, North Korea, and Zainichi Korean society. By creating a more generalized experience in a third country, the novel sheds new light on the place of the individual within the community.

*Jini no pazuru* illuminates the significance of ethnic education by introducing this narrative framework. The work also highlights the role of Chosŏn schools and ethnic education by showing how Jini chooses a rebellious path. Furthermore, it sends a message to Japan as it enters an era of multicultural co-existence by making manifest the multilayered issues faced by Zainichi Koreans. Through these features, the novel communicates a sense of the problems faced by minority groups within Japanese society and demonstrates the immense potential of Zainichi Korean literature.

**Keywords** | Che Sil, *Jini no pazuru* (Jini's Puzzle), Zainichi Korean literature, ethnic education

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## Introduction

Following the end of Japanese colonial rule in Korea, close to six generations of Zainichi Koreans<sup>1</sup> have continued to live in Japan, numbering roughly 480,000 by the year 2021.<sup>2</sup> The character of Zainichi Korean society has been built over time through close relationships with postwar Korea, Zainichi Korean organizations, and Japanese society. Zainichi Korean literature has its roots in the papers published by organizations such as the “League of Koreans in Japan” (Zai Nihon Chōsenjin Renmei, or Chae-Ilbon Chosōnin Yōnmaeng, hereafter Chōren) or the “General Association of Korean Residents in Japan” (Zai Nihon Chōsenjin Sō Rengōkai/Chae-Ilbon Chosōnin Chōng Yōnhaphoe, sometimes also called Chōsōren, hereafter Chongryon) after Korean independence in 1945. After the debut of Kim Hak-yōng in 1966, Zainichi Korean writers came to have a presence in the mainstream Japanese literary scene, going on to produce major second-generation writers such as Ri Kaisei, Kim Sōk-pōm, Lee Yangji, Yu Miri, and Gengetsu, some of whom achieved high literary honors such as the Akutagawa Prize (*Akutagawa shō*). Moving into the 2000s, a new generation of writers including Kaneshiro Kazuki began to appear on the scene. Among such writers, Che Sil has garnered the most attention in recent years. Her debut work, *Jini no pazuru*, received the Gunzo Prize for New Writers (*Gunzō shinjin bungaku shō*) in 2016. In July of the same year, the novel was one of the finalists for the Akutagawa Prize although it did not receive the award. It went on to receive the Thirty-third Oda Sakunosuke Prize (*Oda Sakunosuke shō*) in December 2016, and the Sixty-seventh New Face Award for Fine Arts (*Geijutsu senshō shinjin shō*) in March 2017, making the novel a triple-crown literary success. In August

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1. In postwar Japan, Koreans living in Japan were generally called “Zainichi Chōsenjin” (Chosōn people living in Japan). In this term, “Chōsen” refers to the pre-division state of Chosōn that encompassed both North and South Korea. However, in the current context, some mistakenly understand this term as referring to North Korea (*Kita-Chōsen*). On the other hand, the term “Zainichi Kankokujin” is limited in application to those of South Korean origin. Due to such issues, some Korean writers have simply chosen to use the term “*chae-Il*” (living in Japan) or its Japanese counterpart, “zainichi.” However, this term complicates matters by potentially referring to the entire oeuvre of literature by and about foreigners living in Japan. Some recent alternatives include “Zainichi Kanjin” or “Zainichi Korian” (Zainichi Korean) in more recent diasporic studies. In this study, I choose to use the term “Zainichi Chōsenjin” as it is historically the first term that was used to refer to the literature written by Koreans living in Japan, with no other political implications intended. [Translator’s note: In the English version, though the above caveats still apply, the term of choice is “Zainichi Korean.”]

2. See a report released on December 2018 by Japan’s Ministry of Justice. In the report, the numbers show that there are 449,643 people of South Korean citizenship and 29,559 people of North Korean citizenship. However, since Zainichi Koreans who have gained Japanese citizenship are not shown on the report, the actual numbers are expected to be much higher (Hōmushō 2018).

2018, a translation into Korean was also published (Che Sil 2018), cementing Che Sil's status as a notable literary figure both in Japan and in Korea.

In the text, Che Sil deals with various difficult issues faced by Zainichi Korean society in the past and in the present, including the North Korean repatriation project, ethnic education, and anti-Korean sentiment. After the mid-1960s, Zainichi Korean society underwent a dramatic change due to a diverse array of factors: the failure of the North Korean repatriation project, the erosion of Chongryon's influence, a recalibration of Zainichi Korean society around the second-generation population, and Japan's assimilation policies. In particular, the 2000s saw a marked increase in the number of Zainichi Koreans becoming naturalized as Japanese citizens, due to Japan's "multicultural co-existence" policies. Ethnic education, that is the education of Zainichi Koreans in "Zainichi only" schools, a project with a history stretching to the very first years after Korean independence, evolved along with these social changes and took on a new turn after the governmental inception of multicultural co-existence policies. It is in this context that Che Sil's message in *Jini no pazuru* regarding ethnic education and multicultural co-existence should be read. Previous studies on *Jini no pazuru* include works published in Korean by Sin Seung-mo (2017), Kim Te-gyung (2018), Ōm Chōng-ja (2019), Kim Gae-ja (2020), Jo Young-joon (2020), and Lee Seung-jin (2020). In Japanese, there have been eight book reviews and interviews published to date.<sup>3</sup> Among these, articles that can be classified as literary criticism include that of Sin Seung-mo, Kim Te-gyung, Kim Gae-ja, Jo Young-joon, and Lee Seung-jin in Korean, and that of Kang Yuni (2018) in Japanese. Sin Seung-mo (2017) discusses the meaning of Che Sil's literary accolades in the context of Japanese multicultural co-existence policies based on an analysis of the text. Kim Te-gyung (2018) considers the treatment of anti-Korean sentiments in *Jini no pazuru*, placed among other Japanese literature of the 2000s. Kim Gae-ja (2020) analyzes the representation of North Korea in the work, and goes on to craft a more general history of how North Korea has been represented in Zainichi Korean literature. Jo Young-joon (2020) analyzes the emotional ambivalence of the marginalized Zainichi Korean figure of Jini. Lee Seung-jin (2020) highlights Zainichi Korean literature's struggle with anti-Korean sentiments from multiple perspectives, considering *Jini no pazuru* alongside *Zen'ya*, a novel by Hwang Yōng-ch'i. Kang Yuni (2018) explores the representation of Chosŏn schools (*Chōsen gakkō/Chosŏn hakkyo*) and the problems for ethnic minorities in Japan, focusing on

