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Pachinko (Lee)

Summary | Author Bio | Book Reviews | Discussion Questions | **Full Version** | Print

Pachinko (Lee)

Min Jin Lee, 2017
Grand Central Publishing
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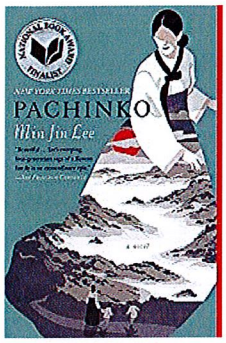

Summary

Profoundly moving and gracefully told, *Pachinko* follows one Korean family through the generations, beginning in early 1900s Korea with Sunja, the prized daughter of a poor yet proud family, whose unplanned pregnancy threatens to shame them.

Betrayed by her wealthy lover, Sunja finds unexpected salvation when a young tubercular minister offers to marry her and bring her to Japan to start a new life.

So begins a sweeping saga of exceptional people in exile from a homeland they never knew and caught in the indifferent arc of history. In Japan, Sunja's family members endure harsh discrimination, catastrophes, and poverty, yet they also encounter great joy as they pursue their passions and rise to meet the challenges this new home presents.

Through desperate struggles and hard-won triumphs, they are bound together by deep roots as their family faces enduring questions of faith, family, and identity. (*From the publisher*.)

Author Bio

- Birth—1968
- Where—Seoul, South Korea
- Raised—Borough of Queens, New York City, NY, USA
- Education—B.A., Yale University; J.D., Georgetown University
- Awards—Narrative Prize for New and Emerging Writer (*more below*)
- Currently—lives in New York, New York

Min Jin Lee is a Korean-American writer and author, whose work frequently deals with Korean American topics. Her first novel, *Free Food for Millionaires*, was published in 2007 and her second, *Pachinko*, in 2017. Both were highly regarded. Lee also served for three years seasons as a "Morning Forum" English-language columnist of South Korea's newspaper *Chosun Ilbo*.

Background

Although Lee was born in Seoul, South Korea, her family came to the United States in 1976 when she was seven. She grew up in Elmhurst, Queens, New York, where her parents owned a wholesale jewelry store. She studied history at Yale and law at Georgetown University. She worked as a corporate lawyer in New York for several years before becoming a writer. She lived in Japan for four years (2007-11) and now lives in New York with her husband, Christopher Duffy, and her son, who is half-Japanese.

Lee has lectured about writing, literature, and politics at Columbia, Tufts, Loyola Marymount University, Stanford, Johns Hopkins (SAIS), University of Connecticut, Boston College, Hamilton College, Harvard Law School, Yale University, Ewha University, Waseda University, the American School in Japan. She has also lectured at World Women's Forum, the Tokyo American Center of the U.S. Embassy, and the Asia Society in New York, San Francisco and Hong Kong.

Writing

Lee's short story "Axis of Happiness" won the 2004 Narrative Prize from *Narrative Magazine*. Another short story, "Motherland," published in the *Missouri Review*, won The Peden Prize for Best Short Story. The story is about a Korean family living in Japan, which is also the subject of her second novel, *Pachinko* (2017). Her short stories have been featured on NPR's *Selected Shorts*.

Her 2007 novel *Free Food for Millionaires* was named one of the Top 10 Novels of the Year by *The Times* (UK), NPR's *Fresh Air*, and *USA Today*. It was a listed as a notable novel by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and as a *New York Times* Editor's Choice. Lee's second novel, *Pachinko*, came out out in 2017.

Lee has also published non-fiction in anthologies and such periodicals as the *The Times* (UK), *New York Times Magazine, Traveler, Vogue, Travel + Leisure, Wall Street Journal* and *Food & Wine*. Further, she has published a number of reviews, among them, Toni Morrison's *Home*, Cynthia Ozick's *Foreign Bodies*, and Jodi Picoult's *Wonder Woman: Love and Murder*. All three appeared in *The Times* (UK).

Accolades

She received the NYFA (New York Foundation for the Arts) Fellowship for Fiction, the Peden Prize for Best Story from the *Missouri Review*, and the *Narrative Magazine* Prize for New and Emerging Writer.

While at Yale, she was awarded both the Henry Wright Prize for Nonfiction and the James Ashmun Veech Prize for Fiction. (*Adapted from Wikipedia. Retrieved 2/15/2017*.)

Book Reviews

[S]tunning.... Like most memorable novels...*Pachinko* resists summary. In this sprawling book, history itself is a character. *Pachinko* is about outsiders, minorities and the politically disenfranchised. But it is so much more besides. Each time the novel seems to find its locus—Japan's colonization of Korea, World War II as experienced in East Asia, Christianity, family, love, the changing role of women—it becomes something else. It becomes even more than it was. Despite the compelling sweep of time and history, it is the characters and their tumultuous lives that propel the narrative. Small details subtly reveal the characters' secret selves and build to powerful moments...In this haunting epic tale, no one story seems too minor to be briefly illuminated. Lee suggests that behind the facades of wildly different people lie countless private desires, hopes and miseries, if we have the patience and compassion to look and listen.

