

THE ROLE OF KOREAN CUISINE IN NEGOTIATING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN MICHELLE ZAUNER'S *CRYING IN H MART*

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ABSTRACT. *This research discusses Zauner's journey of identity as a second-generation Korean American diaspora living in America. She wants to negotiate her Korean identity in a dominant society using Korean cuisine as the ultimate gateway. The data for this research were taken from a memoir titled Crying in H Mart by Michelle Zauner, analyzed using Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity theory, specifically the concepts of being, becoming, and positioning, to clarify how Zauner's identity journey unfolded. This research aims to reveal the construction of diaspora cultural identity through cultural negotiation, utilizing Korean cuisine as a primary tool to explore cultural heritage. The results of this research indicate that Zauner's identity is not static but dynamic instead, representing her complex life journey. Before deciding to negotiate her Korean identity, Zauner experienced many things in America, including discrimination that once made her ashamed of her Korean heritage. As she matured, she realized that Korean cuisine was not merely a means of sustenance but a tool for navigating Korean culture within American society. Thus, it becomes evident how the writing in this memoir constructs a framework that reveals the author's purpose in writing the memoir or the author's position. There is a construction of soft power diplomacy in her memoir; emphasizing detailed descriptions of cooking methods, serving, and Korean cuisine.*

Keywords: *cultural identity; diasporic life; korean cuisine; cultural analysis; discrimination*

PERAN MAKANAN KOREA DALAM MENEGOSIASIKAN IDENTITAS BUDAYA DI MEMOAR *CRYING IN H MART* KARYA MICHELLE ZAUNER

ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini mengkaji soal perjalanan identitas Zauner, seorang subjek diaspora Korea-Amerika generasi kedua yang tinggal di Amerika Serikat. Analisis berfokus pada bagaimana subjek diaspora menegosiasi kultur Koreanya ditengah masyarakat dominan melalui kuliner Korea sebagai pintu masuk. Data penelitian diambil dari memoar berjudul *Crying in H Mart* karya Michelle Zauner, yang dianalisis menggunakan Teori Identitas Budaya Stuart Hall, khususnya konsep-konsep being, becoming, dan "positioning, untuk menjelaskan bagaimana perjalanan identitas Zauner berlangsung. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap konstruksi identitas budaya diaspora melalui negosiasi budaya, dengan menggunakan masakan Korea sebagai alat utama untuk mengeksplorasi warisan budaya. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa identitas Zauner tidak statis namun dinamis, merepresentasikan perjalanan hidupnya yang kompleks. Sebelum memutuskan untuk menegosiasikan identitas Korea-nya, Zauner mengalami banyak hal di Amerika, termasuk diskriminasi yang pernah membuatnya malu dengan warisan Korea-nya. Seiring pertumbuhannya, ia menyadari bahwa masakan Korea bukan sekadar sarana bertahan hidup, tetapi alat untuk menavigasi budaya Korea dalam masyarakat Amerika. Dengan demikian, menjadi jelas bagaimana penulisan dalam memoar ini membangun kerangka yang mengungkapkan tujuan penulis dalam menulis memoar atau posisi penulis. Ada konstruksi diplomasi *soft power* dalam memoarnya, dengan penekanan pada deskripsi rinci tentang metode memasak, penyajian, dan masakan Korea.

Kata kunci: identitas budaya; diaspora; makanan korea; analisis budaya; diskriminasi

INTRODUCTION

Identity is a characteristic that develops over the course of a human life. Identity is a crucial concept, especially for diaspora societies that experience cultural identity confusion. Cohen (2023) defines a diaspora as a person or a particular ethnic group that relocates to a different geographical area due to various factors, such as economic, political, or socio-cultural migration. Even though they have moved and live in a new environment, diaspora citizens still have strong emotional ties to their homeland. Diaspora is more than just a physical movement of people; it is also about maintaining the original cultural identity in a new place. Hall (1990) states that cultural identity is not a fixed concept but rather a concept that is

always in process, resulting from a person's history, culture, and adaptation process. Cultural identity is closely related to diaspora because the identity is often shaped and influenced by diaspora experiences.