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3. Representative studies include Yoshimura, Karube, and Fukushima (2016), Yoshida (2016), Zhong Zhang (2016), Katō (2017), Mun Kyōng-su (2017), and Nagai (2019).

the novel's organization into chapters and comparing it to Kaneshiro Kazuki's *GO*. As can be seen, most of the critical literature on *Jini no pazuru* has involved discussions of its literary value and its engagement with issues such as anti-Korean sentiment and the North Korea problem. There is no critical study to date that focuses closely on the novel's central theme, that of ethnic education. Therefore, this study will consider the function and significance of Zainichi ethnic education based on a textual analysis of *Jini no pazuru*. Such an analysis will provide the basis for a multilayered exploration of the varied concerns that exist within the Zainichi Korean community, particularly with regards to the issue of education. Furthermore, this study will provide a comprehensive account of the role of Zainichi Korean literature during the era of multicultural co-existence in Japan, and its wider potential as a global form of diasporic literature.

### Postwar Zainichi Korean Society and Ethnic Education: A History

After Korean independence in 1945, Zainichi Korean society progressed in the spheres of education, lifestyle, and environment in ways informed by the home country of Korea and by various ethnic organizations. The main guiding force of postwar Zainichi Korean society was the Chören. After Chören was reorganized into the Chongryon, this new organization began to lead various aspects of Zainichi Korean society with the financial support of North Korea. Many members of Zainichi Korean society at the time felt more favorably toward North Korea due to the direct support it provided, in contrast to the more indifferent South Korea, and nursed a great desire for a return to their homeland. This provided the impetus for the North Korean repatriation project, which sent out the first round of 975 repatriates on December 14, 1959.<sup>4</sup> However, after the mid-1960s, as the actual state of life in North Korea became known through these repatriates and as the Chongryon became more and more ideologically rigid, many Zainichi Koreans began to turn their backs on the organization. From this point onwards, the Chongryon gradually lost its influence in Zainichi Korean society. The second generation of Zainichi Koreans, with new and different sets of values, came to take center stage within Zainichi Korean society, triggering a reorganization of the population's social composition. Roughly around the same time, the Japanese government came to

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4. The North Korean repatriation project, begun on December 14, 1959, was carried out in 186 rounds up until 1984, through which a total of 93,339 Zainichi Koreans headed to North Korea.

recognize the issues faced by ethnic minorities in society, and eagerly pushed assimilation policies as a solution. As a result, the idea of living as a Korean while being a naturalized Japanese citizen took hold as a viable “third path” in Zainichi Korean society, and large numbers chose naturalization.

Zainichi ethnic education changed according to the historical course of Zainichi Korean society. In the years after Korean independence, Zainichi Koreans considered Japan to be simply a temporary abode, and sought educational institutions for learning the “mother tongue” in preparation for returning to their homeland. The first Korean language schools opened in 1945, and various institutions for ethnic education followed suit. Ethnic education was carried out in any spaces that were available, including household rooms, small huts, churches, old Japanese army barracks, and abandoned warehouses. The proliferation of institutions to support ethnic education in 1946, which numbered 600-700, attested to the fervent desire for such. For Zainichi Koreans, institutions for ethnic education did not simply provide education, but rather symbolized ethnic identity itself. The idea was that these schools allowed for a small piece of Korea to be fiercely present, albeit in a somewhat shabby form, within a foreign land and society that had continually abused them (Kim Tök-ryong 2004, 16). Along these lines, it can even be said that Chosŏn/Korean-based educational institutions were “a monument to the liberated [Korean] people” erected within the ex-colonizer’s nation (Park Kwang-hyoun 2018, 20).

After the establishment of the Chören and Chongryon, there was a shift from these early forms of ethnic education into forms of schooling led by such organizations.<sup>5</sup> In April 1957, after the establishment of the Chongryon, North Korea began to send educational support funds and scholarships. With this money, new educational buildings and infrastructure were created, and North Korea became the major guiding force of Zainichi Korean ethnic education. This led many existing institutions for ethnic education to close, and Chosŏn schools came to be responsible for the bulk of ethnic education in Zainichi Korean society. Chosŏn schools were still institutions for ethnic education, but since they were spearheaded by Chongryon and its North Korean *chuch’e* ideology, they remained closely affiliated with North Korea in particular.

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5. There are four Zainichi (South) Korean schools accredited by the South Korean government: Tonggyöng Han’guk Hakkyo, Osaka Kōnguk Hakkyo, Osaka Kūmgang Hakkyo, and Kyoto Kukche Hakkyo. Osaka Kūmgang Hakkyo was accredited in 1961, Tonggyöng Han’guk Hakkyo in 1962, and Kyoto Kukche Hakkyo in two stages, with the middle school being recognized in 1961 and the high school in 1965. Tonggyöng Han’guk Hakkyo is classified as a “miscellaneous school,” but the others have been run as regular schools recognized by the first article of the Education Law (*ichijō kō*). Most of the students are Zainichi Korean, whether of Korean or Japanese citizenship.