Krys Lee - New York Times Book Review

The breadth and depth of challenges come through clearly, without sensationalization. The sporadic victories are oases of sweetness, without being saccharine. Lee makes it impossible not to develop tender feelings towards her characters—all of them, even the most morally compromised. Their multifaceted engagements with identity, family, vocation, racism, and class are guaranteed to provide your most affecting sobfest of the year (*Most Anticipated Books of 2017*).

BookRiot

[A] sprawling and immersive historical work.... Though the novel is long, the story itself is spare, at times brutally so. Sunja's isolation and dislocation become palpable in Lee's hands. Reckoning with one determined, wounded family's place in history, Lee's novel is an exquisite meditation on the generational nature of truly forging a home.

Publishers Weekly

(*Starred review.*) [A] beautifully crafted story of love, loss, determination, luck, and perseverance.... Lee's skillful development of her characters and story lines will draw readers into the work.... [T]he author's latest page-turner. —*Shirley Quan, Orange Cty. P.L., Santa Ana, CA*

Library Journal

(*Starred review.*) An exquisite, haunting epic...moments of shimmering beauty and some glory, too, illuminate the narrative.... Lee's profound novel...is shaped by impeccable research, meticulous plotting, and empathic perception.

Booklist

(*Starred review.*) [A]n absorbing saga.... [L]ove, luck, and talent combine with

cruelty and random misfortune in a deeply compelling story.... An old-fashioned epic whose simple, captivating storytelling delivers both wisdom and truth.
Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

We'll add publisher questions if and when they're available; in the meantime, use our LitLovers talking points to start a discussion for Pachinko*...then take off on your own*:

1. The novel's opening sentence reads, "History has failed us, but no matter." What does the sentence mean, and what expectations might it establish for the reader? Why the tail end of the sentence, "but no matter"?

2. Talk about the thematic significance of the book's title. Pachinko is a sort of slot/pinball game played throughout Japan, and it's arcades are also a way for foreigners to find work and accumulate money.

3. What are the cultural differences between Korea and Japan?

4. As "Zainichi," non-Japanese, how are Koreans treated in Japan? What rules must they adhere to, and what restrictions apply to them?

5. *Follow-up to Questions 3 and 4*: Discuss the theme of belonging, which is pervades this novel. How does where one "belongs" tie into self-identity? Consider Mozasu and his son, Solomon. In what ways are their experiences similar when it comes to national identity? How do both of them feel toward the Japanese?

6. How is World War II viewed in this novel—especially from the perspective of the various characters living in Japan? Has reading about the war through their eyes altered your own understanding of the war?

7. How would you describe Sunja and Isak. How do their differing innate talents complement one another and enable them to survive in Japan?

8. Are there particular characters you were drawn to more than others, perhaps even those who are morally compromised? If so who...and why?

(*Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.*)

top of page (summary)

Books & Authors
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About the Author

Full text biography:

Min Jin Lee

Birth Date : 1968

Place of Birth : South Korea,Seoul

Nationality: American

Ethnicity : Asian American

Occupation : Writer

Table of Contents:

Awards:

New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship; Henry Wright Prize for Nonfiction; James Ashmun Veech Prize for Fiction; *Missouri Review,* Peden Prize for best story, and Narrative Prize for new and emerging writer.

Personal Information:

Born October 17, 1968, in Seoul, Korea; immigrated to the United States, 1976; married Christopher Duffy; children: Sam. **Education:** Yale University, B.A., 1990; Georgetown University, J.D., 1993. **Addresses:** Home: New York, NY.

Career Information:

Writer. Practiced law in New York, NY.

Writings:

- *Free Food for Millionaires* (novel), Warner Books (New York, NY), 2007.
- *Pachinko* (novel), Grand Central (New York, NY), 2017.

Work represented in anthologies, including *To Be Real,* Doubleday (New York, NY), 1995, and *Breeder,* Seal Press (Emeryville, CA), 2001.

Sidelights:

Min Jin Lee is a Korean-born writer who was educated at Yale and Georgetown and practiced law in New York before becoming a full-time writer. As a child, she immigrated with her family to the Elmhurst section of Queens, New York, which is also the setting of her debut novel, *Free Food for Millionaires.*

Casey Han, recently graduated from Princeton University, and her sister, Tina, an M.I.T. student, are at the home of their parents, Joseph and Leah, who work in a dry-cleaning store and have dedicated their lives to providing the best they could for their daughters. Tina is the more compliant sister, while the rebellious Casey informs her father that she is not going to attend Columbia Law School, where she has been accepted, but has chosen to instead "find herself." The enraged Joseph tells her to leave their home, and Casey is on her own.

Although she attended an Ivy League school, Casey is uncomfortable in the world of her classmates. She wants success and love and to fit in but does not want to sacrifice as her parents have. Her mentor, Sabine, was born in her mother's village, is married to a wealthy American, and is part of the fashion world. Casey wants to create hats but takes a job working at a bank to support herself until she decides which path she will follow. She also immerses herself in the writings of British authors such as the Bronte sisters, Anthony Trollope, and George Eliot, in which she sees a similarity to the Korean fairy tales told to her by her mother.

