

TENACIOUS KOREAN WOMEN
Reconstruction of Gender Roles from the Joseon Dynasty to 20th-Century Immigration

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By

Sunny Moon, M.A.

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Thesis Advisor: Ariel Glulich, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Korean immigrant women to the United States at the beginning of the 20th century proved that existing gender roles can be deconstructed and reconstructed. Agreeing with the famous statement of Simone de Beauvoir that “being born male or female does not determine behavior,” Judith Butler’s gender performativity claims that everyday actions, speech utterances, gestures, dress codes, behaviors, and rituals are constructed within a given culture as essential components of masculine or feminine identity. An analysis of the Neo-Confucian patriarchal society of the Joseon dynasty finds that the dominant authorities at the time constructed and reinforced gender roles to control women’s behavior. Korean immigrant women’s experiences on foreign soil validate the possibility of deconstruction and reconstruction; gender roles could be altered through their struggle for survival and subsequent rebuilding of family structures from patriarchy to matriarchy. This matriarchy was possible in part because of America’s more advanced democratic capitalist society, where most extreme forms of patriarchy had eroded, and because the gendered immigration policy led to an extremely unbalanced sex ratio in the Korean community, which elevated women’s status. The deaths of picture brides’ elderly husbands and the development of entrepreneurial skills and financial independence by women also contributed. An analysis of these factors and the narratives of the three remarkable immigrant matriarchs suggest that Butler’s claims are correct.

The research and writing of this thesis is
dedicated to everyone who helped along the way.

Many thanks,
Sunny Moon

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Chapter I INTRODUCTION

Gender is constantly redefined and negotiated and socially constructed based on shifting contexts and the people with whom an individual is interacting.¹ This dissertation is intended to arouse interest in Korean modern history and culture in general and particularly in the lives and gender roles of Korean women, both at home and in the United States. Through an examination of women's wisdom from the past, this dissertation seeks to create a new direction for women in the future.

South Korea had the 10th largest GDP in the world in 2020, which is remarkable considering its rise in economic development from one of the world's poorest countries in the 1900s.² However, Korea's gender gap has been relatively stagnant, with South Korea ranking 102 out of 156 countries in 2021.³ The ranking is determined by how well a country leverages its female talent pool, based on economic, educational, health-related, and political indicators. This lack of progress in the gender gap can be traced back to Korea's roots as a deeply sex/gender segregated Neo-Confucian patriarchal society, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter II. The Sex/Gender Segregation law was one of the critical means used by men in the Joseon dynasty to maintain their position of control, which led to increased divisions and separation between girls/women and boys/men and led to disharmony in and out of society.

Korean women's roles have been constructed and deconstructed by traditional patriarchal domination layer upon layer throughout history, and Neo-Confucianism has

¹ Gee, J. P., "Identity as an analytic lens for research in education." *Review of Research in Education*, 25 (1), 2000, 99–125.

² "World Economic Outlook Database." *International Monetary Fund*.
<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2022/April/select-countries?grp=2001&sg=All%20countries>

³ "World Economic Forum." *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*.
https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

had an especially strong influence in the construction of these roles. Neo-Confucianism, a revival of the Confucian philosophy and belief system from China, was adopted by the Joseon dynasty in the 14th century, and most notably, it constructed social orders, including gender roles, which required women to have almost absolute obedience to men.

Neo-Confucian patriarchal domination is the relation between men giving commands and women obeying them. The commanding person needs an enforcement staff – usually men or male-dominated institutions such as police, soldiers, law, prisons, tribute, and taxes to force obedience. These forces suggest not only direct violence applied through physical or armed violence, but also systematic violence that forces people - especially women - to do things they do not want to do. Men could divorce their wives based on the "seven sins (chilgeojiak)" which served as a sort of law; the seven evils were disobeying in-laws, bearing no son, committing adultery, jealousy, carrying a hereditary disease, garrulousness and larceny;⁴ women had to obey their husbands and parents-in-laws and had no right to ask for a divorce.⁵

In addition, women were prescribed to practice the core feminine principles of not being divorced, the need to inhabit the role of a wise mother and good wife (hyunmo yangcho), and the predominance of men over women (namjon yubi).⁶ Under the Neo-Confucian patriarchy in the Joseon dynasty, men ruled over their family members, holding all legal and economic rights, and had an overpowering influence on women's status and lifestyles. Throughout Korean history, women continuously received messages from their male counterparts to step aside and play a submissive role. The patriarchy

⁴ Yung Chung Kim ed. & trans. *Women of Korea: A history from ancient times to 1945*. (Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press.1976.) 52.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. 85

mandated how to be Korean women, effectively forcing women to aspire to certain labels. These labels and judgments were “good and obedient girls,” “virtuous wives,” and “wise mothers” and may have had nothing to do with these women’s authentic selves.⁷ To keep the social order harmonious, Korean society constructed a strict hierarchy among class, age, sex, and gender through rituals, which developed not only to strengthen men’s authority but also to confine women’s involvement in political, social, and economic arenas. As discussed above, the message was delivered in a myriad of ways throughout women’s lives; men used their authority, power, and wealth to ensure that women would not be able to usurp male domination.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the conjoined philosophical and religious influences of Sirhak, Tonghak, and Christianity spread quickly among people of lower social levels and helped break down gender discrimination, classism, and sexism in Korea. The influence of the Tonghak religious movement on women is believed to be considerable because Tonghak elevated women’s role in the family as the head of the family, which was unheard of at that time. The teachings of Choe Jaue U, the initiator of the Tonghak movement, focused on the equality of people regardless of their social class or sex.⁸ His strong desire to ameliorate women’s status could be found in the field of education, which left one of the most enduring legacies of Tonghak during this period.

Korean women clashed with the strict Neo-Confucian gender roles after encountering Western ideas about the New Woman movement and women’s issues in the minds of female students. In addition, Korean women’s ardent resistance to Japanese colonialism expanded women’s involvement in economic, social, and political ventures in

⁷ Ibid. 44.

⁸ Benjamin Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way*: (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1964), 7-35.

Korea. Koreans lived in fear of the Japanese secret police and deeply begrudged the Japanese protectorate and colonization of their country, all of which led to an increase in intense nationalist activity by women.

Some Korean women looked to leave their homeland for Hawai'i due to unstable political and military situations and natural disasters. The influence of Christian missionaries could not be ignored. These foreign missionaries persuaded and encouraged their congregants to immigrate to Hawai'i while recognizing a shortage of cheap laborers in the Hawaiian sugar plantations. Immigrant women from Korea to Hawai'i and the West Coast of the United States proved that gender roles can be deconstructed and reconstructed.

Most studies of Korean immigrant women have focused on their involvement in the Korean Independence Movement. However, this study intends to focus on narratives of Korean immigrant women, particularly on a reconstruction of the family structure, mother and daughter relations, sisterhood, and a type of matriarchy through the anbang network that allowed immigrant women and picture brides to survive their challenging circumstances. Through these networks, Korean immigrant women emerged as active agents who shaped their own lives rather than living as objects excluded or acted on by others. Their homeland was far away and could not protect them from the obstacles and hardships they encountered, and additionally, they were cut off from their native family and friends. Such were the motivations that led Korean women to adopt a matriarchal type of structure of the family.

In this dissertation, matriarchies are defined as mother-centered societies, and their values are based on maternal principles and need: caretaking, nurturing, and

motherliness, which hold for everybody and lead to a society that displays well-balanced gender roles. While recounting the experiences of Korean immigrant women, I will argue that knowledge of their incredibly resilient survival skills and fervent political activities must be passed along to future generations. The stories of the early Korean immigrant women in the United States, and their growth and survival, have largely been ignored in studies of Korean history.

This dissertation analyzes first-person accounts, autobiographical records, and other historical accounts to examine the historical/cultural background of gender roles. Life history is a prized investigative method in qualitative research that offers an understanding of people's lived experiences and valuable insight into the complexity of human lives, cultures, and behaviors. The life histories examined here provide insight into the construction of Korean women's roles and portray their struggles to achieve autonomy and liberation from Neo-Confucian patriarchal norms.⁹ This study integrates Judith Butler's gender construction theory from her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, which will be used to analyze the construction of Korean women's culture; Butler argued that gender is socially constructed and those male and female behaviors are constructed and reinforced by the dominant culture, agreeing with the famous statement of Simone de Beauvoir that being born male or female does not determine behavior.¹⁰

Gender is a view that is most literally described as the state of being male or female. The term "gender" is used to characterize both femininity and masculinity, although it is often used interchangeably "with sex." The key distinction is between sex as biological and gender as socially and culturally constructed. As Tyson states, "the

⁹ Nancy Schrom Dye, "Clio's American Daughters: Male History, Female Reality," *The Prism of Sex*, eds. Julia A. Sherman and Evelyn Totton Beck, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, (1979).

¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*: Routledge Classics. (London, England: Routledge, 2006)

word gender refers not to our anatomy, but to our behavior as socially programmed men and women.”¹¹ For Karren Kinnear, “the social and cultural context in which people live, as well as how they interpret femininity and masculinity, influence gender roles.”¹²

Individuals learn how to behave in particular ways and are indoctrinated to fit social expectations, but these behaviors might not truly express an individual's gender identity. Thus, gender identity is not necessarily a manifestation of intrinsic essence but rather the product of actions and behaviors, that is, a performance that could be deconstructed and reconstructed.¹³

With this concept of gender construction in mind, Chapter I presents the background to my study, introduces the topic and aims, and gives an overview of the dissertation. I try to provide a solid foundation of the influence of Neo-Confucianism over gender roles during the Joseon dynasty. Then, Chapter II includes general background information on Neo-Confucianism and explains its influence on Korean women in general and kisaengs, or courtesans, and addresses the double standard evidenced by the roles assigned to these women by this same patriarchy. It introduces briefly how gender roles were constructed step by step to strengthen and protect male authority during the Joseon dynasty and modern Korea, done in multiple ways through the influence of Neo-Confucianism. One of the major rules to be created to control women was the Sex/Gender Segregation rule, which is addressed in this chapter.

Chapter III introduces seeds of awakening, including the indigenous Sirhak and Tonghak movements along with Catholicism, and enlightened by the education Korean

¹¹ Tyson, Lois. *Critical theory today, A User-Friendly Guide*. Routledge, 2006. 92.

¹² Kinnear, K. *Women in the third world: a reference handbook*. Santa Barbara, 1997: ABCCLIO. Eren BOLAT International Journal of Language Academy Volume 9/3 September 2021, 207/214

¹³ Ibid.

women received from Protestant missionaries. Korean women developed ways to search for their identities through girls' schools and church activities, including work as Bible women and anbang networks (sisterhood connections). Internal and external factors that also contributed to women's awakening could be considered the popularized Hangul, Gapsin Coup, Kabo reform, the New Woman movement, and the conflict with Japan.

Chapter IV discusses three rebellious women who were able to challenge Neo-Confucian Gender roles. These women are Queen Min, who was politically involved in her husband's government; Esther Pak, who became the first female medical doctor in Korea in 1900; and kisaeng Aeng Mu, who challenged male authority publicly when the National Debt Repayment Movement and the March First Movement commenced. Education and financial independence played a key role in the success of these three women and of the other kisaengs who, along with Aeng Mu, made significant contributions to the Independence Movement.

Chapter V encompasses the main focus of this dissertation and explores the experiences of two groups of Korean women who left their homeland for Hawai'i and the mainland United States; this chapter focuses on Korean immigration over the periods between 1903 - 1905 and 1910 – 1924 and introduces the significance of female-centered narratives in the “male-centered” history. Chapter VI introduces three matriarchs; they represent the many matriarchs in the Korean immigrant community and exemplify the role of the support networks described above in bringing about changes in prescribed gender roles. The first is Moon Dora, a spiritual matriarch; the second is Whang Ha Soo, a cultural and practical matriarch; and the third is Roh Kyoung Su, a business and entrepreneurial matriarch. The narratives of these three

matriarchs were considered the “spirits” of unconquerable Korean women and represented many other Korean immigrant women. Chapter VII concludes that Korean immigrant women’s narratives will help future generations evolve and slowly chip away at the barriers that constructed gender norms based on the Neo-Confucian patriarchy, many of which persist in modern Korean culture.

Chapter II Construction of Gender Roles during the Joseon Dynasty

As noted above, Neo-Confucianism greatly influenced the construction of gender roles during the Joseon Dynasty. Expectations for Korean women in general differed from those for kisaengs, or courtesans; these different expectations show the double standard assigned to these women by the same patriarchy.

A. Gender Roles for Women in General

Confucianism is a philosophy and belief system originating in ancient China from Confucius, a philosopher, and teacher who lived from 551 to 479 BCE and was further developed by Mencius (371-289 BCE). The major teaching of Confucianism, also known as the “Golden Rule,” is the principle of treating others as one wants to be treated.¹⁴ The heritage of Confucianism became a vital segment of the code of ethics and a social system rather than a religion in Korea.¹⁵ It influenced the moral system, the way of life, social interactions between old and young, women and men, low and high culture, and was the core of the legal system.

Confucian ideals especially gained prevalence during the Song Dynasty in China. During this time, Song Dynasty scholar Zhu Xi (1130–1200 CE) combined Taoism and Buddhism into Neo-Confucianism. Neo-Confucianism was a revival of classical Confucianism and arose as a reaction to the challenges of Buddhism, Daoism, and Shamanism. Neo-Confucianism concentrated on the secular world to take responsibility for government and social affairs, including broadening education, as well as reforming and renovating institutions and economies.

Before the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910 CE), when Neo-Confucianism was

¹⁴ Antony Flew, ed., “Golden Rule”. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*. (London: MacMillan Press. 1979), 134.

¹⁵ John Fairbank, Edwin Reischauer, and Albert Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*: (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1989), 282.

adopted as the official ideological basis of social organizations, Korean women had enjoyed a relatively high status and were allowed to remarry, although women were not considered equal to men. During the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392 CE) under the Yuan (Mongol) influence, women seemed to have had more privileges and legal rights, such as equal property inheritance between men and women. Even before the Goryeo dynasty, during the Silla period (fourth century–918 CE), Korea had three queens who ascended as heads of the state, and all Silla women had the right to be the heads of families.¹⁶

After the fall of Goryeo, the Joseon dynasty was established by Yi Sung Gye, also known as King Taejo.¹⁷ In 1388, he revolted and took over the reins of the kingdom with the help of Neo-Confucian literati. The Joseon dynasty embraced Neo-Confucianism as the dominant ideology and governed through well-balanced and refined political and social systems, exercising a broad influence on the behavior of society.¹⁸ Like the Goryeo dynasty, the Joseon dynasty adopted a civil examination system, which was called kwakeo. It was an examination to enter high-ranking government offices and a form of upward mobility for the upper class.¹⁹ Only men were allowed to take the examination, and those who passed the higher literary examination came to monopolize all of the dynasty's high positions; this exclusion of women from civic life was one way that the patriarchal system was strengthened.²⁰

The Joseon dynasty of Korea, centered on wisdom and social relations, became

¹⁶ Donald Baker, *Dimensions of Asian Spirituality: Korean Spirituality*. (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

¹⁷ The Joseon dynasty is also commonly called the Yi dynasty, named for the first king's last name.

¹⁸ Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea*. (Ewha Womans University Press, 1976), 28-36.

¹⁹ Mark Cartwright, "Taejo of Goryeo." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. (Last modified November, 2016). https://www.ancient.eu/Taejo_of_Goryeo/.

²⁰ Young Woo Han, *Civil Service Examination System; the Ladder of Success--Social Mobility of Civil Service Examination Degree-holders Seen Through Family Genealogies during the Chōson Dynasty (1392-1608)* 과거, 출세의 사다리 --- 족보를 통해 본 조선 문과급제자의 신분이동 (태조~선조대): (Seoul; Jisik-Sanup Publications Co., LTD, 2013)

a stable society with a highly refined culture under the Neo-Confucian patriarchy. The dynasty was founded upon the three fundamental principles and five moral disciplines of Neo-Confucianism. The three fundamental principles are called samgang and consist of (1) loyalty to the king, (2) filial piety to the parents, and (3) subservience of women to men. The five moral disciplines, called oryun, described the hierarchy of the human interactions between (1) ruler and subject, (2) parents and children, (3) husband and wife, (4) seniors and juniors, and (5) trust among friends.²¹ In addition, various moral doctrines and laws were constructed to keep women under control, and women were prescribed to practice the core feminine principles: a wise mother and good wife (hyunmo yangcho), the predominance of men over women (namjon yeobi), women obeying three masters – father, husband, and son (samjong jido), and seven listed evils (chilgo jiaek) as suitable causes of repudiation of women: disobedience to the parents-in-law, not being able to bear a male heir, adultery, jealousy, having incurable diseases, loquaciousness, and stealing.²² All of these rules solidified the patriarchal system.