Regardless of this political bent, Chosŏn schools have historic value as institutions for ethnic education that fought to maintain an ethnic identity in the aftermath of Japanese colonial rule and the discrimination against Koreans in postwar Japanese society. They also have a history of solidarity with the Japanese working class and the Japanese Communist Party, as can be seen in the “Hanshin Education Incident” which took place immediately after their founding, and this spirit continues within today’s Chosŏn schools (Chŏng Yŏng-hwan 2019, 286-97). In other words, Chosŏn schools cannot be considered separately from North Korean political influence, but it is also impossible to ignore the key role that Chosŏn schools played in the history of Zainichi Korean ethnic education.

After the 1960s the once-eager demand for Zainichi Korean ethnic education began to decrease. After the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea was signed in 1965, accompanied by legal discussions regarding the status of Zainichi Koreans, Chosŏn schools were increasingly regulated, assimilative education was encouraged, and many Zainichi Koreans decided to forgo this overt display of their ethnic identity. Such processes gained further momentum in the 1970s, with more and more Zainichi Koreans attending Japanese schools. By the mid-2000s, the number of students in Chosŏn schools, which had previously numbered around 46,000 nationwide, decreased to 11,500, with class sizes shrinking to one-third of their original scale.<sup>6</sup>

Although Japanese society had been built on the age-old myth of ethnic homogeneity, it came in due course to recognize the minorities living in its midst, and several changes ensued. In the late 1980s, Japan saw a shortage of labor after its exponential economic growth. Many foreign laborers entered Japan as a result, and Japanese society became increasingly multicultural. With another steep rise in the number of foreign laborers in the 2000s, Japan faced the need to reinforce its policies and perceptions regarding multicultural society. The term “multicultural co-existence” (*tabunka kyōsei*) began to take hold among organizations for foreigner support, and it bloomed into the basis of a social movement. Japan’s Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (Sōmu-shō, MIC) launched in 2005 a “Working Group on Multicultural Coexistence Promotion” (Tabunka Kyōsei no Suishin ni Kansuru Kenkyūkai) and released a report the following year, as part of Japan’s nation-wide effort throughout the 2000s to promote multicultural policies for co-existing with those of foreign origin (So Myung-sun 2019, 123-24). In March 2006, the

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6. As of 2012, there are ninety-nine Chosŏn schools in total, including fifty-five elementary schools, thirty-three middle schools, ten high schools, and one university, in sixty-six locations (Song Ki-ch’an 2012, 145).

Ministry of Internal Affairs chose the expression “multicultural co-existence” as its official line, while it comprehensively reviewed the policies and conditions necessary for the incorporation of foreigners into the national community.

Zainichi Koreans were duly included within this community of multicultural co-existence. However, Chosŏn schools were not covered by the multicultural co-existence policies. In April 2010, under the auspices of the Democratic Party of Japan (Minshutō), Japan instituted a “free high-school education” policy whereby no tuition would be charged for public high schools, and every student in private high schools would receive an annual educational support grant of 120,000 to 240,000 yen. However, after North Korea’s bombardment of Yŏnpyŏng on November 23, 2010, concerns arose in Japan that the support funds given to Chosŏn schools could be used to support the activities of the Chongryon and North Korea. Consequently, funding for these schools was withdrawn in 2013. In addition to this, as Chosŏn schools were officially classified not as regular schools recognized by the first article of the Education Law (*ichijō kō*) but rather as “miscellaneous schools,” their students had trouble advancing to higher educational institutions such as universities. Under these social and policy-related conditions, Chosŏn schools continued to lose students, and Zainichi Korean ethnic education came to face many difficulties.<sup>7</sup>

What, then, was the shape of Zainichi Korean society and ethnic education in the 1990s, which is the setting for *Jini no pazuru*? In the post-Cold-War, post-division transborder climate of the 1990s, Zainichi Korean society chose to reach out proactively toward Japanese society. Chosŏn schools sought to harmonize with Japanese society through curriculum reform in the 1980s and a total rehaul of educational methods in the 1990s. They joined the Japan High School Baseball Federation in 1992, the All Japan High School Athletic Federation in 1993, and the Nippon Junior High School Physical Culture Association in 1994. Also, in 1994, the JR (Japan Railways) student pass discount was finally extended to students of Chosŏn schools, and in 1999, Chosŏn school students were granted the right to sit for university entrance exams (Itagaki 2017, 230). While these are some key examples of how Chosŏn schools gained ground in building a peaceful co-existence with Japanese society, tensions rose

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7. Chosŏn schools surfaced as a social issue in Japanese society most prominently through the “*Ch’ima chōgori* incident” of 1994, the attack on Zainichi Koreans after North Korea’s firing of the Taepodong missile, and the attack on a Chosŏn school in Kyoto by the Zaitokukai (see n. 8) in 2009. In 2010, the Democratic Party of Japan launched a “free high-school education” policy (a support grant of 120,000 to 240,000 yen to each student), but it was withdrawn for Chosŏn schools in 2013, resulting in a lawsuit. Chosŏn schools are still a point of tension in Japan, suffering social stigmatization and policy inequality to this day.

after North Korea was suspected of building nuclear weapons in 1994, and animosity against North Korea grew in Japan. Shortly thereafter, there was a violent incident involving the *ch'ima chōgori* (Korean traditional skirt and top) uniform worn by female students at Chosŏn schools. In 1998, North Korea fired the Taepōdong missile, and Chosŏn schools became the target of Japanese right-wing activists. Such tensions continued into the 2000s, as evidenced by the attack by the Zaitokukai<sup>8</sup> on a Chosŏn school in Kyoto in 2009,<sup>9</sup> and Chosŏn schools continue to be the object of anti-Korean sentiment and hate speech, and subject to prejudice within Japanese society.