New York Times Book Review contributor Liesl Schillinger praised Lee's treatment of both generations--Casey's and that of her parents--accomplished in "a feat of coordination and contrast." *USA Today* reviewer Carol Memmott wrote: "As much as this is an immigrant story, it's also an American story full of class struggle, rugged individualism, social status and above all, the money haves and have-nots. Most of all it's an epic meditation on love, both familial and romantic."

In 2017, Lee published *Pachinko,* a work of historical fiction. In the early part of the twentieth-century in Korea, sixteen-year-old Sunja becomes pregnant by a rich, older Japanese man, Hansu. Hansu is already married and has a family in Japan, leaving Sunja pregnant and unmarried. A local priest, Isak, offers to marry Sunja, but he is going to Japan, which means Sunja will have to leave her beloved Korea. Once in Japan, she suffers from the extreme prejudice that the Japanese show toward Korean immigrants, and she ends up living in a Korean ghetto with Isak's brother and his wife. Life is a hardscrabble one, especially after Isak is arrested during World War II and sent to prison, dying shortly after his release. Sunja, who now has two sons, Noa and Mozasu, resorts to selling home-made kimchi on the street with her sister-in-law Kyunghee.

Hansu, meanwhile, has kept tabs on his son, Noa, and pays his way to university, but when Noa finds out that Hansu is really his father, it leads to far-reaching consequences. Noa's brother Mozasu becomes a successful owner of pachinko parlors, eventually handing the business to his son.

Reviews of this multigenerational drama were glowing. Neal Mukherjee in the *New Statesman* wrote: "Lee writes about every character with sympathy, generosity and understanding; in particular, Sunja, the woman who holds the story together, is a wonderful creation. The immensely dignified survivors in this story are the two women at its core, Sunja and Kyunghee: history has bent but not broken them. They have endured." *Booklist* reviewer Joy Matteson commented of *Pachinko:* "Hiroto's careful, deliberate pacing and wonderful storytelling keep listeners thoroughly enthralled in this tale of beauty and tragedy." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer wrote: "Reckoning with one determined, wounded family's place in history, Lee's novel is an exquisite meditation on the generational nature of truly forging a home."

A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor called *Pachinko* "an old-fashioned epic whose simple, captivating storytelling delivers both wisdom and truth." Shirley Quan in the *Library Journal* observed: "Those who enjoy historical fiction with strong characterizations will not be disappointed as they ride along on the emotional journeys offered in the author's latest page-turner." *NPR Online* writer Jean Zimmerman was impressed with *Pachinko* and commented: "This is honest writing, fiction that looks squarely at what is, both terrible and wonderful and occasionally as bracing as a jar of Sunja's best kimchi." Finally, *Guardian Online* reviewer Tash Aw called *Pachinko* "vivid and immersive, ... a rich tribute to a people that history seems intent on erasing."

Related Information:

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- *Library Journal,* March 15, 2007, Beth E. Andersen, review of *Free Food for Millionaires,* p. 61; October 15, 2016, Shirley Quan, review of *Pachinko.*
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- *Publishers Weekly,* January 22, 2007, Judith Rosen, profile of author, p. 64, and review of *Free Food for Millionaires,* p. 155; November 21, 2016, review of *Pachinko,* p. 77.
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The Guardian

Interview

Min Jin Lee: 'History has failed almost everybody who is ordinary'

Christopher Petrella

Min Jin Lee, whose writings wrestle with race, class, diaspora, religion and love, is one of the 200 honorees whose modern-day work best embodies Frederick Douglass's legacy of social change

Thu 2 Aug 2018 07.00 EDT

Throughout 2018 - the bicentennial of Frederick Douglass - The Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University and the Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives are honoring 200 individuals whose modern-day work best embodies Douglass's enduring legacy of social change. The Guardian is publishing the names of all 200 honorees - 10 each week - between now and November.

Here, Christopher Petrella*, director of advocacy and strategic partnerships at The Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University, speaks to one of the honorees,* Min Jin Lee.

Min Jin Lee is a National Book Award finalist, whose writings wrestle with the themes of race, class, diaspora, religion and love. The New York Times Book Review called her most recent novel, Pachinko, one of the 10 Best Books of 2017. Lee is a recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard.

CP: Pachinko is a novel about Koreans in Japan. You note that, in general, Koreans in Japan fall into three categories: North Koreans living in Japan, South Koreans living in Japan and ethnic Koreans with Japanese citizenship. What can this type of arrangement teach us about identity, migration and movement in the US context?

MJL: I'm going to sound like an optimist here. We are having a dark moment in the American political climate regarding undocumented migrants and asylum seekers but, then again, the history of immigration in America has always been checkered.

In the United States we have two competing mythologies about immigration. On the one hand, we believe that different kinds of races make up an American person. On the other, a deep nativist strain keeps resurfacing. Nevertheless, there has also been strong resistance to nativism. Frederick Douglass, for instance, called the United States a "composite nation" when he argued against the Chinese Exclusion Act [of 1882].

CP: In your view, what is the role of the social novel in political resistance? What is the role of art in political movements and political movement making?

