

# School As A Post-Colonial Space in *Zainichi* Film

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**Abstract.** This study used the descriptive qualitative method, and by utilizing postcolonialism theory, this research focuses on reading the politics of colonial space that happened in Japanese schools in *zainichi* films. The results showed a blurring of the boundaries between Korea and Japan. The feelings of the *zainichi*, who have an identity as Japanese because they were born in Japan, the use of the Japanese language in their daily interactions at school, and the use of Japanese names for the *zainichi* show them. In addition, it was also found that Japan's superiority was confirmed as seen by Japan's control over the citizenship of the *zainichi*, the arrogance, and domination of Japan as the majority group in schools, and the acknowledgment by the *zainichi* that the Japanese education system was more advanced than Koreans.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, Postcolonialism, Space, School, Education System

## 1 Introduction

Since Japan annexed Korea in 1910, many ethnic Koreans have been brought in to work in Japan. The need to recruit Korean workers into the industry and the military became urgent after the start of Japan's wars with China in 1937 and the United States in 1941 [8]. At the time of Japanese colonialism, ethnic Koreans living in Japan tried to be assimilated in Japanese social circles through education and mixed marriages. In fact, at that time, the Korean language and culture were prohibited from being used. On the other hand, Shinto religion and the imperial system had to be taught in Korean schools in Japan. The condition of discrimination felt by ethnic Koreans living in Japan or better known as *zainichi*, did not end even though Japan had lost to its allies in World War II. Literally, *zainichi* means "living in Japan", and can be used to designate all ethnicities of foreigners living in Japan. However, the

word *zainichi* in particular is widely used to refer to foreigners from the Korean Peninsula and their descendants who settled in Japan [5]

For Koreans everywhere, the defeat of Japan and the loss of its colonies meant liberation from colonial rule. However, this liberation was not fully felt by the *zainichi*. Discrimination continued to be felt by them after colonialism, including in 1945, ethnic Koreans did not have the right to vote. Then in 1947, the Japanese government issued a regulation to regulate the status of *zainichi* by issuing the Foreigner Registration Act (<https://www.key-j.net>), which stated that all people classified as ethnic Korean or Taiwanese by the Ministry of Law were considered as people. Foreigners and *zainichi* must always carry a foreigner registration document stating their citizenship as Korean. In 1950, the Japanese government also issued a citizenship law whereby all *zainichi* children born to Japanese mothers lost their Japanese citizenship. Only children born to Japanese fathers can retain their Japanese citizenship because Japan does not recognize Korea as a legitimate country, then starting in 1952, this *zainichi* became stateless in Japan so that their rights as citizens, such as not being able to receive social welfare benefits and obtaining work, could not be obtained [4]. And related to education such as the exclusion of Chosen Gakko schools from free high school education policies, should be eliminated [1].

The depiction of poverty and the living conditions of the *zainichi* who experience discrimination often color the storylines of *zainichi*-themed films, including the *Yakiniku Dragon* (2018) directed by Wui Sin Chong, *Go* (2001) directed by Isao Yukisada, and *Pacchigi* (2007) directed by Kazuyuki Izutsu which will be the object of this research. According to [id.japanesefilmfest.org](http://id.japanesefilmfest.org), *Yakiniku Dragon* is set in the 1960s in a slum near Japan's Kansai International Airport. This film tells about the life of the *Zainichi* family with all their problems, surviving in Japan by opening a small yakiniku restaurant called *Yakiniku Dragon*. The father, Yong-Gil, and mother, Young Soon, have three daughters from their previous marriages and one son from their current marriage. Identity conflicts occur in their youngest son, Tokio, who is deaf due to being bullied at school because of his identity as Korean. The next film, *GO*, tells the life of a teenager of *zainichi* descent named Sugihara, who falls in love with a Japanese girl named Tsubaki Sakurai whom he met after Sugihara moved from a Korean school to a Japanese school. Sugihara's boxing father taught Sugihara boxing, which helped him a lot when facing discrimination from the Japanese. The love story between

Sugihara and Sakurai experiences conflict after Sugihara says he is a descendant of *Zainichi*. Nevertheless, the film ends happily in the end because Sakurai realizes that a person's identity is not determined by his nationality. Then the film *Pacchigi*, directed by Kazuki Izutsu, was set in Kyoto in 1968. This film tells the story of Kosuke Matsuyama, a good student, not the type of child who tends to commit juvenile delinquency suddenly gets caught in a fight between his friends and Korean students who attend a high school for the *zainichi*.