In sum, although Chosŏn schools have mounted various efforts since the 1990s to achieve acceptance within Japanese society, they still face difficulties due to multiple factors such as provocative North Korean military activities and the antagonism of Japanese right-wing groups. In view of this history of Zainichi Korean ethnic education, Che Sil's *Jini no pazuru* grapples with the concerns of Zainichi Korean society, including North Korea, the North Korean repatriation project, and the related ideological struggle. Her work deserves special attention for its message regarding multicultural co-existence and ethnic education against the backdrop of Chosŏn schooling.

## Stepping Towards Revolution: A Literary Analysis of *Jini no pazuru*

### 1. The Debut of Che Sil and the Construction of *Jini no pazuru*

Che Sil made her debut on the literary scene in Japan when her first novel *Jini no pazuru* was awarded the Gunzo Prize for New Writers in 2016. Tsujihara

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8. A far-right ethno-nationalist organization that launched on January 20, 2007. The full name is Zainichi Tokken o Yurusanai Shimin no Kai (Association of Citizens against the Special Privileges of the Zainichi). As of October 22, 2009, they hold a membership of more than 7,000 people, and campaign for issues such as the termination of the special residency rights of Zainichi Koreans and the disallowing of the use of Japanese-style alias names.

9. The Kyoto Chosŏn school attack refers to an incident on December 4, 2009 in which members of the Zaitokukai held an anti-Korean demonstration in the Kanjin-bashi Children's Park, a park in front of the Kyoto Chosŏn Che-1 Chōgūp Hakkyo (Kyoto Chosŏn First Elementary School), targeted toward students coming to and from school. The Zaitokukai members hurled hate speech toward the students, including phrases such as "Let's beat the Chosŏn schools out from Japan," "children of spies," and "you smell like *kimchi*." A lawsuit ensued, and in October 2013, the Kyoto District Court ruled that the Zaitokukai must pay a fine of 12,260,000 yen and forbade them from holding street demonstrations within 200 meters of a school. The ruling was ratified on December 9, 2014 by Japan's Supreme Court.

Noboru, then the prize's judge, gave high praise to Che Sil, commenting that "like a dragon, great talent makes its appearance!" (*Subarashii sainō ga doragon no yōni shutsugenshita!*) (Tawada and Tsujihara 2016, 84). *Jini no pazuru* is comprised of thirty-one chapters, and the chapters move back and forth in time.

The first chapter introduces the readers to the "present" Jini in 2003, just as she is about to get expelled from the American high school. Jini, a third generation Zainichi Korean attending a high school in Oregon, US, has a hard time adapting to school life. Jini confesses to her only friend, the hearing-impaired Maggie, about her middle-school days at the Chosŏn school in Japan in the year of 1998. After graduating from the Japanese elementary school where she was discriminated against as a Zainichi Korean, Jini applies for a Chosŏn middle school. For the benefit of Jini, who did not learn *Chosŏnŏ* (the Korean language) in her elementary school,<sup>10</sup> the Chosŏn school decides to conduct classes in Japanese. As a result, her classmates often take their frustrations out on Jini, while some even intentionally bully her, and Jini is unable to adapt to the Chosŏn school. On the final day of summer vacation in 1998, North Korea launches the Taep'odong missile, causing anxiety and hostility towards North Korea to soar in Japan. The next day, Jini sets off to school in her *ch'ima chŏgori*, the standardized Chosŏn school uniform. On her way to school, Jini fails to get off at the right station due to the deliberate interference of someone in the crowd. She then gets off at the next station and walks to school, but gets assaulted, and sexually harassed by three Japanese men. Traumatized, Jini refuses to attend school for three weeks. After sorting out her thoughts at home, Jini determinedly returns to school having written a revolutionary manifesto declaiming the negative influence of North Korea on Chosŏn schools and Zainichi life in Japan. It turns out to be the day of the school dance performance. As soon as the performance is over, Jini rushes back to the classroom to distribute her manifesto across the school, and throws the portraits of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il out the window into the schoolyard. Jini is dragged off by her schoolteachers, leaves the school, and is hospitalized in a psychiatric ward. Once discharged from hospital, Jini moves to the US and attends a high school in Oregon, but still feels lost. In the end, her time with Stephanie, a children's book author who hosts her in the US, helps Jini heal and open up to the world.

In its broad themes, *Jini no pazuru* therefore deals with the issue of ethnic education within the setting of the Chosŏn school and lays out the multilayered

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10. In accordance with the original text of *Jini no pazuru*, I use the term *Chosŏnŏ*, instead of Korean.

problems facing Zainichi Koreans, such as the problems of North Korea, Japanese society, anti-Korean sentiment, and education.