MJL: All art is political because it is created by people. I explicitly intended to write political novels. My first book [Free Food for Millionaires] is a critique of class and immigration in America. My second novel is about Koreans in Japan in relation to colonialism and xenophobia. Both novels deal with themes of immigration, race and homeland. Primarily, they speak to what the diaspora does and means for people who are scattered throughout the world. My third novel, American Hagwon, will complete my triology; the novels are unrelated in characters, but related by the theme of diaspora.

Political novels can be boring to read unless written effectively with the powerful tools of fiction; I was trying to do this. I want my books to be pleasurable and edifying. Though Frederick Douglass didn't write fiction, his speeches have great narrative power because he integrates storytelling tools elegantly with his political analysis.

Christopher Petrella (CP): The opening line of Pachinko, your latest novel, reads: "History has failed us, but no matter." What inspired such a powerful idea?

Min Jin Lee (MJL): "History has failed us, but no matter" serves as my thesis statement. I believe history has failed almost everybody who is ordinary in the world, not just the Korean-Japanese, who are the subject of Pachinko. I am also arguing that the discipline of history has failed. It is not that historians aren't doing their jobs but rather that the memory of history has been reconstructed by the elite, because the overwhelming majority of ordinary people rarely leave sufficient primary documents; they do not have others recording their lives in real time.

The phrase "but no matter" is a statement of defiance. It doesn't matter that history has failed us because ordinary people have persisted anyway. This idea gives me an enormous amount of strength and hope as a writer because I am an ordinary person. Those of us who may be women of

color, immigrants, or working class aren't often meant to be people who write novels about ideas, but no matter.

CP: When did you first learn about Frederick Douglass and how has he contributed to your own political consciousness?

MJL: I first learned about Frederick Douglass as a child in school. However, as I got older, I read his writings and gained a different sort of respect for him and his work. Douglass defies every category. Most people think of him as an abolitionist and orator, but I see him as a writer who comes from an "outsider" background. He was primarily self-taught and freed himself literally from nearly every possible cage.

His path to freedom serves as both an amazing metaphor and literal truth. Above all, he wasn't someone who escaped, reached his destination, then closed a door. He kept it open at great cost to himself, and he argued for the rest of his life to include other groups like Native Americans, women and immigrants. He's a vital and necessary example of what humanity can do.

Christopher Petrella, PhD, is the director of advocacy and strategic partnerships at the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University. His forthcoming book is entitled Crimes of this Guilty Land: Histories of White Supremacy in New England (Haymarket Books).

Topics

- Race issues
- Opinion
- Civil rights movement
- comment

PBS NEWS HOUR

'Pachinko' author Min Jin Lee answers your questions

Jul 30, 2018 6:25 PM EDT

Min Jin Lee, author of our July pick for the NewsHour-New York Times book club Now Read This, joins Jeffrey Brown to answer questions from readers, plus Jeff announces August's book.

Read the Full Transcript

Judy Woodruff:

Every month, Now Read This, our book club partnership with The New York Times, features a different book.

Jeffrey Brown talks with author Min Jin Lee and announces our pick for August.

Jeffrey Brown:

"History has failed us, but no matter," the opening line of the acclaimed novel "Pachinko."

It's a page-turning epic of four generations of Koreans living in their homeland and as second-class immigrants in Japan. It was our book club pick this month.

I know many read along with us. And a number have sent in questions for author Min Jin Lee, whom I'm delighted to welcome now.

Hello.

Min Jin Lee:

Hi, Jeff.

Jeffrey Brown:

And I'm glad you could be part of the book club.

Min Jin Lee:

Thanks so much for having me.

Jeffrey Brown:

First, let's start by addressing maybe that first line. "History has failed us."

Tell those who didn't read the book or are less aware of it, what were you after?

vWell, that's my thesis statement.

Jeffrey Brown:

The thesis statement.

Min Jin Lee:

It's my thesis statement.

And I was really trying to argue that I think that history has failed ordinary people around the world, because we're not documented. We're not recorded. And we don't understand what's happened to us, because all of us, historically, because so many people didn't leave primary documents.

So it's not that historians are bad people. They're not elitist. It's just that they can't. So, if you're illiterate, for example, people don't know anything about you, unless people are recording you in real time.

Jeffrey Brown:

Yes.

So you ended up telling a multigenerational story of poor people, basically, moved on around through history.

Min Jin Lee:

And they're forced to move.

So I was really interested in trying to figure out, what were their stories like? And I used to believe that they were victims. And then I met so many of them who are descendants, and I realized, no, they're incredibly fierce and intelligent and incredibly adaptive.

Jeffrey Brown:

All right, let's start with the questions. In fact, the first one goes right to that issue.

Min Jin Lee:

Oh, super.

Jeffrey Brown:

So, let's take a look at that.

Patrica Carr:

I was very interested in the history and the culture in the book. Would you talk a little bit about your research and preparation for the novel?

Min Jin Lee:

Oh, I majored in history in college.

Jeffrey Brown:

Yes?

Min Jin Lee:

So I really like research. And I like reading nonfiction. I love biographies. And I like anthropology and sociology. So I did a lot of academic research first.

And then I did secondary research in terms of the academic and mainstream research. And then I started to really talk to the Korean Japanese when I lived in Japan from 2007...

(CROSSTALK)

Jeffrey Brown:

You lived there yourself?