Cultural identity consists of many aspects, one of which is cuisine. Despite the common perception of cuisine as a cure for hunger, it also serves as a symbol of cultural identity, particularly among diaspora residents. As Dalessio (2012:2) says, "Food consumption is always culturally constructed, and therefore, what we eat and don't eat is largely a result of which group we belong to." For diaspora residents, cuisine can shape culture and serve as a tool to negotiate cultural identity. When at home, they often cook traditional cuisine to maintain a connection with their cultural roots. However, when in public,

they usually adapt the cuisine typically eaten by the dominant community to fit in well. Although they are not fully able to preserve their mother culture in the dominant culture, at least their cuisine can help negotiate cultural identity for diaspora residents who must socialise with other cultures every day. The topic of cultural identity and diaspora is particularly intriguing, as numerous literary works explore the challenge of diaspora residents adapting to a new identity while simultaneously negotiating their original one, often through memoirs.

As a genre of creative writing about the author's specific, significant period in their own life, memoirs focus on personal memories, emotions, and reflections rather than an entire biographical writing. Different from autobiography, a memoir uses storytelling techniques to create an emotional connection with the reader by revealing a "universal truth." Hence, in terms literary research, memoir can be used as the source of data to find out how it represents cultural identity in the part of Zauner as the second generation of diasporic subject.

Crying in H Mart is a memoir that tells the story of Zauner's experience in facing complex identity and finally embracing her Korean culture as a second-generation Korean American diaspora. Before deciding to delve into her ancestral culture, Zauner expressed her discomfort with how others perceived her as a mixed race. While living in the United States, she often faced discrimination from native Americans because her face tended to blend in with Asian features; some Americans still harboured prejudices against Asians. The American perspective on Asian immigrants, coupled with the Korean emphasis on strict beauty standards, left her feeling increasingly alienated between the two cultures (Besman et al., 2018). Zauner often felt trapped between two opposing cultures and never entirely accepted by either one.

We are interested in analysing *Crying in H Mart* as the object of this research because this memoir serves the issue of cultural identity that is divided within a Korean-American person. In the journey, Zauner experiences confusion, longing, and a search for meaning about what it means to be Korean and American. Based on what Zauner experiences, the issue of how cultural identity is constructed through diaspora experiences and memory becomes an intriguing area for exploration. Therefore, Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity is applied. According to Hall (1990: 713), cultural identity continues to evolve with the times because it encompasses various cultural phenomena in each era. For diaspora residents, being a cultural minority

within a dominant culture is a source of pressure and confusion about the balance between two cultures, as experienced by the author and the main character in *Crying in H Mart*.

This article discusses the lives of the diaspora in *Crying in H Mart*. As introduced before, the diaspora refers to the movement of minority communities within a dominant society, encompassing a complex process of identity formation. Diaspora is a process of cultural adaptation by the diaspora community, which involves negotiating its minority identity within the dominant culture. This study questions how the construction of Korean cuisine is used as a tool to negotiate cultural identity in the United States. Therefore, Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity is used to analyse the complexity of the diaspora characters' identities to find a sense of home. This research aims to explore how the main character, a Korean-American in this memoir, navigates the complexities of being between two cultures and the role of Korean cuisine in shaping their complex identity. In addition, this research also identifies the critical position of the author and main character as subjects of diaspora.

Based on the explanation, cultural identity becomes the focus of the problem that occurs in *Crying in H Mart*. Thus, two main problem questions served:

1. How does the memoir construct the negotiation of cultural identity through Korean cuisine in Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H Mart*?
2. How is the author's critical position?

In answering the two research questions, the operational of Hall's theory is explained in the following research method.

METHOD

The data collected in the research is done through close reading technique, paying attention to details supporting the need of the study, i.e. the narratives and dialogues in the memoir showing the process of Zauner's cultural identity formation. Furthermore, additional data about Korean diaspora in the US are also collected, since Hall's theory about cultural identity embrace discursive approach. The collected data are then processed through classification step comprising main data taken from the memoir and additional data taken from sources other than the memoir. The analysis is done by mapping the issue in the memoir referring to how Zauner experiences discrimination for being a Korean diasporic subject, how she negotiates her Korean culture and how her cultural identity is constructed. As Hall states, cultural