Furthermore, the dynasty was characterized by a rigid social hierarchy structure of four hereditary classes: (1) an upper class of scholars and military officials (yangban), (2) clerks and technicians (chungin), (3) freeborn commoners (yangin), and (4) lowborn individuals (nobi or cheonmin). The yangban class, which constituted less than 10 percent of the population and had several privileges, dominated political and military power and wealth. The chungin were considered middle class or relatively petty officials. The yangin class consisted of common people who were mostly

²¹ Michael Seth, *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 157-158.

²² Myung Choi, & Jake Harwood, "A hypothesized model of Korean women's responses to abuse", *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*. 2004. 15. 207-216.

farmers.²³ The cheonmin class was the low-born. Most members of the cheonmin class were kisaengs (courtesans), actors, shamans, butchers, and hereditary slaves, also known as nobi. The cheonmin class, which was essential for the government, was public property owned by the government; they were also chiefly owned by petty government officers, as well as small to medium landowners. This unconscious and unawakened populace accepted their social status without questioning and complaint because they believed it was their fate.²⁴ Likewise, women were unlikely to challenge their assigned gender roles because they believed it was their destiny in the Neo-Confucian patriarchy.

As a strong intellectual movement, Neo-Confucianism became a powerful mechanism for spreading and preserving the Confucian teaching of principles, disciplines, and firm social hierarchy. It also produced a stiff, elitist culture based on the doctrines of Neo-Confucianism and resisted modernization. This long stagnant period of influence led to the evolution of a Korean form of Neo-Confucianism including nonflexible rituals and hierarchy.²⁵ Most notably, it had constructed social orders including gender roles.

The dynasty implemented laws banning women's social mobility called the Kyongguk taejon, which constructed a written record of laws that enforced stern policies on the activities of women and their behaviors by subduing physical freedom as well: for example, women were banned from outdoor activities such as horseback riding, playing games, visiting temples and mountains, and participating in outdoor

²³ Yung Chung Kim ed. & trans. *Women of Korea*: 1976. 135-36

²⁴ Bok Rae Kim, "Korean *nobi* resistance under the Chosun dynasty (1392–1910)", *Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, Volume 25, 2004, 48-62.

²⁵ Victor H. Mair, ed. *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*: (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

feasts. If women refused to follow this regulation, they were punished; punishments included one hundred lashes and physical confinement and further strengthened men's complete authority over women's bodies and lives.²⁶

Kyongguk taejon (or Great Codes for Governing the State) is a complete code of law, that comprises all the laws including customs and decrees released from the late Goryeo Dynasty to the early Joseon Dynasty and had been a basis for over 500 years of Joseon Dynasty politics. Included in the Kyongguk taejon were rules about the strict segregation of men and women,²⁷ the rule that prevented personal contact between men and women outside marriage; males and females should not sit together after they reached the age of seven.²⁸ Sex/gender segregation happens when a society views one sex as better than another. The goal of segregation is to keep the "inferior" sex/gender away from the "better" one, and the lesser ones are usually exploited and endure severe discrimination. Korean women's activities in Joseon society were confined to their homes; being married and thus financially supported by a husband was the only means to economic survival, except for a few special occupations such as women servants and kisaengs. Women, especially upper-class women, were effectively incarcerated during daylight and, even at home, were forbidden direct contact with any man outside the family. Thus, the ideal of femininity constructed a dependent being, at once inferior, passive, and obedient.

Customs and institutions which banned free contact between men and women reached an extreme level. Even husbands and wives lived much of their lives apart

²⁶ Ibid, 156.

²⁷ 경국대전(經國大典), Gyeonggukdaejeon" (in Korean and English). The Academy of Korean Studies. Archived from the original on 2011-07-16. Retrieved on 02/01/2021.

²⁸ Yung Chung Kim ed. & trans. *Women of Korea*. 55-56

because of the unique architecture that promoted segregation. Systematic restriction of women's roles took many forms, including the structure of a house, whose architecture represented the division of men and women. This was evident in the creation of the anbang and sarangbang, which were separate quarters in the house for women and men.²⁹ The anbang, the inner quarters for women, was structurally farther from the main entrance and was strictly women's space and off-limits to the public view. The sarangbang, in contrast, was an outer quarter of the home reserved for men, facing the street with the main gate to their main courtyard.³⁰ There, men discussed matters that they considered more worthy of their intellect, and then, an owner of the house usually would call the women in the rear of the house for drinks or other favors.

The Sex/Gender Segregation law was issued as one of the means used by men in the Joseon dynasty to maintain their position of control over women. The segregation was subject to legal sanctions and was maintained as a firm custom during the Joseon dynasty. In some cases, random people who entered the courtyard of a home without the owner's permission could be killed. Even police officers would not be able to enter a woman's room to apprehend a criminal who was hiding in it.

Korean society emphasized the importance of hierarchy to keep this social order, aiming to strengthen men's authority and to confine women's involvement in areas outside the home. It furthered the marriage system, which was considered mandatory and a women's duty during the Joseon dynasty. Once wedded, a woman had to be faithful, devoted, and obedient to her husband; she also had to be fertile because she was not valued as a person until she gave birth to male heirs.³¹ Her identity was lost and became

²⁹ Yung Chung Kim, 1976, 86.

³⁰ Pae-yong Yi, *Women in Korean History*: (Ewha Womans University Press 2008).

³¹ Seth, 156.

the full property of her husband, and she was known as “wife of...” or “mother of...”, viewed as an extension of her husband or son.³² Without her identity, she could be replaced by other women; therefore, Joseon men could keep several concubines, although there was a clear distinction between the primary spouse and the second, or concubine.³³

This practice initially was due to the unbalanced ratio of men to women due to continuing wars and was rooted in concern for the welfare and safety of women and children, but concubinage was later constructed as a sort of marriage system. Additionally, due to emphasis on the importance of paternal blood lineage, a new concept was constructed: that conception was entirely a father’s doing, and a mother was simply a surrogate, or more degradingly, an “incubator.” Men’s desire to have multiple women, like a king, led them to adopt concubinage to manifest male superiority. The practice gradually permeated the lives of common people and became the norm of the public morality of the entire Joseon society.

Authorities like kings often used rituals to validate and legitimize their rule as heads of sovereigns, especially in a new regime. In many cases, a ruler needed to authenticate and strengthen his authority as a new leader from a divine line, which was connected to spikes in ritual activity. The Joseon dynasty was no exception. The first king of the Joseon dynasty adopted Neo-Confucianism from China to establish hierarchical structures to keep his authority.³⁴ Ancestor worship rituals in Korea became a powerful social and spiritual force, although women’s ancestor rituals at

³² Katrina Maynes, "Korean Perceptions of Chastity, Gender Roles, and Libido; From *Kisaengs* to the Twenty First Century," *Grand Valley Journal of History*: Vol. 1, 2012: Iss. 4.

³³ Douglas Harper, "Polygamy". *Online Etymology Dictionary*. "Archived copy". Archived from the original on 1 February 2016. Retrieved June 2022.

³⁴ Byonghyon Choi, *The Annals of King Taejo: Founder of Korea's Chosŏn Dynasty*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

their husbands' houses were banned.³⁵ The rituals were usually directed by the first-born male and thus became gendered to strengthen the patriarchal bloodline. The only part women played in ancestor worship services was that of men's assistants, managing all the necessary preparations, such as purchasing ingredients, cooking the food, and setting up the ritual table. Without the assistance of women, ancestor worship could not have been performed.

Another example of strengthening patriarchy was the Korean hoju system, which was applied as a family registration system under Civil Law.³⁶ All members of a family were recorded under hoju – the head of the family. Korea's patriarchal system held that only male members of the family would be the head of the family. When a father died his first son, not his wife, inherited the position of head of the family.³⁷

The custom of so-called “kidnap” marriage also served to reinforce the patriarchy. This tragically comical but miserable custom took place among the commoners and low classes during the Joseon dynasty. Under this unwritten law, widowers, impoverished old bachelors, or any men (with or without the help of several accomplices), could kidnap a divorcee or a widow and force themselves on her without their consent. Government and society recognized these actions as legitimized marriages.³⁸ Sometimes the desperate divorcees and widows themselves or their families arranged the kidnapping so that the women could be remarried without shame.³⁹ Although those involved in the practice perhaps felt guilty, they may have

³⁵ Seung Gyu Moon, “Ancestor Worship in Korea: Tradition and Transition.” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, (George Kurian, 1974), 71–87.