Min Jin Lee:

I lived there because my husband got a job there.

Jeffrey Brown:

Yes.

Min Jin Lee:

And when I met the Korean Japanese, I realized that all the books were great, but they had a really serious point of view. And it didn't really capture the personality of the people.

And I thought, oh, fiction can do that. Fiction has the ability to expand people's points of view, and also to have the contradictions, because people are so contradictory.

Jeffrey Brown:

And this — just to set the scene, but this takes us through the entire really 20th century, starting in a very poor area of Korea.

Min Jin Lee:

Yes.

Jeffrey Brown:

So you went back and studied the history?

Min Jin Lee:

I did. I did. I even went to historic villages.

I met a lot of people who speak Korean in a very different way than people from Seoul, for example.

Jeffrey Brown:

Yes.

Min Jin Lee:

And a lot of the times, I was so dumbfounded by the complexity and the variety of Koreans in Japan.

And then I met the Koreans — Koreans in Korea. And there was like an incredible variety there, too. So I thought, oh, even I was guilty of having a monolithic view of people in Korea and Japan.

Jeffrey Brown:

OK, let's go to our next question. Let's see what's coming here.

Anatole Ghio:

I have two questions. First, was Koh Hansu modeled off the character of Rhett Butler from "Gone With the Wind"?

And, second, how and where do you discover your characters?

Jeffrey Brown:

OK, well, Koh Hansu is one of the key characters, but to maybe address it more generally, about how you come up with some of these characters.

Min Jin Lee:

The way I come up with characters is by meeting people. And I find people really fascinating, and I take composites.

So, I don't actually have a character that comes up in my head. Usually, they come from interviews. So I will interview a lot of different people, and certain types come up.

Jeffrey Brown:

So the research really goes right to the character, huh?

Min Jin Lee:

Oh, yes, I actually work very much like an academic, not so much like a fiction writer, who often says, I hear a song or I hear a voice. Like, I don't work that way.

I usually come straight from the history and sociology and I go, oh, these people existed.

Jeffrey Brown:

OK, next question.

Diana Levey:

Why did you choose to write from the viewpoints of multiple characters, rather than focusing on an individual and letting his or her story reveal and populate the cultural, economic, political and psychological situations?

Jeffrey Brown:

Multi characters. Interesting question, huh?

Min Jin Lee:

So I use the omniscient narration, which is my hat tip to 19th century literature that I wanted to write, and it's my favorite kind of book.

But I wanted to write a social realist novel. I wanted to tackle immigration. I wanted to tackle homeland. I wanted to tackle identity in a whole community. And, in that sense, I can't be limited to one character or two characters.

So I had to have this huge panorama. And I really like it, because I like minor characters very much. I have always felt like a minor character, so I feel very comfortable talking about them.

Jeffrey Brown:

OK, let's go to one more question for this section.

Nora Flynn Miller:

If your novel was taught in a high school English class, what are the themes that you would want young people to be challenged by and discuss in a literature course?

Min Jin Lee:

That's a terrific question.

And I have been told that it's taught in colleges and in high schools right now, and I have spoken at a couple of high school. But the thing that you're not going to get right away is, I would love for people to talk about a community, because very often people talk about the immigration, the refugee issues, as well as xenophobia.

All those things are absolutely in the book, but I'm interested in the idea of, when you have a student,how does she see herself in a community? What is her role?

Jeffrey Brown:

Yes.

Min Jin Lee:

Because I think, in the U.S., we have so much but individuality.

And I think, actually, individuals are really important, but what's really important is how we're connected to each other.

Jeffrey Brown:

All right, stay right there. We're going to continue our conversation. And we're going to post all of it on our Web site and Facebook page.

And for now, I will say, Min Jin Lee, thank you for "Pachinko," and thank you for joining us.

Min Jin Lee:

Thank you, Jeff.

Jeffrey Brown:

But before we go, let me announce our pick for August.

We're changing it up a bit, and we'd like to perhaps introduce you to a new author. Her name is Lesley Nneka Arimah. She was raised in Nigeria and the U.S. and honored by the National Book Foundation in its five under age 35 category. Her story collection, "What It Means When a Man Falls from the Sky," which is a great title, right, was named a book — a best book of 2017 by numerous publications.


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WIKIPEDIA

Pachinko

Pachinko (パチンコ) is a type of mechanical game originating in Japan and is used as both a form of recreational arcade game and much more frequently as a gambling device, filling a Japanese gambling niche comparable to that of the slot machine in Western gaming.


A pachinko parlor in Tokyo

Pachinko parlors are widespread in Japan, and they usually also feature a number of slot machines (called *pachislo* or pachislots); hence, these venues operate and look similar to casinos. Modern pachinko machines are highly customizable, keeping enthusiasts continuously entertained.

Gambling for cash is illegal in Japan. Pachinko balls won from games cannot be exchanged directly for money in the parlor. The balls also may not be removed from the premises, and are engraved in identifiable patterns showing to which parlor they belong. Balls won at the parlor are exchanged for prizes or tokens, which can be exchanged for cash at a place nominally separate from the parlor. One prize exchange may serve a number of nearby parlors, getting a percentage of the prize's value when it is collected by the parlor.