In the three *zainichi*-themed films, one interesting similarity is to be investigated further: the emergence of school settings. Even though it is not the main story, the school setting seems inseparable from the storyline. It is because school or education is part of the discrimination that *Zainichi* feels until now. After World War II ended, Korean *zainichi* were no longer considered subjects of the empire who had common ancestry with Japan, where previously the slogan of *issuidojin* or Japan as the elder brother was touted. The official discourse that developed after the war was to reject "other ethnicities" and homogeneity to become "Japan's defining qualities" [4]. Therefore, *zainichi* students who attend Japanese schools can feel rejected by other Japanese students, and this is depicted in all three films. Sara Upstone, in her writings, mentions that the city is one of the alternative spaces of the state on a smaller scale where postcolonial movements are represented [12]. Thus, this school is also part of the postcolonial space used to maintain the stability of Japanese colonialism). Upstone also mentions in her writings that colonial people constructed spaces with boundaries that appeared as natural boundaries to distinguish them from the natives. By living themselves (colonial life) in the indigenous space, boundaries are increasingly visible, and colonial power seems absolute and fixed [12]. This is also evident in the school space where the superiority of Japan in educational practice has blurred the boundaries between Japanese students and Korean *zainichi* students, but at the same time reinforces the more significant superiority of Japanese students. *zainichi* feels that schools in Japanese schools are much better quality than the school for *zainichi*. This view is seen once in one of the scenes in *Yakiniku Dragon*.

Japanese education changed the identity of the language, especially what happened to the third generation of *zainichi* who were born around the 1970s, where they were born in Japan. Many have chosen to attend Japanese schools. Therefore, they grew up like the Japanese in general to the point of being almost indistinguishable from the Japanese. Most speak only Japanese and cannot communicate in Korean [9]. It can be seen that the concept of space and

boundaries instilled by the Japanese colonialists had obscured the *Zainichi's* preference for what was already in them, both identity and practices in life that existed before colonialism.

This research also used several other previous studies as a reference for this research, namely the research conducted by Wury Dwiwardani [3] entitled Postcolonial Space in Kitchin by Yoshimoto Banana. The study is to reveal a response to cultural colonization in the postcolonial space that emerged from Kitchin's novels. The results showed that there are representations of colonial concepts and the concept of tradition. There is also a depiction of chaos as a form of new ideas that refuse to be combined in one of the camps that build a structure of opposition between colonial and tradition. With this chaos emerged a new structure connected to efforts to survive amid a culturally colonized society. Research on *Zainichi* Korea was also conducted by Susan J. Menadue-Chun [7] in her dissertation entitled Postcolonial Practices in Japanese Education and Their Effect on *Zainichi* Korean Students. The study analyzes how the Japanese government's education policy is responsible for marginalizing and subjugating *zainichi* Koreans. It is different from the authors's research above, which looked more at how school is a postcolonial space in the *Zainichi* film.

This study will read the politics of colonial space in schools in Japan and describe what has been obscured by Japanese colonialism's order in educational practices using postcolonial theory. So the question in this research is how the schools in the movie *Yakiniku Dragon*, *GO*, and *Pacchigi* as a postcolonial space.

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. Data collection techniques were carried out through library research. Primary data sources are obtained from films with the theme of *Zainichi* Korea, namely the *Yakiniku Dragon*, *GO*, and *Pacchigi* films. The data analysis technique was carried out in a qualitative descriptive manner. The analysis steps classify the three *zainichi* films, *Yakiniku Dragon*, *Go*, and *Pacchigi*, in terms of structure. Then analyze the postcolonial space from the construction of school rooms contained in the three *zainichi* films, and finally conclude the analysis that has been done.

## 2 School in the Yakiniku Dragon, GO and Pacchigi as Postcolonial Space

School in the film Yakiniku Dragon, GO, and Pacchigi as a postcolonial space is constructed as a space where the boundaries between Korea and Japan are blurred. However, on the other hand, the school was also constructed as a space to strengthen Japan's superiority over its colony, namely the *zainichi* students. Sara Upstone expresses that postcolonial space pays attention to control efforts in the form of approval of thoughts or concepts instilled by the colonial authorities as a strategy of domination and preservation of power. Various agreements on concepts that benefit Japan are sought to be embedded in all people living in Japan by forming ideals and harmonizations in the field of education and the school environment to maintain the stability of colonialism. The Japanese colonials constructed school spaces with boundaries that appeared as natural boundaries to distinguish them from the *zainichi*. The school as a postcolonial space is as follows.