³⁶ Business, [Law talk]Abolishing the hoju Published: Apr 6, 2010 - 02:26, accessed 08/2022. System <https://m.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20050323000033>

³⁷ The Constitutional Court Decision 2001Hun-Ka9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 2004Hun-Ka5 (consolidated) decided on February 3, 2005.

³⁸ Yung Chung Kim. *Women of Korea*, 98-99.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 98-99.

also felt that they were “saving women from misery” if they kidnapped them. The missionary Anabel M. Nisbet witnessed and wrote about a young Korean widow, who was a good-looking and diligent woman. When her husband died, several “no-account” widowers camped in front of her house at night to steal her because Korean society considered a widow as an “owner lacking woman,” so almost anyone could claim her. The young widow sheltered at a missionary’s home and pleaded for her protection.⁴⁰

The whole society was complicit in kidnapping women in the name of saving them from their misery. The custom is rooted in gender inequality and strengthened the Neo-Confucian patriarchy, which connotes that only men could take women and save them from their lifelong loneliness and misery of widowhood. Additionally, the government intervened to prohibit remarriage, forbidding the offspring of remarried women from taking high office in the government⁴¹ because remarriage was considered an act of failure to keep loyalty and chastity toward a woman’s dead husband.⁴²

B. Gender Roles for Kisaeng

As noted, the ideal femininity in the Joseon dynasty was constructed as a dependent being, at once inferior, passive, uneducated, and obedient, and women's self-worth and honor were measured by their chastity and adherence to men.⁴³ Korean women, in general, had to be chaste, stoic, modest, uneducated, confined and

⁴⁰ Ahn, Katherine H. *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom: Pioneer American Women Missionaries in Korea*. (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library. 2009), 105-106

⁴¹ SangPaek Yi, “*Chaega Kumji supsok-ei yurae-e taehan yongu*” 9 Study on the custom of prohibiting remarriage) Hanguk munhwa sa yongu nongu (Seoul, 1947).

⁴² GunHo Park. Yeolnyeo and Great Mother and Me Too Movement. [A Page in History] I think of the "Great Mother Award." 열녀와 장한 어머니 그리고 미투 운동 [역사의 한 페이지] ‘장한 어머니상’을 생각한다. December 14, 2018 10:07 AM <http://www.redian.org/archive/128012>

⁴³ *Songs of the Kisaeng*. Trans. & Introduced by Constantine Contogenis and Wolhee Choe. Boa Editions, Ltd. Rochester NY. 1997. 11.

segregated based on Confucian ethics.⁴⁴ However, this section explains the prescribed roles of kisaeng women to indicate the construction of double standards of the elite class and their hypocrisy and to illustrate how and why kisaengs' roles were constructed the way they were.

The male-dominant society constructed the kisaeng system for their satisfaction and pleasure; kisaeng's education and artistic achievements were necessary to provide intellectual and emotional companionship for their male guests. Kisaengs with remarkable intelligence were also trained in medicine and provided treatment to women of noble families, who were generally not allowed to consult male physicians. Artistically talented kisaengs occasionally served as seamstresses and sewed royal garments.⁴⁵ However, the Confucian patriarchal authorities could not intervene in these women's doings because of the firm segregation law, and women had to control and manage the system - which could be called a form of matriarchy.

The kisaeng System first emerged in the early Goryeo period (935-1392) and was at its height in the middle Joseon period (1392–1910). The history of kisaeng dates to the Chinese hegemony on the Korean territories from the Goryeo dynasty and continued to exist through the Joseon era. Kisaengs were traditionally part of the caste economy of the Joseon dynasty. The role of kisaengs in Korea was not only political, but also social, economic, and cultural. Many of them worked at the royal court or in governmental structures to help artists at big festivals, provide services in hotels, and organize governmental meetings and tea ceremonies.⁴⁶

The system of patriarchal gender supremacy was the root of the abuse of power

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Seth, 158.

⁴⁶ Constantine Contogenis and Wolhee Choe, *Songs of the Kisaeng*.

in many relationships between men and women in Korean society. The rich and powerful men of Joseon admired and loved kisaengs, who were completely different from their filial wives at home because they offered a unique type of companionship.⁴⁷ Kisaengs needed to be emotional, entertaining, intelligent, and vibrant and lived outside of the female codes; kisaengs were not allowed to be faithfully devoted to one man; they spoke their mind, traveled freely, joined social events, and intermixed with men.⁴⁸

In the early part of the Joseon dynasty, approximately a hundred kisaengs were recruited every three years and sent to the royal court. A similar number of kisaengs were sent, after training, to provincial capitals and military outposts. However, there were petitions for the elimination of the kisaeng system because it depleted the government's funds and conflicted with and eroded Confucian ethics. Oppositionists criticized the government bureaucracy as decadent and hypocritical because they promoted Confucian values requiring their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters to be chaste, while simultaneously mandating kisaengs to be promiscuous.⁴⁹ On the other hand, some supported the system because it helped to legitimize the government by centralizing the arts and monopolizing cultural symbols of national unity. The supporters of the system also claimed that kisaengs assisted the government while satisfying not only the sexual needs of court officials but also troops assigned to foreign lands.⁵⁰

There were three grades of kisaengs based on their skills, talents, and achievements. The first grade, *ilpae*, served kings and queens and high-ranking

⁴⁷ Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea*. 106.

⁴⁸ Seth, 158.

⁴⁹ Yung Chung Kim, 142.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 141-43.

government officers. The second grade was called ipae, who had been born and trained in the profession but had retired and worked for private clients. The third grade, sampae, worked in taverns and provincial salons as entertainers and prostitutes who sold sex more often to commoners.⁵¹ Despite these distinctions, all kisaengs were technically slaves and sex workers.⁵²

Most of them were the daughters of other kisaengs, as they inherited their mother's status, or daughters of poor families confronted with desperate financial difficulties, sold to a kisaeng academy (gyobang). Kisaengs had very strict hierarchies within the system - a form of matriarchy and extensive education of "Teaching College (Kyobangwon)" formed by retired kisaeng women, which was a court-supported institution.⁵³ Generally, between 16 to 22 years of age, these young women were formally trained for their profession and regulated by the Joseon dynasty.⁵⁴ The word 'kisaeng' means 'person of art' or 'skilled person in various arts.' They were also known as "flowers that speak poetry" and functioned for both artistic and sexual purposes. Since kisaengs belonged to the lowest strata of society, they were convenient objects of pleasure for the upper class men.⁵⁵ Their profession required promiscuity and they were prevented from having a normal life as was available to Korean women at the time.⁵⁶ They were relatively free to go anywhere they wanted and were not subject to the Sex/Gender Segregation law. They were forbidden to be chaste, while chastity was of utmost importance for all other Korean women who should keep it with their life.

⁵¹ *Songs of the Kisaeng*. Trans. & Introduced by Constantine Contogenis and Wolhee Choe.

⁵² Yongyi, Pae (2008). *Women in Korean History*. (Ewha Womans University Press, 2009.) 115; Kim Yung Chung, *Women of Korea*. 140.

⁵³ Insuk Lee, "Convention and Innovation: The Lives and Cultural Legacy of the *Kisaeng* in Colonial Korea (1910-1945)," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 23, no. 1 (2010): 76.

⁵⁴ Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea*: 138.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 55.