By 1994, the pachinko market in Japan was valued at ¥30 trillion (nearly $300 billion).[1] As of 2015, Japan's pachinko market generates more gambling revenue than that of Las Vegas, Macau and Singapore combined.[2]

Contents

Description

A pachinko machine resembles a vertical pinball machine, but is different from Western pinball in several ways. First, a pachinko machine uses small (11 mm diameter) steel balls, which are rented to the player by the owner (usually a "pachinko parlor," featuring many individual games in rows), while pinball games use a larger, captive ball. The pachinko balls are not only the active object, but are also the bet and the prize. The player loads one or more balls into the machine, then presses and releases a spring-loaded handle, which is attached to a padded hammer inside the machine, thus launching the ball into a metal track. The track guides the ball around the edge of the playing field, then when the ball loses momentum, it falls into the playing field from near the top. Some pachinko machines have a bumper to bounce the ball as it reaches the top, while other machines allow the ball to travel all the way around the field, to fall on the second time that it reaches the top.

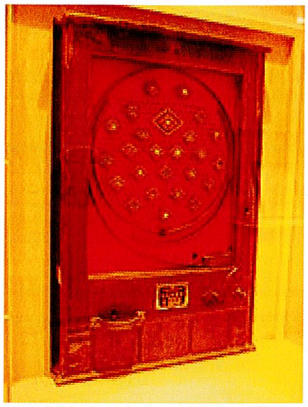
In either case, the ball enters the playing field, which is populated by a large number of brass pins, several small cups into which the player hopes the ball will fall (each catcher is barely the width of the ball), and a hole at the bottom into which the ball will fall if it doesn't enter a catcher. The ball bounces from pin to pin, both slowing the fall and making it travel laterally across the field. A ball which enters a catcher will trigger a payout, in which a number of balls are dropped into a tray at the front of the machine. Many games made since the 1960s feature "tulip" catchers, which have small flippers which open to expand the width of the catcher. Tulip catchers are controlled by the machine, and may open and close randomly or in a pattern; an expert player might try to launch the ball with an impulse and timing to reach the catcher when the flippers are open.[3] The object of the game is to capture as many balls as possible. These balls can then be exchanged for prizes. Pachinko machines were originally strictly mechanical, but modern ones have incorporated extensive electronics, becoming similar to video slot machines.

History

Pachinko machines were first built during the 1920s as a children's toy called the "Corinth game" (コリントゲーム *korinto gēmu*), based on and named after the American "Corinthian bagatelle".[4] Another likely inspiration was the *Billard japonais*, 'Japanese billiards', invented in Western Europe during the 18th century. It emerged as an adult pastime in Nagoya around 1930 and spread from there. All of Japan's pachinko parlors were closed down during World War II but re-emerged in the late 1940s. Pachinko has remained popular since; the first commercial parlor was opened in Nagoya in 1948.[5] As a country influenced by Japan during its occupation, Taiwan has many pachinko establishments.[6] Nowadays an estimated 80 percent of pachinko parlors in Japan are owned by ethnic Koreans.[6]

Until the 1980s, pachinko machines were mechanical devices,[7] using bells to indicate different states of the machine. Electricity was used only to flash lights and to indicate problems, such as a machine emptied of its balls.[8] Balls were launched using a flipper; their speed was controlled by pulling the flipper down to different levels. Manufacturers in this period included Nishijin and Sankyo; most of these machines available on online auction sites today date to the 1970s.[7] After that time, pachinko machines incorporated more electronic features, thus requiring electricity for operation.

Billard japonais, Southern Germany/Alsace ca. 1750–70.



Pre-war pachinko machine.

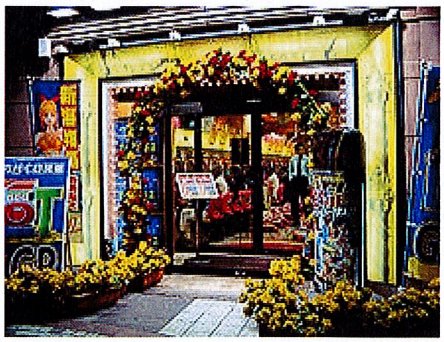
Mechanical pachinko machine from the 1970s.

A modern, electronic pachinko machine in a Tokyo parlor.

Mechanism

To play pachinko, players get a number of metal balls by inserting cash or cards directly into the machine they want to use. These balls are then shot into the machine usually via pulling a lever once for each launch from a ball tray. The balls then fall vertically through an array of pins, levers, cups, traps and various obstacles until they reach the bottom of the machine screen.