identity is not something that already exists and fixed. Instead, it is the result of experiences, history, and socio-cultural contexts that continue to change and develop over time (Hall, 1990: 222). Furthermore, the concepts of *being* and *becoming* are inseparable, interconnected and play a crucial role in determining an individual's *positioning*. According to Hall's explanation above, it can be said that Zauner's *being* is an identity that already exists from the past based on her historical experience. Then, we can refer to the process of her journey as *becoming* where a new identity emerges and constantly re-emerges. Since Hall's theory of cultural identities embraces discursive approach, it is necessary to relate the discourse of cultural identity in the memoir to the experience of Korean diasporic subject in the US around the time the memoir was written. By relating them, it will be figured out the critical positioning of Zauner as the author as well as the Korean diasporic subject living in the US.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part shows how Zauner, a second-generation Korean diaspora in America, experiences complexities regarding her identity and begins negotiating it through Korean cuisine applied in Hall's Cultural Identity theory.

1. Zauner's Cultural Dynamic as a Diasporic Subject

Diaspora people who live in the host country usually negotiate their cultural identity indirectly to adapt well. They move to another country is due to many factors, including the marriage experienced by Zauner's parents, making her the second-generation Korean diaspora in America.

1) Being a Second-Generation Korean Diaspora

Zauner was a baby born in Korea and raised in America. She is the child of a Korean mother and an American father. Her mother has always watched Zauner's journey as an American citizen. Despite adapting to the West, her mother indirectly observed Korean culture applied by her daughter gradually, so the child is always connected to her homeland. From there, Zauner was confused as to who she was. This is common among the second generation of the Korean diaspora in America, who grew up in America and have a sturdy Korean background. They tend to have an identity that does not fully align with the dominant culture where they live or their parents' culture (Park, 2009). This part focuses on Zauner's history, starting from how she was born and raised in this world. The part will explain how she experienced the dilemma of her identity before she felt positioned by others

and eventually had to negotiate her identity through many things, including Korean cuisine.

They dated for three months and when the training program ended, my father asked my mother to marry him. The two of them made their way through three countries during the mid-'80s, living in Misawa, Heidelberg, and Seoul again, where I was born. (Zauner, 2021: 11)

The fact that she was born in Seoul is a significant indicator that she comes from a place rich in cultural significance despite having spent much of her life outside the context of Korean culture. She was born with the full name Michelle Chongmi Zauner in Seoul, South Korea. The name is a mixture of American and Korean names.

Chongmi was named after her mother, while Zauner was named after her father. The naming pattern follows the American style. This aligns with the practice of most Korean American diaspora couples who name their children using American naming conventions to facilitate assimilation (Kim, 1987). Zauner is the child of a Korean mother and a Caucasian American father who has lived in an American environment since she was an infant. This represents a form of identity as a being, a starting point that conveys a sense of authenticity or originality, though it will later be questioned and negotiated.

"Are you Korean?"

"*Ne, Seoul-eseo taeonasseoyo*," I said as quickly and seamlessly as possible. Yes, I was born in Seoul. My mouth was loose and comfortable with the words I knew, and I said them as if trying to impress her, or more realistically, trying to mask my linguistic shortcomings (Zauner, 2021: 199).

Being a Korean descent living in the United States made her feel comfortable with the language, but she admitted that she could not fully understand it. She experiences the dilemma faced by many Korean children in America, where they grow up surrounded by the Korean language but cannot understand it fully because their lives are dominated by American culture (Zauner, 2021:52). This is one of the reasons behind their decision regarding their ancestral culture. Zauner must understand and accept her Korean identity, even though she has not fully mastered it. Many Korean immigrant children in America share similar experiences with Zauner, as they are accustomed to hearing Korean at home but lack the full ability to speak or understand the language comprehensively (Jeong, 2021). This is a consequence of assimilation into American

culture, where English is dominant in everyday life.

2) Societal Perception as a Perpetual Stranger in Every Space

As a Korean American diasporic person living in America, Zauner is often treated differently from the dominant culture that considers her foreign from most Americans. On the other hand, her mother and Korean family continuously help Zauner explore Korean culture. This causes Zauner to rack her brains to adapt better so that she is always accepted by society, both in the American and Korean environments. This part discusses the complexity of Zauner's identity journey in dealing with perceptions from both sides before she finally chooses to negotiate her cultural identity through Korean cuisine.