⁵⁶ Minato Kawamura, *Gisaeng: Malhaneun kkot (Kisaeng: The speaking flowers)*. (Seoul: Sodam. 2001)

Kisaengs could be severely punished, even killed, if they did not comply with the authority's request or if their services were not pleasing.⁵⁷

For many centuries, kisaengs formed both the most prestigious and most despised social groups in Korea. In the Goryeo dynasty, they could become royal concubines and gain noble status. However, kisaengs became the lowest caste of the society and the property of the state during the stern boundaries of the Joseon dynasty.⁵⁸ Although there were many attempts to disband the kisaeng institution for the entire 500 years of the Joseon dynasty, the system was preserved by the government officials, who were the major recipients of their services.⁵⁹ Additionally, elite men in the Joseon dynasty moved the kisaeng system successfully from the public realm into their private houses - also known as concubinage for their sexual advantages.⁶⁰

Although these young women from the lowest class were kept as toys and luxurious sex slaves for court officials and government guests, they were required to be well-educated. Education was unrealistic for women (and even men) of common and lower classes; only kisaengs were able to cross over these gender and class boundaries within strict Confucian lines and receive an education.⁶¹ To please well-educated high-ranking officers and foreign envoys, they undertook a serious education that mirrored that of the yangban gentry to provide intellectually stimulating companionship, simultaneously offering romance and flirtation.⁶² Kisaengs studied manners, oriental

⁵⁷ Yung Chung Kim, 139.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Elaine H., Kim & Chungmoo Choi (1998). *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*. (Psychology Press, 1998), 172.

⁶⁰ Christian de Pee, Reviewed Work: Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity: Gender and Social Change in China, 1000–1400 by Beverly Bossler, Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Harvard-Yenching Institute, Vol. 74, No. 1 (JUNE 2014), pp. 108-115

⁶¹ Minato Kawamura, *기생 말하는 꽃 (Kisaeng: The speaking flowers)*, [Seoul: Sodam, 2001] (Tr. from Japanese original)

⁶² Yung Chung Kim, 138

medicine, and textile arts and spent years honing and refining their craft. Kisaengs were fluent in multiple foreign languages, wrote poetry, and were well-versed in the arts, music, musical instruments, dance, politics, philosophy, and history.

In addition, they were trained in conversation, seduction, and the “maximum utilization of female sexuality.” They had the bodies of slaves and the minds of aristocrats.⁶³ When the yangban gentry longed for the attention of a learned female companion, he would seek out a kisaeng for her mastery of art, refined conversation, and intellectual responses, while their wives had to wait for them to come back from kisaeng houses, without showing jealousy. When a wife showed jealousy, which was one of the seven evils of Confucian moral ethics, it was grounds for desertion.

Kisaengs’ paradoxical identity, as socially despised yet popularly acclaimed artists in music, dance, and poetry may well have given them the self-awareness to search for a unique identity as artists through their talents and practices. Their skills established their individuality by letting them exist within a culture, although most of them were anonymous and were not recognized for their artistic excellence. Even though these women were afforded freedoms and opportunities uncommon for Korean women in general, they were absolutely powerless.¹³⁸ Although stigmatized by the Confucian culture because they were the lowest in society and despised as fallen women, some kisaengs were regarded as intellectual equals to the men they served and deserved to be praised. The highest recognition they could receive was a reputation among the men they entertained. Many poems survived due to kisaengs’ connection with royals, nobles, and scholars.⁶⁴

⁶³ Constantine Contogenis and Wolhee Choe. *Songs of the Kisaeng*. Trans. & Introduced. Boa Editions, Ltd. (Rochester NY, 1997), 12

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Kisaengs could live a self-found creative life rather than a life imposed on them, unlike other women in the Confucian patriarchal system. They could establish their unique identity and gender roles within a culture, using freedom to associate with men of power. Some regarded them as the “female elite of the Joseon dynasty” for their ability to converse on an intellectual level with the noble and powerful men who sought kisaengs’ company.⁶⁵ The Joseon dynasty provided the official educational policy for kisaengs up until the early 20th century, and kisaengs were one of the most well-educated groups of women throughout Korean history until the Japanese occupation. One kisaeng in Seoul, Pak Nokchu, demonstrated her intelligence in her 1927 essay in *Changhan* (Eternal bitterness) the kisaeng journal.⁶⁶ She raised her voice while pleading with readers to fight for equality and respect for their status in society:

We kisaeng need to unify systematically in order to survive in this society [...] Now we can raise our voices and thoughts to people who ignore us through this journal, which has become our ‘mouthpiece.’ Our social status is extremely miserable and marginalized. There is no social welfare system for us at all in our society. This means that we have not been treated equally with other ordinary people as human beings, and are always looked down on as slaves. However, we shall not endure this anymore. [...] We are human beings and we also have tears, blood, and sense.⁶⁷

According to the essay, Pak Nokchu acknowledged her social standing in society as “miserable and marginalized,” and as one who could not be protected by her family or state. She said that she did not have a voice, nor equal rights with other ordinary women, but she would challenge to rally to improve their social standing as human beings, not as sex slaves. She demonstrated the complicated double standard for feminine ideals placed

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ The *Changhan*, the *kisaeng* journal which translates into “eternal bitterness,” originally published in 1927 by the *Kugilgwon*, a famous Seoul *kisaeng* house, and only two volumes have been preserved.

⁶⁷ Insuk Lee, “Convention and Innovation”, 2010, 90.

by the Confucian patriarchy and claimed that she would aim to deconstruct her “miserable and marginalized” status.

Conclusion

As Butler emphasized, the dominant culture in any society constructs and reinforces male and female behaviors; in other words, gender roles are socially constructed. During the Joseon dynasty, laws such as the Kyongguk taejon were constructed to reinforce the strict segregation of sex/gender based on Confucian patriarchy and to restrict women’s access to formal education to prevent their awakening.⁶⁸ By making the rules for society, men could preserve their authority, power, and wealth, which had already granted them more than their fair share of power over women. The Confucian patriarchy claimed that with the exception of kisaeng, women did not need to be literate to fulfill their bestowed duties. Therefore, until the late 19th century, most women were denied the opportunity to acquire an education. Korean history attested that women in the Joseon dynasty experienced and accumulated deep-seated grievances about their assigned roles in a male-dominated society; some of them rose against the authority sporadically, but not in an organized fashion. Korean women’s identity and self-consciousness were buried deep in traditional society, but they were gradually awakening with the coming of the modern period of Korea through exposure to mass literacy through a vernacular (Hangul), mass modern Christian education for girls/women, and the indigenous Sirhak and Tonghak movements.

⁶⁸ Hyeong Sik Shin, *A Brief History of Korea*. Seoul, Korea: (Ewha Womans University Press, 2005), 148.

Chapter III Seeds of Deconstruction

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a transition period leading to a new era with significant innovations and reforms in socio-economic thought. The indigenous movements Sirhak and Tonghak; Catholicism, called the universal faith of humanity; and both internal and external influences began to weaken women's assigned roles that had been constructed during the Joseon period. Korean women, who had been hibernating for some time, started awakening and expressing their grievances for women's rightful places, arising from an outraged sense of justice influenced by the indigenous movements; cracks were beginning to form during the later part of the Joseon dynasty.

A. Indigenous Movements (Sirhak and Tonghak)

As discussed in Chapter II, Neo-Confucianism involved extreme formality, including the rigid hierarchical structure, marriage and concubinage systems, and ancestor worship rituals. In the latter part of the Joseon dynasty, many scholars began to reconsider the principles of Neo-Confucianism; they attempted to reform its metaphysical nature and focus on practical matters including skills and ideas learned from Catholic missionaries. The first of these reform movements, called Sirhak, committed to a practical approach to statesmanship instead of the blind following of Confucian teachings. Although the intention of the movement never focused on women's issues, Catholicism's idea of equality of human beings - women and men as equal before God - was appealing to many Sirhak followers.

Sirhak, also known as "Practical Learning," was a Confucian social reform movement in the late Joseon dynasty in Korea. King Jeongjo (r. 1776–1800), the 22nd

ruler of the Joseon dynasty of Korea, maintained the policy of impartiality to prevent factional disputes; according to this policy, people were promoted based on ability and character rather than on social faction. He also initiated other political and cultural reforms, and his efforts led to the blossoming of Sirhak.⁶⁹ It developed in response to the increasingly metaphysical nature of Neo-Confucianism that seemed detached from the rapid agricultural, industrial, and political changes arising in Korea between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Most Sirhak scholars were from factions excluded from power and other disaffected scholars who called for reform. Sirhak aimed to counter the blind following of Confucian teachings and the uncompromising loyalty to “formalism” and “ritualism” by Neo-Confucians. The young scholars gradually challenged the hierarchical structure and formal Confucian principles.