## 2. The Pain of Forced Ethnicity and Ethnic Education

For Jini, the elementary school used to be an enjoyable environment where she could be together with Japanese students without being self-conscious of her ethnicity. But as she moves to a higher grade, the rumor spreads among students that Jini is a Zainichi Korean. Afterwards, the school gradually transforms into a place where Jini increasingly experiences discrimination. The novel makes visible the process through which Japanese students learn to discriminate against Zainichi Koreans in Japanese schools, as this excerpt demonstrates:

It was in history class when I was in the sixth grade of the elementary school. I was tense without knowing why, when the class was about to discuss Japan invading the Korean peninsula. The Korean history of the colonial period took up no more than a few sentences in our textbook; the teacher read it without emotion, and added that “see, this is about people like Park Jini.” ... On my way home, I saw Iguchi at the train platform and ran to her shouting, “Let’s go home together!” Iguchi ignored me. I grabbed Iguchi’s arm as she was about to turn away; she turned around excitedly and shouted, “Don’t touch me with your dirty hands!” I turned over my hands, and looked at them, uncertain how I had got my hands stained. There were no visible marks. Iguchi snorted, as if she couldn’t believe I was actually looking at my hands.  
 “Are you such a fool? *Chōsenjin*. Get off of me.” (Che Sil 2016, 37-38)

Jini becomes tense when her history class approaches the subject matter of colonial Chosŏn. Her homeroom teacher refuses to discuss colonialization seriously, making light of it as something that only concerns “people like Park Jini.” Her classmate further shocks Jini when she uses discriminatory terms such as “dirty hands” and “*Chōsenjin*” when Jini approaches her. Through this passage, it is made apparent that history education is handled in Japanese schools in such a way that it consolidates a discriminatory sense of distinction between Japanese people and Zainichi Koreans, rather than giving them useful information about the colonial past. It is no surprise that such history classes prejudice the consciousness of Japanese students and heavily inform their discrimination against Zainichi Koreans, and in this respect, Japanese schools operate to overtly discriminate against them. Ozawa Yūsaku, a scholar of ethnic education, explains this in the following way:

Another practical function of Japanese schools is in making known the discrimi-

nation against Zainichi Koreans; accordingly, Zainichi Koreans in school are forced to see themselves as Zainichi Koreans. For Zainichi Korean students, the Japanese school is a place where they encounter discrimination for the first time; it is a place where they become acquainted with discrimination, and only that. (Ozawa 1975, 78)

According to Ozawa, Zainichi Korean students experience discrimination for the first time in Japanese schools, and “learn” that they have to conceal their identity. *Jini no pazuru* corroborates Ozawa’s account of Japanese schools, as, in representing the method of education in these institutions, the book lays bare the process by which Zainichi Koreans learn to conceal themselves, including the why and how. This being the case, we might ask how does the novel describe the Chosŏn school?

The Chosŏn school is rendered as the antithesis of the Japanese school: it is supposed to be an ethnic space that Zainichi Korean students choose to attend to avoid the discrimination that happens in Japanese schools. Still, for Jini, the Chosŏn school soon becomes a place where she experiences suffering, though in a different way than in the Japanese school. In the Chosŏn school, instructors start conducting classes in Japanese for Jini. The Chosŏn school is a place defined by its adoption of *Chosŏnŏ* as its official language, but it turns out that Jini causes the language to be ruled out of usage in her classroom. The consequence is that Jini is regarded coldly by her classmates.<sup>11</sup>

Her “mother tongue” *Chosŏnŏ* therefore becomes the most serious source of trouble for Jini in the Chosŏn school. As since she is not familiar with Korean, conversations are associated with great anxiety.

“*Nugu?*” Chae-hwan said. “*Nugu?*” I asked back. Chae-hwan nodded. Then he repeated, “*Nugu?*” ... I knocked Chae-hwan over and made it to the door as fast as I could. “Hey!” Chae-hwan shouted after me. I did not stop for him ... Chae-hwan did not seem to have followed me. I still had not found peace. My heart palpitated. (Che Sil 2016, 32-33)

In the Korean language “*nugu*” is an everyday word meaning “who” (*dare* in Japanese); in Japanese, “*nugu*” means “to take one’s clothes off.” Jini runs away in fear from Chae-hwan because she mixes up the two meanings of “*nugu*.” An element of everyday conversation for users of *Chosŏnŏ* at the school turns into a source of intense terror for Jini. With this scene of Jini becoming terrified of

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11. “Some looked at me with awkward eyes. I looked away and ducked my head” (*Nan nin ka ga, shiraketa me de watashi o mita. Watashi wa wazu shisen o sorashite, kao o fuseta*) (Che Sil 2016, 28-29).

someone speaking what should be her own “mother tongue,” the novel starkly brings to light the confusion entailed by her lack of bilingual-ness (Sin Seung-mo 2017, 301).

Jini also experiences difficulties in building social relationships in the Chosŏn school. Her classmate Yun-mi dislikes and bullies Jini. Yun-mi tells their homeroom teacher that Jini does not make an effort to learn the Korean language, and requests for classes to be conducted in *Chosŏnŏ*. She warns their classmates that people who talk to Jini will be the next target of bullies. Yun-mi is antagonized by the fact that Jini has a Japanese name and used to go to a Japanese school, and vents her anger towards Japanese society and Japan on Jini (Sin Seung-mo 2017, 301). Thus, discrimination and bullying continue to torment Jini in the Chosŏn school. Here, Che Sil is making a comment on the essence of humanity itself when she shows Jini being discriminated against even in her new school. Jini, early in the novel, observes that the Chosŏn school “was no different from the Japanese school, except for the school uniform and the school events.”<sup>12</sup> Her observation proves to be true, though in an ironic way: the Chosŏn school is no different from the Japanese school in how it discriminates against Jini. Jini believes that her experience will be different in the Chosŏn school, but the essence of her experience remains the same in both schools. The new environment of the Chosŏn school comes with a new form of discrimination for Jini. The fiction of Chosŏn schools as a safe haven for Zainichi Korean people can be seen falling to pieces.<sup>13</sup> In *Jini no pazuru*, Chosŏn schools are depicted as places of suffering rather than proper educational institutions, and are no different from Japanese schools in this respect. Jini soon becomes critical towards Chosŏn schools, and in the process, she becomes aware and critical of the influence of North Korea that lays behind these institutions of learning.