The player has a chance to get more balls to play with if one of the launched balls hits a certain place during the fall through the Pachinko machine. Having more balls is considered a benefit, because it allows the player to remain in the game longer and ultimately have a larger winning chance.[9] Newer machines have a digital slot machine on a large screen in the center of the system. The objective of this part is to get 3 numbers or symbols in a row for a jackpot.[10]



Entrance to pachinko parlor in Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan

Older pachinko machines had a spring-loaded lever for shooting the balls individually, but newer ones use a round knob that controls the strength of an electrically fired plunger that shoots the balls onto the playing field. When shot, the balls drop through an array of pins; some of them will fall into the centre gate and start up the slot machine in the centre screen. Every ball that goes into the centre gate results in one spin of the slot machine, but there is a limit on the number of spins at one time because of the possibility of balls passing through the centre gate while a spin is still in progress. Each spin pays out a small number of balls, but the objective is to hit the jackpot. The program of the digital slot machine decides the outcome of the spin when the ball falls through the center gate, not when the spinning animation plays.[11]

Payout mode

If the first 2 numbers or letters of the spin match up, the digital program will display many animations before the third reel stops spinning, to give the player added excitement. This is called a reach (or reachi) and sometimes longer animations are played called super reaches. Pachinko machines offer different odds in hitting a jackpot; if the player manages to obtain a jackpot the machine will enter into payout mode.

The payout mode lasts for a number of rounds. During each round, amidst more animations and movies playing on the centre screen, a large payout gate opens up at the bottom of the machine layout and the player must try to shoot balls into it. Each ball that successfully enters into this gate results in a large number of balls being dropped into a separate tray at the bottom of the machine, which can then be placed into a ball bucket.

The inside workings of a pachinko machine being pulled out of a parlor.

Hidden modes, hints, and instant wins

To enhance gameplay, modern machines have integrated several aspects not possible in vintage machines. One commonly used addition is the ability to change between different play modes, including rare and hidden modes that can differ significantly from normal play. Two examples can be seen in the Evangelion series of pachinko machines, which include mission mode and berserker mode, which range from having little effect on winning to being an almost guaranteed win.[12][13]

The videos played and light patterns can also give players a general idea of what their odds of winning are. For example, a super reach might make a small change in its animation or show an introductory animation or picture. This adds excitement to playing as any given machine will have several common patterns or animations that can occur, with some having much more significance than others in terms of ultimate odds of winning on a given spin. Some machines even allow for instant wins or second-chance wins in which a spin that appears to have lost or have very low chance of winning based on the hints shown will award the player with three matching numbers and enter into fever mode without necessarily matching numbers up during the reach or spin.[14]

Post-payout systems

After the payout mode has ended, the pachinko machine may do one of two things. Most Pachinko machines employ the *kakuhen* (確変, short for 確率変動 meaning probability change) system, where some percentage of the possible jackpots on the digital slot machine result in the odds of hitting the next jackpot multiplying by a large amount, followed by another spin regardless of the outcome. The probability of a *kakuhen* occurring is determined by a random number generator. Hence, under this system, it is possible for a player to get a string of consecutive jackpots after the first "hard earned" one,

commonly referred to as "fever mode". Another type of *kakuhen* system is the special time or ST *kakuhen*. With these machines, every jackpot earned results in a *kakuhen*, but in order to earn a payout beyond the first jackpot, the player must hit a certain set of odds within a given amount of spins.

When a jackpot does not result in a *kakuhen* combination, the pachinko machine will enter into *jitan* (時短, short for 時間短縮 meaning time-reduction) mode, with a much larger number of spins than *kakuhen*. Under the original payout odds, the center gate widens to make it considerably easier for balls to fall into it; this system is also present in *kakuhen*. To compensate for the increase in the number of spins, the digital slot machine produces the final outcomes of each spin faster. ST pachinko machines do not offer this mode; after it ends, the machine spins as in *kakuhen*. Once no more jackpots have been made, the pachinko machine reverts to its original setting.

Koatari

Starting in 2007, the majority of Japanese pachinko machines started to include *koatari* (小当たり, small jackpot) into their payout systems. *Koatari* is shorter than the normal jackpot and during payout mode the payout gate opens for a short time only, even if no balls go into it. The timing of the opening of the gates is unpredictable, effectively making it a jackpot where the player receives no payout. *Koatari* jackpots can result in a *kakuhen* as per normal operation, depending on the payout scheme of the machine in question. The main purpose of *koatari* is so that pachinko manufacturers can offer payout schemes that *appear* to be largely favorable to customers, without losing any long-term profit.

In addition to being able to offer higher *kakuhen* percentages, *koatari* made it possible for manufacturers to design battle-type machines. Unlike old-fashioned pachinko machines that offer a full payout or a *kakuhen* for any type of jackpot earned, these machines require players to hit a *kakuhen* jackpot with a certain probability in order to get a full payout. This is orchestrated by the player entering into "battle", where the player, in accordance with the item that machine is based on, must "defeat" a certain enemy or foe in order to earn another *kakuhen*. If the player loses, it means that a normal *koatari* has been hit and the machine enters into jitan mode.

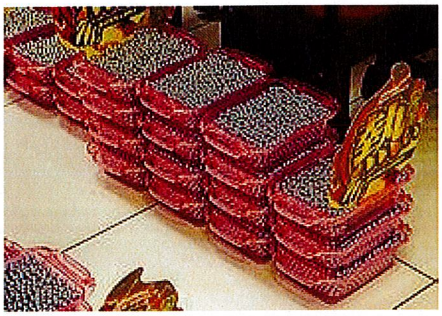
Another reason for incorporating *koataris* is that they make it possible for a machine to go into *kakuhen* mode without the player's knowledge. This is referred to as *senpuku* (潜伏 'hidden') *kakuhen* because it does not occur in any of the jackpot modes. A player sitting at a used pachinko machine offering a 1 in x chance of hitting a jackpot in normal mode can hit it within x spins easily because the previous player did not realize that the machine was in *senpuku*. This induces players to keep playing their machines, even though they may still be in normal mode. Japanese pachinko players have not shown significant signs of protest in response to the incorporation of *koatari*; on the contrary, battle-type pachinko machines have become a major part of most parlors.