### 2.1. The feelings of the *zainichi* who have an identity as Japanese because they were born in Japan



**Fig. 1.** Sugihara's friend throws him the ball while shouting “*Zainichi*”

杉原 : 僕は日本で生まれた。僕は日本で生まれた所謂コリアンジャパニーズ。  
まあ、僕は日本人と何ら変わらないと思ってるんだけど、奴らはこう呼ぶ....  
日本人 : 在日!!  
Sugihara : I was born in Japan. I was born in Japan and called Korean-Japanese. Yes, I don't think I'm any different from the Japanese, but they call me...  
Japanese: *Zainichi*!! (Film Go: 01:45)

The Japanese consider *Zainichi* not a part of them. As experienced by Sugihara in the film Go in the quote above, even though he feels that he is no different from the original Japanese because they were all born in Japan, Sugihara's school friends, who know he is of Korean

descent still distinguish him from calling him *zainichi*. As a person, Sugihara ended up having doubts about his identity, between himself as a *zainichi* or as a Japanese. Sometimes, even Sugihara did not care about his identity anymore. Like when Sugihara had a relationship with Sakurai Tsubaki where, when revealing his identity as a Korean-born and living in Japan was not necessary, he assumed that in the Olympics, he could support both Korea and Japan. It also appears in the scene where Sugihara talks to his father and states that he is neither Korean nor Japanese. He is just “grass without roots.”

## **2.2. The use of Japanese by the *zainichi* in daily interactions at school**

According to The Fact Media Japan, to get an education, the *zainichi* attended a special school for ethnic Koreans in Japan called Chosen Gakko or Chosun Hakkyo. Chosen Gakko is sponsored by North Korea and Chongryon. In addition to Chosen Gakko, there is also Kankoku Gakkō which is a Korean school sponsored by South Korea and operated by Mindan. The Japanese government requires the use of Japanese in *Zainichi* schools. However, in the film *Go*, it is seen that the Japanese language was forbidden to use in North Korean schools, the high school where Sugihara attended for the first time before finally moving to a Japanese high school. Implicitly, this conveys *Zainichi*'s rejection of the Japanese system, including the use of the language.



**Fig.2** Prohibition of speaking Japanese in Korean school **Fig.3** A Korean teacher who calls Sugihara a traitor

Meanwhile, students who speak Japanese are considered traitors. It happened to Sugihara, who continued to use Japanese because he thought the Japanese term could better express the meaning conveyed than Korean. Sugihara feels familiar with using Japanese because his everyday language to communicate with his father, a *zainichi*, also tends to use Japanese. In addition, the tendency to use Japanese as the language of daily communication was also carried out by Sugihara while attending a Japanese high school, so from this habit. It can be seen that the feeling of being part of Japan is awakened, but on the other hand, the prohibition from North Korean high school teachers using Japanese also helped remind him of his identity as a Korean.

### **2.3. Japanese Control of *Zainichi* Nationality**

One of the scenes from the film *Go* depicts Sugihara's friend Jong-il giving his opinion that *Zainichi* has no state. *Zainichi* is not a Japanese citizen, even though they have lived in Japan for a long time. In addition, *Zainichi* also cannot return to their home country or travel to other countries due to citizenship status problems. The main character in *Go* Movie, Sugihara, is

even told that he is afraid if he does not bring a Foreign Resident Identity Card, as seen in the following scene.



**Fig. 4** Jong-il talks about a stateless *zainichi* to other *zainichi* students

Sugihara : I thought I would be arrested for not carrying a Foreign Resident Card. I'm a South Korean citizen.

Police: So you're Korean.

Sugihara : No, I'm *Zainichi*.

Police: Does *Zainichi* also have to always carry a Foreign Resident Card?

Sugihara : Yes, otherwise it will be jailed or fined 200,000 yen  
(Film GO: 01: 31)

The dialog above tells of Sugihara, who meets a police officer who wants to borrow money to buy coffee. However, Sugihara was frightened because he thought he would be arrested for not carrying a Foreign Identity Card, so he beat the policeman unconscious. However, he felt guilty, approached the policeman, and chatted about Sugihara's identity. Sugihara said that a *zainichi* should always carry a Foreign Resident Card. Otherwise, they would be jailed or fined 200,000 yen. The punishment was heavy enough to make *Zainichi* afraid if he did not take it. It shows that Japan has firm control over the citizenship status of the *zainichi*.

#### **2.4. The use of Japanese Names for *Zainichi***

In the film GO and Yakiniku Dragon, set in a Japanese school, the main character uses a Japanese name even though he is of Korean descent. The Sugihara character, whose real name is Lee Jong Ho, does not even dare to say his Korean name in front of Japanese people. The character Sugihara in the movie Go tells Sakurai, the Japanese girl he likes, about his real name, which he never mentions in front of other people. He was afraid to say his name because it was very foreign to Japanese people. He is afraid that he will be considered strange, ostracized, and even hated if he mentions his real name. It shows that foreigners must lose



their original identity and replace them with Japanese to be accepted in Japanese society. Feelings of annoyance and anger over not recognizing *Zainichi's* real identity are also seen in the following data.