In Eugene, I was one of just a few mixed-race kids at my school and most people thought of me as Asian. I felt awkward and undesirable, and no one ever complimented my appearance. In Seoul, most Koreans assumed I was Caucasian, until my mother stood beside me and they could see the half of her fused to me, and I made sense. Suddenly, my "exotic" look was something to be celebrated. (Zauner, 2021:27-28)

Zauner has experienced racial discrimination since childhood. Being frequently questioned about her racial origins, She felt awkward and unwanted. In Lacan's view (2007), Zauner felt that the gaze of the dominant society always determined her identity. She did not have complete control over who she was, as she was constantly being judged and labelled by others. This had an impact on the development of her self-esteem, sense of security, and psychological integrity. Her identity was fragile and emotionally vulnerable, as there was no social response that she could fully trust as an accurate representation of herself. This response influences how second-generation diaspora members behave in their daily lives and how they perceive themselves as descendants of the second-generation diaspora. Caught between two cultures, they must resist the standardization they face, as the second-generation experiences more complex issues than the first generation, given that being part of the diaspora was not their own choice but that of their parents (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001:150).

'Are you Chinese?' 'No.' 'Are you Japanese?' I shook my head. 'Well, what are you, then?'

I wanted to inform her there were more than two countries that made up the Asian continent but I was too confounded to answer. There was something in my face that other people deciphered as a thing

displaced from its origin, like I was some kind of alien or exotic fruit (Zauner, 2021:83).

Being at the point of re-embracing Korean culture through Korean cuisine must go through a highly complex process for Zauner. When she was twelve years old, she felt discriminated against by her schoolmates. Her friends' questions indicated they seemed to distinguish Asian creatures from Americans. Zauner thought she was unfamiliar and cornered by that discriminatory question. Moreover, the question "What are you then?" makes her feel like an astral being who came to earth (Zauner, 2021:83). The treatment of her friends had an impact on the upheaval of Zauner's identity, which at that time was increasingly wanting to eliminate her Korean identity and merge with the Caucasian race. Zauner asked her mother not to make any more lunches at school for fear that her friends would see her eating Korean cuisine, so she preferred to follow what her friends bought at the cafeteria.

Zauner even experienced verbal abuse by her schoolmates, "I tortured myself over whether it was because of the crude jokes boys in my class would make about Asians having sideways pussies and loving you a long time (Zauner, 2021:83)." Although this is a joke, the context of this joke contains racism and verbal sexual abuse to Zauner. In the United States, Asian women often objectify Asian women's bodies through fetishization based on an event that frequently appears in Western industrial culture. Louie (2016) said that the phrase "Love You Long Time" comes from the 1987 film *Full Metal Jacket*, which has an interpretation that Asian women are tools to satisfy the lust of American men who must be submissive, docile, have an exotic appearance, and behave politely to American men. Zauner's experience reflects the difficulties often faced by Korean-American women in the diaspora, who must navigate social pressure, racial discrimination, and fetishization. This shows how diaspora identities are not naturally formed or developed freely but must be negotiated through interaction with more dominant social forces.

2. Negotiating Korean Culture in America

After experiencing many things in her journey, Zauner decided to negotiate her identity through Korean cuisine. Her exploration of her Korean identity in America is also reflected in her activities, which increasingly explore Korean cuisine. Initially, Zauner was only a Korean cuisine eater, but over time, she began to learn how to cook Korean cuisine with the help of her mother. The peak of Zauner's study of Korean cooking was when her mother died.

After her mother passed away, Zauner became more frequent in cooking Korean cuisine by learning how to cook through social media. Although the American environment surrounds Zauner, she does not forget her cultural heritage by negotiating Korean culture through Korean cuisine.

1) Visiting H Mart: Re-Embracing Korean Cultural Heritage

As a member of the Korean diaspora who mingles in America, Zauner sometimes feels longing for Korea and goes to one of the Asian supermarkets there. She can hardly speak Korean, but in H Mart, it feels like she is fluent (Zauner, 2021:2). At H Mart, she thinks that she can speak Korean fluently and flexibly because she meets many Korean diasporas people who are like her, living in an American neighborhood. Meeting colleagues with the same background makes her feel more confident in doing everything, including crying. H Mart is a store that specializes in selling Asian products located in Elkins Park, Philadelphia, USA. For Zauner, H Mart is not just an Asian product store but an Asian store that provides all the best Korean products in town, unlike other stores. This case aligns with the concept of positioning by Hall (1990), which talks about how cultural identity is formed based on a person placing herself in a situation where that person must face another culture. In this part, Zauner positioned herself according to what was happening where she was at H Mart, an Asian store that many Koreans were in. While in America, she mainly speaks English, at H Mart, she is more complimentary to use her proud language, which is Korean.