### 3. The Community and the Individual: “Choosing” the “Revolution”

The novel *Jini no pazuru* addresses the issue of the North Korean repatriation

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12. “*Seifuku to gakkō gyōji o nozoite wa, hontō ni Nihon no gakkō to kawaranakatta*” (Che Sil 2016, 47).

13. Kang Yuni explains that *Jini no pazuru* emphasizes the similarity between the Chosŏn school and the Japanese school, building up its criticism on the parallel between Chosŏn schools and other schools. Focusing on the specificity of Chosŏn schools and the line of demarcation between Chosŏn schools and Japanese schools—as is the case in Kaneshiro Kazuki’s *GO*—runs the risk of an intensified exclusion. *Jini no pazuru* bypasses this risk when it emphasizes the similarities between the two schools and blurs the lines of demarcation between them.

project together with the issue of ethnic education. There are three chapters dedicated to the issue of North Korea, all entitled “A Letter from North Korea” (*Kita Chōsen kara no tegami*). Each is comprised of letters that Jini’s mother receives from North Korea. The series of letters embodies a change of perspective towards North Korea. In the first letter, Jini’s grandfather writes that he is lucky to be in North Korea and that he is living a fruitful life of equal labor (Che Sil 2016, 30-31). In the second letter, we hear that he has a foreboding feeling that he will not be able to leave North Korea alive; he believes Jini’s mother should no longer wait for his letters and dedicate her life to the family she currently has (41). The third letter from North Korea is written by a half-brother of Jini’s mother, not her father himself. The letter explains how Jini’s grandfather was forced to remarry after the repatriation, and how the letter-writer was born of that marriage. The letter-writer’s news is that Jini’s grandfather had fallen ill, and that he died without receiving proper medical treatment not long after he sent out his second letter. Jini’s grandfather originally left Japan for North Korea through the North Korea repatriation project, full of dreams of his homeland. There, he was assigned to a second marriage that he did not want, spent his life in labor, and died due to a lack of medical treatment. The episode gives a glimpse of the reality of North Korea, as well as illuminating the life that repatriated Zainichi Koreans and their families left behind in Japan.

The changing tone of the three letters reflects the shifting psychological state of Jini in the book. The first letter follows the chapter in which Jini first enters the Chosŏn school with hopeful expectations. In this chapter, Jini meets some considerate students there and discovers its positive aspects. The second letter follows the chapter that shows Jini struggle to learn *Chosŏnŏ* and adapt to the Chosŏn school. We read the third letter after the chapter that tells us of the North Korean missile launch, and the subsequent sexual assault of Jini at the hands of Japanese men the next day. The changing mental state of Jini after starting at the Chosŏn school parallels the changing state of her family within these letters from North Korea. That is, her experience of the Chosŏn school becomes linked to the wider Zainichi experience of North Korea.<sup>14</sup>

In its political actions North Korea does not take into calculation the possible harmful outcomes for Zainichi Koreans, and here the negative effects of such are made clear. A day before the start of school in the summer of 1998, North Korea launches the Taep’odong missile. The missile traverses the airspace of the Japanese archipelago before falling into the ocean, causing ill will toward

14. Kim Gae-ja (2020) points out that these three letters “help make a direct relation between the conflict-ridden experience of Jini and the issue of North Korea, interpreting the conflict-ridden experience of Zainichi in Japanese society as originating in the issue of North Korea” (159).

North Korea to soar in Japan. Students of Chosŏn schools are to wear *ch'ima chŏgori* to school in normal circumstances, but due to special situations such as that of the North Korean missile launch, they may wear gym clothes instead.<sup>15</sup> Uninformed of this, however, Jini sets off to school in her *ch'ima chŏgori* as usual. Jini fails to get off a packed train at Jujō, her school's station, due to the malign interference of someone in the crowd. She has no option but to get off at the next station, Ikebukuro. As she passes by a game center, she gets dragged off by three men in suits who falsely claim to be the police. She gets assaulted and sexually harassed in a corner of the building, and she is not able to go to school that day. The same day, the Chosŏn school receives anonymous phone calls threatening to poison the water and to kidnap and violently harass female students, which strikes the students with fear. The North Korean missile launch has been shown as putting the Chosŏn school and its students in a vulnerable position. This episode demonstrates how the Chosŏn school's students are twofold minorities in Japanese society.

Traumatized by what took place in the game center, Jini refuses to attend school and dwells upon the relationship between the Chosŏn school, North Korea, and Japan. She reflects on the suffering of Zainichi Koreans—especially that of Zainichi Korean students—due to the actions of North Korea. Determined to go back to the school, Jini quietly prepares her own “revolution.” She first attends school again three weeks after the incident. This day also happens to be the day of the school dance performance. She hastens to the fourth floor of the middle school building, the first one to leave the gym after the dance performance. Then, in a classroom of the middle school building Jini pulls out copies of the manifesto she has prepared from her bag. Her manifesto reads:

For our people in North Korea whose human life and rights are being trampled, for all the kidnapped victims of the world, for those who risked their lives to defect from North Korea, we should ourselves become a collective truly concerned with international society. Otherwise, the stupid world will not change, and we students will be blamed for the villainous Kim regime and for the Chosŏn schools who hang up their portraits. We should proclaim to the world that we are not with the Kim regime. (Che Sil 2016, 62)

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15. The uniform of female students of Chosŏn schools had been *ch'ima chŏgori*, but these uniforms became the target of a Japanese right-wing attack in May 1994, signifying the wider victimization of students of Chosŏn schools. Due to this, from April 1999, the *ch'ima chŏgori* uniform became optional for commuting students. The more general-looking uniform (the second uniform) was to be worn on the way to school and was to be changed to *ch'ima chŏgori* (the first uniform) once students entered the school. Students could still commute in the first uniform if the student or the family so desired.