Many Sirhak scholars agreed with the teachings of Tonghak (another reform movement to be discussed), especially concerning social equality, which greatly contributed to the push for women’s education. These thinkers were convinced that problems such as invasions by foreign powers and social instability in Korea were connected with the internal weakness of the country itself; women’s education was one of the steps meant to strengthen Korea’s internal weakness. For them, women’s equality did not center on women; rather, it centered on the country, patriotism, and Korean modernization. Sirhak scholars gave their attention to every field of learning, including Christianity. These young and ambitious Sirhak scholars had noticed the spread of Catholic Christianity in China in the late 1700s when they were looking for innovation and for ways to reform the Confucian system.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea*. 195.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 197.

Sirhak, or “Practical Learning” emerged along with Tonghak, or “Eastern Learning,” as revisions of Neo-Confucianism.⁷¹ Tonghak exemplified the theologizing of indigenous egalitarian views of Korean people. The core concept of Tonghak was the egalitarian social ideology: Every human being is an embodiment of heaven, and one should serve every human being as he would serve heaven.⁷² This movement, which was formed by Korean scholar Choe Jae U (1824–1864), emerged in reaction to the spread of Catholicism and the failure of Confucian values.⁷³ Choe was a disowned son of yangban and his concubine. He experienced the yangban society without the privileges of his class as the son of a concubine and was not allowed to take the national examinations to become a high-ranking government official; instead, he worked on the land inherited from his father as a farmer.

His main teaching was “Man [men and women] and God are one”; individuals achieve purpose through sincere faith in the universality of God in the oneness of their own body and spirit. His teachings had an enormous impact on the common populace. His teachings focused on the equality of people regardless of their social class or sex.⁷⁴ For Choe Jae U, if inequalities would be resolved between men and women, the poor and the rich, and the noble and the worker, that would be an ideal world. Adherents to his teaching believed that the movement of Heavenly Will would be blocked because of the social inequality against women and the poor. His criticism of widow remarriage and concubinage was fierce; it awakened women’s consciousness and taught them that women and men were equal. Simultaneously, he criticized economic injustice and moral

⁷¹ Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*: (Cambridge University Press, 2000) pp. 121–122

⁷² Choe Jae U, *Yongdam yusa* (Hymns from Dragon Pool), 1860

⁷³ Yung Chung Kim, 243-45.

⁷⁴ Benjamin Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way*: (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1964), 7-35.

decay and claimed the need for a new set of values.⁷⁵

Choe emphasized also women's education and women as heads of households, although his principle of gender equality was not widely applied throughout Korea. The swift rise of indigenous movements challenged the bases of the traditional Neo-Confucian state, especially the hierarchy of four classes, and greatly contributed to the birth of modern women's education in Korea.⁷⁶

Choe's humanistic ideals of new Korean womanhood were intended to change her subordinate and dependent status. He claimed that the wife should be the "master of the home" and men should respect women's important role in the family and learn how to value and respect them. He emphasized the change of family structure from father to son to husband and wife. Likewise, he criticized Confucian ethical codes—the three bonds and five relations (*samgang oryun*) as obstacles to women's upward mobility and progress. He exemplified his beliefs by teaching his two daughters, who were former slaves adopted as a daughter and a daughter-in-law, to read and write. These new ideas spread among the depressed populace quickly and appealed to the marginalized such as women, fallen yangban, and farmers.⁷⁷

Tonghak gained popularity, which threatened the government because its teachings did not consider the king the center, or the noble class the governing entity of society. It instead recognized the importance of all people. The new beliefs shook hard against the Joseon dynasty's five-hundred-year-old foundation, which gave the king absolute power; no one was allowed to be richer and/or more powerful than the king. Threatened by Choe's radical thought in the social order, the government

⁷⁵ Suhm Kyoung Hong, "Tonghak in the Context of Korean Modernization," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 10, No. 1, (Autumn, 1968), 43-51

⁷⁶ Tonggol Cho, *Ilchecha Hankuk nongmon undongsa*: (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1978), 19.

⁷⁷ Carl Young, *Eastern Learning and the Heavenly Way: The Tonghak and Chondogyo Movement and the Twilight of Korean Independence*: (University of Hawai'i Press, 2014).

considered him a rebel and had him killed in 1864 on charges of disrupting society. The government prohibited Tonghak as a cult and persecuted its followers. However, its contribution to social equality, especially for women's rights and status, could not be exaggerated. During his brief four-year ministry, Choe recruited millions of followers; his teachings have continued for over 160 years to the present day, mostly among women, the poor, and the oppressed.³⁴

The Sirhak and Tonghak movements did not bring modernity to Korea nor vastly improve women's status. However, Tonghak leaders strongly addressed permission for widows to remarry and made Koreans better prepared to consider women's rights and equality when these modern ideas finally reached the peninsula. The women's movement in Korea by this time emerged along with the Korean people's acute realization of the need for "modernization" and "enlightenment."⁷⁸ Modifying the Confucian view of women was key to the development of a new image of women in the modernization of Korea. The idea of independence from Japan, along with women's enlightenment was embedded in the minds of many citizens, and it cultivated nationwide consciousness.

Sirhak and Tonghak intellectuals fought against certain traditional beliefs such as sex and gender segregation, the lack of education for women, and the prohibition against women's participation in the public arena. They argued that if Korea was to pursue modernization, the role and status of women had to be changed because traditional customs were barriers to modernization. These intellectuals urged that women should be educated, claiming that educated mothers would raise their children better and support their husbands more effectively. The Tonghak movement continued

⁷⁸ Carter Eckert & Ki Baik Lee, et al., *Korea, Old and New: A History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Korea Institute, 1990).

to suffer persecution at the hands of Confucian government officials and remained underground, waiting for the right moment to emerge. Nationalist anti-Japan sentiment began to challenge traditional gender roles for women by emphasizing the importance of women's education. Considering millions of Tonghak followers at that time, the movement may also have begun to awaken and empower women, though perhaps not consciously.

The advent of Sirhak and Tonghak in the 18th and 19th centuries suggested modernization in the making. Although the roles and expectations of women were still strictly defined by the Neo-Confucian culture, some women were beginning to recognize that these constructed roles could in fact be changed. During this time women had begun to awaken from their mental sluggishness through various movements and religions; they were looking for something new and different and had started to search for their identity.

B. Influence of Christianity, the Establishment of Girls/Women's Schools, Bible women, and the Anbang network

The rise of Christianity in Korea was closely related to the deep dissatisfaction and depression felt by the people due to centuries of poverty, social exclusion, corruption, and subjugation and thirsty souls seeking religious salvation.⁷⁹ Catholicism taught equality among human beings and helped break down class barriers and sex barriers.⁸⁰ When Korean women encountered the doctrine that men and women were equal in the eyes of God, they were deeply inspired and awakened by it. Everyone who wanted to worship God could come and sit together, which was radical given the strict class system and the Sex/Gender Segregation law. The Sex/Gender Segregation law

⁷⁹ Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea*, 200.

⁸⁰ Hong Yol Yu, *Hanguk Chonju kyohoe-sa (History of the Catholic church in Korea)*: (Seoul, 1962), 757.

actually generated a way for creating “woman's-work-for-woman” links and the network had the unintentional impact of spreading Catholicism in Korea, followed by the remarkable success of Protestantism thanks to the anbang network and the Bible Women system;⁸¹ women could easily visit other women’s houses, and if one of them was aware of equality in Christian doctrines, she could teach and enlighten other women.⁸²

One Catholic believer, Colomba Kang Won Suk (1761-1801), took advantage of the Sex/Gender Segregation law - and the reluctance of even the police to search women’s quarters - to provide refuge for the first Catholic priest in Korea, Chinese Father Zhou Wenmo (1753-1801), and to offer a space for him to lead worship. Father Zhou hid at her house from 1794 to 1801 for six years. She organized the first Catholic Women Believers Association at the end of the eighteenth century and challenged existing authority, demonstrating the strength of the weak. Colomba believed that there was nothing the government could take away from her except her life. She continued to help Father Zhou to hold masses and prepared to teach the Gospel in secrecy.⁸³ Though police officers had informants, they could not search Kang’s house because the segregation law prohibited it. Eventually, the Joseon court ordered the search of her house, and Colomba Kang and Fr. Zhou were arrested and decapitated at the West Gate prison, becoming martyrs in the persecution of July 3rd, 1801.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Frederick J. Heuser Jr. "Woman's Work for Woman, Cultural Change, and the Foreign Missionary Movement." *The Journal of Presbyterian History*. Vol. 75, No. 2 (Summer 1997), 119-130.