I wonder how many people at H Mart miss their families. How many are thinking of them as they bring their trays back from the different stalls. If they're eating to feel connected, to celebrate these people through food. Which ones weren't able to fly back home this year, or for the past ten years? Which ones are like me, missing the people who are gone from their lives forever? (Zauner, 2021:6)

In the quote, Zauner describes how the American diaspora who visit H Mart try to stay connected to their home culture by buying their specialties as a bridge to their homeland. The cuisine at H Mart is a hunger reliever and a medium to pamper beautiful memories of their past, family, and homeland. Zauner defines H Mart as a shopping place where many diaspora residents release their fatigue after spending a whole day with the dominant cultural community. H Mart pampers its visitors with a variety of cuisine that are served precisely with the

taste of the visitor's homeland so that it evokes an emotional bond between the person, the cuisine, the motherland, and H Mart (Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2014:2).

This statement is reinforced by one of the sentences in the following paragraphs, "We're all searching for a piece of home, or a piece of ourselves" (Zauner, 2021:7). In addition to aiming to release longing with memories through the cuisine they buy at H Mart, they, and Zauner, have the primary goal of finding an atmosphere called home as their shelter. At H Mart, they found it a place where they could be themselves without relying on the outside world filled with dominant cultures. As a second generation, Zauner feels freer surrounded by people with the same background as her. The second generation tends to think that they find the definition of the word "home" when they can experience their home culture dominantly, not as a minority, as they experience it daily (Kim, 2018:294). Being around immigrants made her feel like she had a place to go home to when she was tired of facing the dominant culture.

2) Korean Cuisine as the Ultimate Gateway to Vibe with Korean Culture

In a diasporic society, cuisine is symbolized as an expression of an identity attached to a person in a cultural cluster. It is categorized as a cultural heritage that does not need to be doubted. Zauner relies on her mother's presence as a link between her and Korean culture. Even though she did not formally learn to cook Korean cuisine from her mother, Zauner still cooks cuisine like *kimchi* according to her confidence and deep understanding of the taste of Korean cuisine she had felt during her childhood. *Kimchi* has become a mandatory dish for Koreans. *Kimchi* is usually served with other main dishes to neutralize other dishes' spicy, sweet, or salty taste. Cho (2006: 211) states that *kimchi* is not just an ordinary cuisine but also a symbol of Korean cultural identity. The Korean government strongly supports *kimchi* as a national cuisine symbol, including it on the "One Hundred Symbols of National Culture" list since 2006. With *kimchi*, the Korean diaspora community can feel the sensation of "home" since *kimchi* has become a national cuisine, and maybe with the presence of the Korean diaspora in many countries, *kimchi* can be known not only in Korea. This shows that cultural identity can be inherited through many things explicitly and implicitly, one of which is expressly through everyday habits that occur in the family: eating traditional Korean cuisine in America.

Growing up in America with a Caucasian father and a Korean mother, I relied on my mom for access to our Korean heritage. While she never actually taught me how to cook (Korean people tend to disavow measurements and supply only cryptic instructions along the lines of “add sesame oil until it tastes like Mom’s”), she did raise me with a distinctly Korean appetite. This meant a reverence for good food and a predisposition to emotional eating. We were particular about everything: *kimchi* had to be perfectly sour, *samgyupsal* perfectly crisped; stews had to be piping hot or they might as well have been inedible (Zauner, 2021:1).