Jini scatters her manifesto flyers all over the stairs and in the corridors. The flyers rain down on the floors of the school. She returns to the classroom to remove the portraits of the two Kims, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, adorning the front of the classroom, and throws them on to the floor. The frames shatter into pieces; Jini then throws the broken portrait frames out of the fourth-floor window of the building. The students who witness the incident are shocked. Jini is dragged off by her schoolteachers to be confined to a psychiatric hospital.

To criticize the North Korean regime, Jini “chooses” the revolutionary act of destroying the portraits of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. Her objects of criticism include the North Korean regime that has endangered students, and the more immediate Japanese society full of discrimination and violence. For Jini the Chosŏn school was supposed to be a haven from the discrimination she suffered in Japanese schools. However, the discrimination merely continued in a different form in the Chosŏn school, and her anguish was only heightened when North Korea put its own people in danger by launching a missile. In this respect, organizations such as the Zaitokukai are the byproduct of such North Korean actions, that end up further victimizing Zainichi Korean students. The structure of Che Sil’s novel puts into question the nature of the societies of North Korea and Japan, at the same time as problematizing the true implications of ethnic education.

Essentially, *Jini no pazuru* asks if it is right for adults to decide if their children should receive an ethnic education. Students of the Chosŏn school do not question the portraits of the Kim family prominently placed in their classrooms. Here, the portraits are a matter of fact, natural part of the scenery, something that has been there since before they were born. Jini speaks of the inner contradictions of Zainichi Korean society, including the Chosŏn school, when it comes to North Korea-related issues:

Even when you go to lectures, all they talk about is old Chosŏn. When they must talk about present history, they all try to look at it from the point of view of South Korea. They blend stories of South Korea with stories of North Korea so that they never touch on sensitive issues. Still, since we are in the Chosŏn school, shouldn’t we think deeply through the problem of North Korea? Do we have portraits of the South Korean president in our school? No. There is no such thing. How come we refuse to talk about the here-and-now problem of North Korea, when we are in a Chosŏn school? They say schools have nothing to do with politics. If so, why do I see political things in the school? (Che Sil 2016, 71)

The novel criticizes how Zainichi Korean society refuses to face reality when there are numerous North Korea-related problems to be dealt with, including

the Chosŏn school itself. Zainichi Korean society blends the stories of South Korea together with stories of North Korea to avoid facing the difficult situation in its fullness. Chosŏn schools are interlinked with the North Korea regime. When North Korea launches the missile and antagonizes Japanese society, it is Zainichi Korean people who bear the brunt of the backlash. Zainichi Korean society therefore uses the former state of Chosŏn and the present state of South Korea in combination to obscure reality and refrain from dealing with the situation. Despite North Korea's unaccountable and unaccounted-for actions, the Zainichi Korean people continue to send their children to Chosŏn schools. As a result, young and vulnerable Zainichi Korean students like Jini become victimized. *Jini no pazuru* problematizes such a set-up: the meaning of Zainichi Korean ethnic education—and the relationship between Chosŏn schools and the North Korea regime—needs to be seriously reconsidered in Zainichi Korean society.

Are these problems laid out in *Jini no pazuru* localized to Zainichi Korean society, North Korea, and Japan? We get an answer to this question in the depiction of the US at the beginning and end of the novel, as *Jini no pazuru* is about Japan and the Zainichi Korean society within it, but it is also about Jini's life in the US. Discharged from the psychiatric ward in Japan, Jini moves to the US, but again struggles to adapt to the high school. The American school is not that different from the Japanese school or the Chosŏn school. John, a disabled student, intermittently wails during classes, but no one shows concern, and the class proceeds as if nothing happened. Students do not respect John and treat him as if he has an infectious disease. In the first chapter of the novel, Jini narrates that "the school is a cruel place," portraying the American school in a critical light similarly to the Chosŏn school and the Japanese school. Jini lets us know how the space of the school generates a universal condition of suffering, regardless of the nation to which it belongs. *Jini no pazuru*, structure-wise, deals with the relationship between individuals and groups, individuals and communities in broad terms. Through its representation of the tertiary space of the US in addition to its representation of Zainichi Korean society and of Japan, *Jini no pazuru* shows what it means for an individual to be placed in the community. *Jini no pazuru* shows how Jini and John fail to belong to a community and reflects on the forms of the relationships that exist between individuals and communities in the process. This is an extension of the novel's reflection on Jini in the Chosŏn school and its ethnic education, Jini in Zainichi Korean society, and Jini in Japanese society.

In showing how Jini's revolution makes her an individual subject unaffiliated to any communities, *Jini no pazuru* asks the readers to reconsider the function

and meaning of ethnic education. But while the novel represents Chosŏn schools in a critical light, this does not mean that it is altogether critical of the context of ethnic education exemplified by Chosŏn schools. Che Sil discusses how Jini changes through her experience at the Chosŏn school:

If Jini kept attending the Japanese school, she would have repressed her feelings. Whatever she did, people would have attributed it to her *Chōsenjin*-ness and blamed her. I believe she was able to do what she did because she was allowed to express herself and release her explosive energy in the Chosŏn school—unlike in the Japanese school. Her environment changed when she started attending the Chosŏn school, making her Jini, instead of “*Chōsenjin* Jini.” If I may speak from Jini’s perspective, I would say she would have nevertheless been glad to be in a place where she was accepted as the individual that she is... Jini was able to have her outburst because she loved her friends. (Che Sil 2019)