⁸² Kevin Cawley, "4 Dangerous Women in the Early Catholic Church in Korea". In *Religious Transformation in Modern Asia*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015.) Retrieved in Oct. 2022 https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004289710_005

⁸³ James H. Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], 30-64.

⁸⁴ Alex Jensen, "Korea and the Church of Martyrs". *kofc.org*. (6 May 1984) Retrieved 6 December 2021.

Women like Colomba Kang Won Suk started rebelling against class and gender barriers under Neo-Confucianism and were no longer satisfied with prescriptions for how to be “good” wives and subservient daughters. They were teaching other women about rights and equality and liberating them from patriarchal commandments, with some choosing to remain virgins and resisting marriage altogether.⁸⁵ Threatened by the movement, severe persecutions were carried out against Catholics in 1801, 1839, 1846, and 1866. An estimated 10,000 believers were martyred during this period. Yet, such dire methods brought only partial success, and Catholicism continued to grow.

By this time, the Joseon dynasty had started to change with the opening of the country to the outside world, and foreign missionaries introduced modernization and modern schools. The Korean-American Treaty of 1882 prepared for American Protestant arrivals in Korea through extraterritorial rights for American citizens. Many other countries’ missionaries arrived and founded schools and taught the Christian tenet that all human beings were equal before God. These teachings were greatly enhanced by the Sirhak, Tonghak, and Kabo Reforms that continually acted as reform movements in Korea.

In 1883, the Methodist Foreign Mission Headquarters in New York decided to establish a mission in Korea and dispatched Mary Fletcher Benton Scranton (1832-1909) in 1885 to become the first female missionary of the United Methodist Church in Korea.⁸⁶ The WFMS believed the most direct influence on women’s enlightenment was education and focused on establishing girls’ schools. Mary Scranton laid the foundations for the WFMS mission in Seoul and helped establish the wider

⁸⁵ Cawley, Kevin N. "4 Dangerous Women in the Early Catholic Church in Korea".

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Protestant missionary endeavor on the Korean peninsula.⁸⁷ During the pioneering period of the mission, there was a desperate need for Korean female evangelists, who conveyed the thoughts of a missionary to Korean women because of the language and culture barriers.

In 1886, Scranton established Korea's first girls' school by Queen Min's decree.⁸⁸ Queen Min was a strong supporter of girls' education. She visited Scranton's school in 1885 and gave its name "Ewha" (Pear blossom) haktang (school), a symbol of the royal family;⁸⁹ Queen Min's visit not only raised the public image of the school for women's hope and vision to bring a career and to full gender equality and also believed that the creation of the school was significant not only to girls but also for the state, believing girls could be a driving force for good, change, and progress.⁹⁰ In fact, girls' education did contribute to the foundation of inclusive and sustainable growth. It also contributed to improving the circumstances of women's literacy activities.

Scranton's goal was to share the Christian message with Korean girls and women and help them organize Christian services.⁹¹ A couple of years later, Annie J. Ellers, a medical missionary who was sent from the North Presbyterian Church, established Jeongdong school in 1887.⁹² Additional Christian schools were established at a rapid pace during the last quarter of the nineteenth century; half of these schools were for girls. The education was equivalent to that of the regular nonsectarian schools with the addition of

⁸⁷ Rosemary Keller, ed., *Spirituality & Social Responsibility*: (Abingdon Press, 1993), 185-90.

⁸⁸ Jeong-kyu Lee, "The establishment of modern universities in Korea and their implications for Korean education policies": In *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 2001, 9 (27)

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "130th Anniversary Special in Relics." Ewha Womans University. Accessed June 2022. Exhibition <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/130-years-of-memory-in-relics-ewha-womans-university-museum/fURp9DCMQjVLQ?hl=en>

⁹¹ Jeong-kyu Lee.

⁹² Daniel Lyman Gifford, "Education in the Capital of Korea, Part I." <The Korean Repository> July, 1896. 281-287.

their Christian-oriented teachings. In 1888, Scranton opened the Sunday school and started recruiting students and expected strong enrollment because attendance offered many benefits, like free tuition, food, and lodging.⁹³ However, recruitment of girls was not easy due to the Confucian culture; Girls were discouraged from leaving the house; this was especially true of middle and upper-class families. Women themselves also were not prepared to go against such a long-standing indoctrinated culture yet. Another contributing factor was that the school was founded by Christian missionaries. It had been only twenty years since Catholics were massacred by the Korean government, thus, whenever Christianity was mentioned, Korean people remembered the fear people felt during the massacres.⁹⁴ It was understandable for parents who were reluctant to send their daughters to missionaries for a new education.

The Sex/Gender Segregation rule was a deep-rooted patriarchal ideology, and missionaries soon recognized that this rule hindered their mission to convert especially Korean women to Christianity because male preachers could not preach in front of women congregants.⁹⁵ It is estimated that the Presbyterian Church started around 1897 and the Methodist Church started around 1898 to systematically train Bible women. However, even before Bible women were trained systematically, several missionaries recognized the need for female evangelists who could help them interpret their messages and visit other Korean women in their homes.

When Mary Scranton started Sunday school classes to recruit Bible women, the classes were all scheduled during the daytime and participants were all Korean men;

⁹³ Donald Clark N., "Preface". In Heather Willoughby, ed., *Footsteps Across the Frontier*. (Ewha Womans University Press, 2007).

⁹⁴ Alexander Y. Hwang & Lydia T. Kim. "The Silk Letter of Alexander Sayông Hwang: Introduction and Abridged Translation." *Missiology*, vol. 37, no. 2, Apr. 2009, 167–179.

⁹⁵ Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea*. 203-09.

there were no women because the segregation law forbade Korean women to go out in daylight. Scranton resolved to recruit women in the evening for women participants only.⁹⁶ Another example of the segregation custom was that Scranton initiated the hanging of a curtain between the male preacher and the women congregants, between the male congregants and female congregants.⁹⁷ Although it seemed superficial, this practice worked. From that time on, whenever men and women gathered for services, they used a curtain to allow women to hear male teachers or male missionaries' voices.

Furthermore, most importantly, the segregation rule resulted in producing "Bible women - female evangelists," who could visit many women's quarters -- *anbang* -- to share the Gospel and resources without any restrictions. After the evangelist training, Bible women were sent to their jurisdictions under the direction of the missionary who hired them to carry out their evangelism work. They were evangelists who preached the Christian gospel, sold Bibles and hymnals, taught *Hangul*, and visited women who were not even allowed to go outside.

From the late 1880s, early pioneer missionaries were searching for Korean women who had mature character, intellectual capacity to teach Bible to others, and personal liberty to work among women. These full-time Bible women or evangelists provided essential support in the growth of evangelical work, especially to spread the Gospel in small villages far from cities. Missionaries found that "evangelism among the working class is better than for upper classes," and "you should spread the gospel among women, making a greater effort to educate Christian girls, because mothers have a great

⁹⁶ Mary Paik Lee. *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America*. Eds. Sucheng Chan. (University of Washington Press. 1990.) Intro. xxxiv

⁹⁷ Ewha Woman's University Archive, ed. *Ewha Old and New: 110 Years of History 1886-1996*. (Ewha Womans University Press. 2005)

influence on the education of coming generations.” Great success in Christianity could be explained because of the simplicity of the Korean alphabet, the impact of conversion to Christianity on Korean women’s status, and the establishment of girls' schools.⁹⁸

Thus, the issue of women’s education was swirling in social and political chaos, in which foreign Christian missionaries recognized that establishing schools for girls was the most urgent matter for spreading Christianity.⁹⁹ Missionaries preferred to train single women from Ewha Hakdang or widows as Bible women because many married women with families could not concentrate on evangelical work full-time. Most of the Bible women were wives who had been neglected or abandoned by their husbands.¹⁰⁰

Anbang link also helped find students for the Bible class, although missionary women found that the most effective method was through girls’ schools. For example, six years after Ewha Hakdang was founded, the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS) missionaries in Korea had two of their students working as assistants – Mary Hwang who was a young married woman as their Bible woman, and Esther Pak as their interpreter, whose narrative was introduced in Chapter IV.¹⁰¹ Becoming a Bible woman was more than simply becoming a dedicated Christian; it was an opportunity to learn, work, and make money. Bible women also had to be literate, so they became role models for many women.