Cuisine is the main link of their cultural identity in most Korean American families. Cuisine is one of the sacral things for the Korean diaspora. They must be careful in sourcing foodstuffs and processing cuisine, in this case, making *kimchi*, which must have perfect similarity, *samgyupsal* must be crispy, and soup must be served very hot according to Korean standards to maintain the authentic value of Korean cuisine. In Korean culture, cuisine is not just a biological need but also a symbol of identity, emotional connection, and respect for tradition (Chung et al., 2016). Zauner’s realization that she is a descendant of the Korean diaspora living in America makes her remember the Korean heritage she learned from her mother. Zauner’s journey has influenced the change and acceptance of her identity until nowadays. Hall (1990:225) states that people’s identity is influenced by *being and becoming*, which means a process of a person’s historical journey from birth until now.

Zauner’s mother shows the process of *being and becoming* as a manifestation of her love for her child by preparing meaningful cuisine. “Soak short ribs for two days,” reflecting the attention to detail and the importance of cuisine preparation in Korean culture. “Filling the fridge with her child’s favorite *banchan*” shows how cuisine is used as a tool to maintain family connections and cultural identity. “Buying and fermenting *kimchi* in a certain way,” which is not only related to taste but also to the authenticity and authenticity of the way of eating in Korean culture (Zauner, 2021:60).

“I didn’t know how to cook many Korean dishes on my own, and the few I had learned to prepare were too heavy for her current state. I felt lost. I asked her constantly if she could think of anything I could cook for her, but she had no cravings to chase and dismissed my suggestions listlessly. The only thing she could come up with was Ottogi brand cream soup, an instant powder I could buy at the Asian grocery that was neutral and easy to digest.” (Zauner, 2021:68)

Many Korean immigrant children do not automatically inherit traditional dish-making skills, as they are more likely to eat Korean cuisine prepared by their parents than to learn to cook it themselves. Zauner felt lost when she could no longer rely on her mother’s cooking. She thought she had to be able to cook Korean to connect with her mother’s culture again. There is another case when Zauner desperately wanted *jatjuk*, pine nut porridge when she was sick. Kye, her helper, makes *jatjuk* for her, but Zauner intends to make it herself because she has to master how to make Korean cuisine. She once said, “That food was an unspoken language between us, that it had come to symbolize our return to each other, our bonding, our common ground” (Zauner, 2021: 86). Cuisine is a tool for Zauner to understand her mother and vice versa. In addition, cuisine is also a symbol of return to each other, between her and her mother. If interpreted more broadly, this can be construed as Zauner wanting to return to Korean culture through cuisine, where her mother firmly upholds Korean culture.

Zauner’s tension began to arise when she asked her mother for direct instruction on how to make cuisine. At this moment, they happened to be in different places, so Zauner had to call to be taught by her mother. Her mother gave the tutorial haphazardly with uncertain doses. This describes the traditional Korean way of cooking, which relies on intuition and experience in previous cooking. According to Kennedy (2024), in AP News, Lisa Kyung Gross, a top chef founder of *The League of Kitchens*, said that many traditional family recipes often do not have definitive recipes and tutorials, so it requires a good understanding of instincts adapted to experience. More specifically, Chef Roy Choi said that cooking traditional cuisine takes competent, intuitive knowledge without precise measurements because the proper measurements come from great instinct (Choi, 2022). A great instinct comes from nothing but sincerity when cooking so that the results of the cuisine taste homier.

Growing up in an America that learned everything systematically and standardized, Zauner was not used to Korean cooking, which relied only on intuition. Zauner was even frustrated because of technical difficulties in cooking, which required her to use her feelings. This led to an identity conflict between the first and second generations of the Korean diaspora in America in terms of cooking. The first generation tends to use only an estimate of feelings. In contrast, the second generation, exposed to American culture in such a way, must know everything with certainty and logic. These

differences create an emotional and cultural distance where American cultural assimilation often clashes with the cultural roots of Korean traditions. Despite experiencing many things, Zauner still cooks Korean cuisine wholeheartedly, always to be connected to Korean culture and always connected between generations. According to Hall (1990), this case is a form of *becoming* where hospitality rebuilds its ancestral identity by cooking traditional Korean cuisine.

I racked my brain for something I could make them for breakfast and landed on *doenjang jjigae*, the ultimate Korean comfort food. My mother often served it alongside our Korean meals, a rich, hearty stew filled with vegetables and tofu. I had never made the dish myself, but I knew its basic components and what it should taste like. Still in bed, I turned onto my side and googled how to make Korean fermented soybean soup. The first link led me to a website run by a woman named Maangchi. There was a YouTube player at the top of the page and a recipe on the bottom. The video was shaky and pixelated. A Korean woman who appeared to be about my mother's age stood over the sink of a dimly lit kitchen (Zauner, 2021: 145).