Nonetheless, Jini suffers in the Chosŏn school and experiences violence and discrimination in Japan due to her status as a student there. Still, she grows through the painful experiences and the anguish, learning to stand upon her own feet as an individual. Jini, who has become independent through this process, saves herself through her personal revolution. She discovers herself to be more than a *Chōsenjin* at Chosŏn school and finds the independent personality of “Jini.” In the absence of an external gaze that defines her as *Chōsenjin*, Jini gets to find her own self. Thus, the ethnic education is found to have a meaningful function. Through Jini, we can see that the Chosŏn school is more than a space for inculcating ethnic identity, it is a space that nurtures Jini into becoming an individual subject. The apparatus of ethnic education provides a safe place for Jini to learn to stand up as an individual in her own right. *Jini no pazuru* is the record of how an independent individual steps out of the school and into the world through a personal revolution of self-discovery that tears down boundaries.

#### 4. The Status of Zainichi Korean Literature as Illuminated by *Jini no pazuru*

What does *Jini no pazuru* tell us about the status and the role of Zainichi Korean literature? Shortlisted for the 155th Akutagawa Prize in 2016, Che Sil became the second Zainichi Korean writer to be shortlisted for the award, seventeen years after the author Gengetsu in 1999. Zainichi Korean literature, which has been in somewhat of a vacuum after Gengetsu, was reinvigorated by the appearance of Che Sil. Even aside from the symbolic prestige of being a nominee for the Akutagawa Prize, Che Sil herself is a figure that reminds Japan

of the issue of minority groups. Tawada Yōko, former judge of the Gunzo Prize for New Writers, comments:

This novel stands out among numerous novels lost in the comforting fiction of monolingual, homogenous Japan; it is informed with the suspense that is only known to those who have been—and constantly are—exposed to violence... It brings into plain light the face of Japanese society violently holding onto the fiction of sameness and homogeneity. (Tawada and Tsujihara 2016, 83)

Tawada Yōko points out that Japanese society lives in a fiction of monolingual homogeneity, and that minority perspectives such as those of Che Sil bring into focus what such a society keeps out of sight. Che Sil brings to attention the issue of minority groups that has existed beside Japanese people all along. Questioning the commonly accepted idea of a homogenous Japan, her Zainichi Korean literature sends out a message of multicultural co-existence. Zhong Zhang, a Zainichi Korean poet, describes another function of Zainichi Korean literature:

You can read this novel as a narrative of a *Zainichi*—one that could not find a standing in Japan nor in Chosŏn and had to cross the borders—being saved by the “literature” that she encounters. In this, the novel is also engaging with an important theme of Zainichi Korean literature: that the minority figure can stand for the general and ordinary. (Zhong Zhang 2016, 147)

Zhong Zhang believes that, in Zainichi Korean literature, the literary text produced by the people of this minority group culminate in the representation of the universality of Japan. Zainichi Korean literature embodies the universalist message that the Zainichi Korean minority group is not essentially different from Japanese people. Kim Hoan-gi’s view is also that Zainichi Korean literature functions as an antithesis to the nationalist rhetoric of Japan, Japanese people, and Japanese society (Kim Hoan-gi 2015, 13). At the same time, along the lines of Kim Hoan-gi’s analysis, we see how Zainichi Korean literature’s engagement with anti-nationalist, anti-ideological, and anti-centralist themes—such as the rhetoric of co-existence, children of mixed race or multi-ethnic backgrounds, and Korean-Japanese people—helps readers come to terms with the hybridity of Zainichi Korean literature and the global movement towards multicultural community (Kim Hoan-gi 2009, 124). In bringing Jini to life as a representative minority figure, Che Sil shows the reality of multicultural co-existence in Japan in a critical and educative light.

In dealing with ethnic education, *Jini no pazuru* brings to literary life the layered problems of Zainichi Korean Society, the relationship between North

Korea and Japan, and anti-Korean sentiment. In the process, it sends out a positive message in respect of multicultural co-existence and co-living. *Jini no pazuru* is a text that affirms the cultural function and potential of Zainichi Korean literature in the era of multicultural co-existence.

## Conclusion

Che Sil made an impactful debut as a new Zainichi Korean writer with *Jini no pazuru* in 2016, gaining many literary accolades. Against the backdrop of Chosŏn schools, *Jini no pazuru* deals with past and present concerns of Zainichi Korean society, including ethnic education, North Korea and the North Korean repatriation project, and anti-Korean sentiment. With ethnic education as her central theme, Che Sil poses questions about North Korea, Japan, and Zainichi Korean society. Her writing moves away from the usual fare of existing Zainichi Korean literature, which tends to circle exclusively around Japan, Zainichi Korean society, and the Koreans, and presents a more generalized situation by including the tertiary geographical space of the US. In this process, the novel deals with the wider theme of relations between the individual and the group, and furthermore sheds light on the place of the individual within the community. Thus, in defining the relationship between a certain group and an individual and showing an individual gaining self-reliance outside of the community, the novel demonstrates the function and significance of ethnic education. The text critiques and questions ethnic education, but its goal is not to deny its importance. Through Jini's discovery of self, her experience in a Chosŏn school, and her revolutionary choices in advancing toward the world, the novel shows the positive role of ethnic education. Furthermore, through the minority character symbolized by Jini, the novel gives a literary rendition of multilayered issues involving North Korea, Japan, and anti-Korean sentiment, and sends a message encouraging us to live together in peace in an age of multicultural co-existence. It is here that we find the true role and potential of Zainichi Korean literature, particularly in Japan's current climate of multicultural co-existence.

• Translated by RIM Jiwon

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