Design

Pachinko machines vary in several aspects, including decoration, music, modes and gates. The majority of modern machines have an LCD screen centered over the main start pocket. The game is played with keeping the stream of balls to the left of the screen, but many models will have their optimized ball stream to be in the center of the play field or to switch from left side to right side depending on the game mode. Vintage machines vary in pocket location and strategy with the majority having a specific center piece that usually contains win pockets.

Prizes

Winnings take the form of additional balls, which players may either use to keep playing or exchange for prizes (景品 *keihin*). When players wish to exchange their winnings, they must call a parlor staff member by using a call button located at the top of their station. The staff member will then carry the player's balls to an automated counter to see how many


Pachinko balls

balls they have. After recording the number of balls the player won and the number of the machine they used, the staff member will then give the player a voucher or card with the number of balls stored in it. The player then hands it in at the parlor's exchange center to get their prizes. Among the array of prizes available, there will invariably be an item known as the "special prize" (特殊景品 *tokushu keihin*: typically a small silver or gold novelty item encased in plastic) that can be sold for cash at an outside establishment in the vicinity of the parlor. Special prizes are awarded to the player in amounts corresponding to the number of balls won. For example, one special prize worth ¥1500 outside the parlor might be offered to a customer per 400 balls won, assuming each ball originally cost 4 yen. The vast majority of players opt for the maximum number of special prizes offered for their ball total, selecting other prizes only when they have a remaining total too small to receive a special prize.[15]

Besides the special prizes, prizes may be as simple as chocolate bars, pens or cigarette lighters, or as complicated as electronics, bicycles and other items. Under Japanese law, cash cannot be paid out directly for pachinko balls, but there is usually a small establishment located nearby, separate from the game parlor but sometimes in a separate unit as part of the same building, where players may sell special prizes for cash. This is tolerated by the police because the pachinko parlors that pay out goods and special prizes are nominally independent from the shops that buy back the special prizes.[16] Some pachinko parlors may even give out vouchers for groceries at a nearby supermarket. The *yakuza* (organized crime) were formerly often involved in prize exchange, but a great deal of police effort beginning in the 1960s and ramping up in the 1990s has largely done away with their influence.[15] In Tokyo, the special prize exchange is handled exclusively by the Tokyo Union Circulation company (known as TUC), which sells pachinko and slot parlors gold slivers in standardized plastic cases, which it buys back from winning customers at its "TUC Shop" windows.[17]

Recreational pachinko

Many video arcades in Japan feature pachinko models from different times. They offer more playing time for a certain amount of money spent and have balls exchanged for game tokens, which can only be used to play other games in the establishment. As many of these arcades are smoke-free and the gambling is removed, this is popular for casual players, children, and those wanting to play in a more relaxed atmosphere. Thrifty gamblers may spend a small amount on a newly released model in such establishments to get the feel for the machine before going to a real parlor. The same machines can be found in many stores, with the difference being that they pay out capsules containing a prize coupon or store credit.

Regulations

Smoking

Smoking is allowed in parlors, although there are discussions in Japan to extend public smoking bans to pachinko parlors.[18]

Crime

Gambling is illegal in Japan, but pachinko is regarded as an exception and treated as an amusement activity.[19] Although awarding direct money prizes for pachinko is illegal, it is possible for parlors to reward players with golden tokens which can then be sold for cash at nearby exchange centers.[20] With the growing public and political pressure in recent years,

since passage of Japan's blanket anti-gambling law in the 1990s, the police are more active in regulating parlors.[15] Retired officers often work in the pachinko parlor industry; critics have pointed out that while this has had a deterrent effect against organized crime involvement, it also means that these operators are in a strong position to influence police officers in their favor.[15]

An anti pachinko demonstration in Tokyo, Japan (2013)

The police tolerate the level of gambling in pachinko parlors. For example, in May 2005, a parlor in Kanagawa prefecture reported to the local police that someone had counterfeited their tokens and made off with the equivalent of US$60,000 in cash by trading them in at their nearby exchange center. Even with such information proving that this parlor was illegally operating an exchange center, which by law must be independent from the parlor, the police did not shut them both down, but instead only worked to track down the thief in question.[21]

Ball designs

Pachinko balls are forbidden to be removed from a parlor to be used elsewhere. To help prevent this, many parlors have a design or name engraved in each ball vended so that someone can be spotted carrying a tray of balls brought from the outside. This has led some to start collections of pachinko balls with various designs.

Franchises

A number of media franchises, mainly Japanese media franchises (including Japanese film, anime, manga, television and video game franchises), have generated significant revenue from sales of licensed pachinko and pachislot machines to pachinko parlors and arcades.[22][23]