After the death of her mother, Zauner felt there was an emptiness in her life. The house had no more Korean touches, such as her mother's cuisine or mixed Korean and English conversations. At one point, she cooked Korean cuisine at home called *doenjang jjigae*, a traditional Korean soup made from fermented soybean paste, vegetables, meat, or seafood. Zauner said in her memoir that this cuisine is the ultimate Korean cuisine that her mother used to serve (Zauner, 2021: 145). Apart from the stomach's needs, this cuisine shows Zauner's efforts to reconnect with Korean culture. Previously, Zauner only enjoyed Korean cuisine passively by eating the cuisine made by her mother or buying Korean instant cuisine at H Mart. After her mother's death, she started to cook Korean cuisine by herself. This shows her role from passive, who only enjoys Korean cuisine, to an active role, which is also cooking Korean cuisine. She not only accepts Korean traditions but also takes part in negotiating Korean traditions by cooking Korean cuisine.

All things considered, Zauner's willingness to negotiate Korean culture through Korean cuisine started when she felt unfamiliar with Korea. There were times when she focused on her American associations so that she could not enjoy the essence of the meaning of Korean food. Gradually, her awareness began to grow because she had to be able to cook Korean cuisine by herself with the help of her

mother. Previously, she only enjoyed dishes made by her mother. Zauner started to get serious about cooking Korean cuisine after her mother's death because she felt she had to preserve Korean culture, which could connect her with her mother. Despite going through a lot, Zauner still managed to negotiate her identity through Korean cuisine in the American environment.

3. Critical Position of the Author

In addition to honoring her mother in this memoir, Zauner also describes the complexity of her cultural identity as a second-generation diaspora. As a second-generation diaspora with an American father and a Korean mother, she aims to demonstrate how her identity shapes her relationship with the dominant culture. Her experiences as a diaspora are shared in *Crying in H Mart*, including her experiences of being viewed as different by the dominant culture. Zauner confirms this in her interview with Conan O'Brien on the Team Coco (2023), where she often felt confused about her identity because the dominant American society frequently asked her who she was. Zauner's critical position highlights the discrimination perpetuated by the dominant society toward those deemed different. Zauner emphasizes that discriminating against those who are different from us is a harmful attitude with negative consequences, particularly on one's mental well-being.

The detailed depiction of Korean cuisine creates a persuasive sensation for readers to explore Korean cuisine. This work can be seen as a form of soft cultural diplomacy or soft power carried out from the perspective of ordinary people, not the state. Nye (2019) states that soft power is the art of persuading citizens of other countries without forcing or threatening the country's sovereignty to be interested in a thing or lifestyle through grassroots, not made by the government. Zauner here is inviting international readers to enjoy Korean cuisine through the emotional path she poured out through her memoir. She conveys that culture not only belongs to the country of origin but also lives and develops in diasporic versions to be further introduced to other countries.

CONCLUSION

As a second-generation Korean diaspora living in America, Zauner negotiates her cultural identity through Korean cuisine to adapt well. Through Hall's Cultural Identity theory, we can see the element of *being* that Zauner inherited Korean identity through

her mother and American identity through her father. Hence, she began to show the process of *becoming*, and she started to want to dive into Korean culture by going to H Mart. H Mart is an Asian grocery store in America that sells a lot of Korean cuisine. Sometimes Zauner buys fast food or ingredients that she cooks herself at home. Zauner feels she has found her home again by cooking and eating Korean cuisine. Finally, she can negotiate her Korean and American identity without losing either.

Zauner's point of view as a writer shows that she wants to voice that the Korean diaspora in America also deserves a decent life without being treated as strangers. In addition, depicting details about Korean cuisine, such as the right timing to eat *doenjang jjigae* and cooking Korean cuisine with authentic Korean to produce cuisine that has a distinctive home-style taste that everyone wants, is one form of soft power diplomacy by Zauner. Soft power diplomacy is an art of inviting and promoting a culture, habit, or lifestyle slowly and indirectly through many things, one of which is wrapped in literary works that Zauner poured out through *Crying in H Mart*.

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