Sugihara : How can you call me *Zainichi*?! That means I am a foreigner who one day must leave this country. You know that?! Sometimes I want to kill all of you Japanese. You're afraid of me right? You guys have to call us something right. All right, call me a lion. But a lion never feels himself a lion. You guys gave it that name. You can call me anything, snake, scorpion or even alien. But I don't think I'm an alien! I'm not Korean I'm not an alien! I am me!! (Fim GO: 01: 54)

Sugihara is very angry with Sakurai for calling her Korean in that scene. It offended Sugihara, born and raised in Japan, despite being of Korean descent. He felt humiliated by the name or designations that the Japanese gave to *Zainichi*. Because basically, they want to be recognized as themselves without being associated with citizenship or any identity. It shows that Japan's superiority makes minorities like *Zainichi* feel they have no place in society. They feel that Japanese people label themselves as foreigners who are not part of Japan itself.

## **2.5. Japanese Arrogance and Domination as Majority in School**

In one scene of the film *Go*, Sugihara is shown kicking a Japanese student who is his teammate because he cannot stand the bullying he receives from them. Also, in this scene, many Japanese students challenge Sugihara to a fight after the beating incident by Sugihara on the basketball court, but Sugihara easily defeats them. Here can be seen Japanese students trying to maintain their superiority over the *Zainichi* race, where they want to prove that Japan is the strongest.



Fig. 5 Sugihara retaliates against a blow given by a Japanese student

## 2.6. Recognition of the Excellence of the Japanese Education System

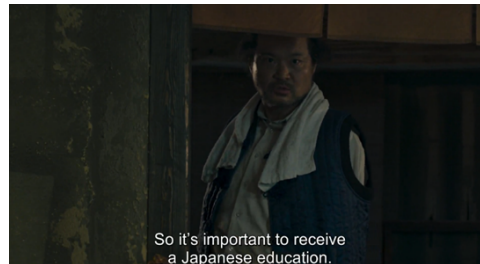


Fig. 6 Yong-gil gives his opinion upon attending a Japanese school (Yakiniku Dragon: 43:10)

In the movie Yakiniku Dragon scene, Young-il (Tokio's father) argues with Young-soon (Tokio's mother) about transferring Tokio to another school. Young-soon wants Tokio to change schools because she feels sorry for Tokio, who is mute and bullied. However, Yong-il rejects it and says that they were finally able to send Tokio to a Japanese school the hard way. It indicates that *zainichi*'s access to education in Japanese schools is still limited. In addition, *zainichi* also considers the quality of education in Japanese schools to be better, so he does not want to give up the opportunity to receive an education in Japanese schools. Tokio's father also stated that they would continue to live in Japan after all. Therefore, receiving a Japanese education is essential and best for Tokio. By receiving a Japanese education, *zainichi* will be able to understand how Japanese people think so that they are more acceptable in Japanese society.

Then in a scene in the movie Go, Sugihara tells his father that he wants to attend a Japanese school to see the wider world. Sugihara says he can blend in with Japanese society if he attends a Japanese school. While in Korean schools, the social scope is limited to the same community group. In addition, they cannot freely travel because they do not have citizenship status. By receiving a Japanese education, *zainichi* can move more freely through the social spaces of Japanese society so that they can feel the freedom that has been as if they did not get because of their status as *zainichi*.

## 3 Conclusion

The film *Yakiniku Dragon*, *GO*, and *Pacchigi* shows that from the point of view of the *zainichi*, the school becomes a space where Japanese hegemonic concepts are instilled because of its flexibility. Japanese control over *zainichi* can be seen from the use of Japanese as the language of instruction at school which has become part of *zainichi*'s daily language in interacting with students and other environments. The Japanese are considered more able to represent the expression of their feelings, so they use it in their daily interactions at school. It's just that in the film *Go*, there is also resistance not to using Japanese as the language of instruction in a special Korean school. With this chaos emerged a new structure connected to efforts to survive amid the conditions of the Japanese education system where Korean special schools continue to teach the spirit of nationality through culture and the use of Korean in the teaching and learning process. Japan's superiority can also be seen from the recognition by the *zainichi* that the Japanese education system is more advanced. Even though they are hard to find and there is a possibility that they will get discriminatory behavior in Japanese schools, *zainichi* still fights to get an education at these Japanese schools. Because for them, getting a Japanese education is a way to move more freely in the social spaces of Japanese society. Therefore, the acknowledgment of the superiority of Japanese education by the *zainichi* has been the result indirectly obtained from the strategy of controlling and preserving Japanese power over the *zainichi*.

Other acknowledgments also arise from the feelings of the *zainichi* who have an identity as Japanese because they were born in Japan. The second and third generations of *zainichi* are *zainichi* children born and raised in Japan, so it is natural for them to feel that Japan is their homeland, even though Japan does not necessarily recognize them as Japanese. The school as a bounded space is instilled in *zainichi* as something fixed, controlled, absolute, and seems natural and this condition is a form of power as well as a blurring of territorial boundaries because it coincides with the pervasiveness of the Japanese colonial concept through education for the *zainichi*.

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