Missionary Harriet G. Gale (1885-1908) briefly described the life paths of the Korean women she worked with, ranging from a “light-hearted and almost careless, always smiling” woman to a woman who “fears nothing and will talk about the Bible and

⁹⁸ SongMo Hwang, “Protestantism and Korea,” *Korea Journal*, vol 7, no. 2 (February 1976), 5.

⁹⁹ Yung Chung Kim, 217, 244.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 86

¹⁰¹ Pae-yong Yi, *Women in Korean History*. (Ewha Womans University Press. 2008.)

read it anywhere.” Gale introduced one woman as “the best and brightest of all is dear old halmonie” [grandmother]. Gale went on to say: “Unlike most Koreans, she looked straight into my face and not at my dress She came, day after day, caring nothing about the strange [foreign] things she saw, but eagerly devouring chapter after chapter of the Gospel.”¹⁰² The case Gale introduced here was not unique. Many missionary women testified that widows or single elderly Korean women actively worked as Bible women. They served as role models for modern women through their Christian teachings and doctrines, which included the principle of equality and the rights of women. These women were perceived as passionate individuals committed to their understanding of the truth. They were women of passion and displayed sincere dedication to their faith and work, which led some widows to become Bible women.

Widows had very low status in Korea, but they could raise their status to become Bible women, which gave them an enhanced identity other than a mere widow.¹⁰³ Furthermore, they were paid for their work and attained some level of financial independence.¹⁰⁴ In general, career opportunities like these didn’t come often for Korean women at the time, especially for widows. Once they were accepted as Bible women, they received serious literacy training in mission schools and Sunday schools and were offered job opportunities as Bible women, teachers, nurses, and even housemaids for missionaries. These opportunities stimulated Korean women to awaken for their rights.

¹⁰² Harriet G. Gale, "The Women who Labor with me in the Gospel," *Woman's Work for Woman*, 7, no. 8 (August 1892): 215-17.

¹⁰³ EuiYoung Yu, "Women in Traditional and Modern Korea." in *Korean Women in Transition*. 1987. (Center for Korean-American and Korean Studies. LA, CA. 1987.) 15

¹⁰⁴ Hyaewool Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Woman, Old Ways*. Seoul-California Series in Korean Studies, 1 (University of California Press, 2009) 140-41.

Access to education was a seed for deconstructing the established roles for women under Neo-Confucianism.¹⁰⁵ The establishment of Christian schools and other women's schools such as Jinmyung and Sookmyung in 1895 and 1899 accelerated such development.¹⁰⁶ Korean girls and women who pursued higher education and professional careers might have converted to Christianity to take advantage of these exceptional opportunities.¹⁰⁷ They were taught to emphasize the importance of being better housewives, mothers, and educators of their children. Despite this conservative view of female missionaries, their educational, medical, and charitable activities based on evangelistic efforts were indeed important factors behind the radical social changes that began to take place in Korea. In a manner, American women missionaries helped accelerate the process of modernization in Korea through their examples of lifestyle, professionalism, and active social engagement.¹⁰⁸

Another factor that made Bible women reputable was that up until the 1930s, most of the Korean population lived in villages of less than 10,000 people, which gave easy access for women to visit other women's homes to spread the Gospel; this enabled female missionaries and the Bible women to preach the Gospel in all of the villages, using women's quarters (anbang) for evangelism.¹⁰⁹ Paradoxically, the segregation rule allowed missionary women to initiate a women's ministry and produced the anbang link. The British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) Annual Report for 1913 highlighted the Bible women's ability to meet other women. It described these Bible women's accessibility through the anbang network as limitless in these women's comfortable

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 145-50.

¹⁰⁷ Allen Clark, *A History of the Church in Korea*: (Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1992), 112.

¹⁰⁸ Katherine H. Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom: Pioneer American Women Missionaries in Korea*: (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2009), 447.

¹⁰⁹ Hanok, Korean.net. Access date: June 12, 2020.

spaces to spread the Gospel.¹¹⁰

From anbang, the matriarch of the house would direct domestic work and this was the sphere in which informal education and ethical instructions happened for women including daughters. Anbang was her only legitimate space; a place she could control, teach, command, and excel in the duties of a daughter, wife, and mother, who worked everything else related to the comfort and interest of the men in the sarangbang. Generally, the influence of anbang was felt in other areas of the house, like the kitchen, and in places where women carried out domestic work outside the house, such as the village wells, washing places by the mountain streams, and marketplace.¹¹¹

The network was indispensable to Korean women because it was the only educational network offered to women at the time. The missionary women's motto of "woman's-work-for-woman" described the link of communication amongst the Korean female populace, which provided the best access to family networks. From this point, the term "anbang network" will be used instead of the foreign missionary's motto. Korean women's contributions to missionaries and Bible women's missions through the anbang network were indispensable.

Literacy and the teaching of Bible women brought Korean womanhood into a new phase of progress. Attending schools and Bible classes gave women chances to enjoy not only physical liberty outside their homes but also spiritual liberty as well. Through the influence of Sirhak, Tonghak, and Christianity, people witnessed not only the first female Korean medical doctor and first trained nurse, but also the first trained kindergarten teachers, and many other women leaders. However, despite the remarkable prospects

¹¹⁰ Yi Man-yŏl, *Han'guk Kidokkyo wa Minsokweesik* (The Korean Christianity and Nationalism), (Seoul: Jisiksanubsa, 2000), 356-374.

¹¹¹ Katherine Ahn. *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*. 200

both Korean women and foreign women missionaries had in the mission field, both missionary women and Korean Bible women were significantly controlled by a patriarchal church structure that institutionalized gender inequality.

According to the daily newspaper Maeilsinbo, on September 17, 1922, the pay for male preachers ranged from 78 won to 100 won, while the women's pay was around 20 won. The Bible women and church-related women demanded a raise in salary, appealing to the newly appointed bishop of the Southern Methodist Church. This instance became one of the earliest cases of women seeking equal rights with men.¹¹² Gender inequality in the church was demonstrated in the lack of women in leadership positions; a wide salary gap between men and women workers; and the overall subordinate status of women.

When Western missionaries initially came to Korea, it seemed that women could deconstruct the idea of inequality, but as the church began to settle, male-centered dogmas prevailed. Women's position in the church did not progress, but in many cases actually underwent a regression. Many Protestant leaders supposed that inequality was endorsed from the beginning by God, the absolute authority. Male leaders believed the inferiority of women was an unchangeable fact that God willed from the beginning. Theologians justified it, and church leaders reaffirmed it.¹¹³

C. Internal/External Factors: Hangul, Gapsin Coup, Kabo Reform, New Women, and Conflicts with Japan

As discussed above, the growing number of female Catholic memberships indicated that women were studying church doctrine in Hangul thanks to the first Korean theology translated by the well-known scholar Chong Yak Chong, *The Essentials of the*

¹¹² Kim Yung Chung, 222.

¹¹³ Ibid. 206-208.

Lord's Teachings, which contributed to the development of Hangul culture.¹¹⁴ In particular, the use of the Bible translated into the Korean alphabet, Hangul, brought significant changes in the cultural life of Korean society.¹¹⁵ Hangul was created for women and low-class people in 1443 during the reign of King Sejong, who wished to help his people express their sentiments in writing.¹¹⁶

Chinese characters were used for written Korean; these Chinese characters were cherished by the yangban class, and Hangul was disdained because of its relative simplicity. However, thanks to the widespread reading of the Bible in Hangul at the beginning of the twentieth century, the value of the Korean language was finally recognized, and women's literacy increased notably.¹¹⁷ The ability of women and the common people to participate in cultural life was recognized, and the silenced began to speak; in another small way, the carefully constructed role of women in Korean society was beginning to change.

The Kabo Reform and Gapsin Coup were two additional factors that sowed the seeds of the deconstruction of Neo-Confucian gender roles in Korea. Before the Kabo reform (1894-1896), several young scholars, who could not wait for the sluggish modernization process by the government, took action to save the country from failing. They were the radical group that brought about the Gapsin Coup in 1884 for modernization.¹¹⁸ The Gapsin Coup was an attempted three-day coup d'état by a small group (about 150) of the Sirhak reformers led by Pak Yong Hyo and several scholars in

¹¹⁴ Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea*. 196.

¹¹⁵ The Annals of King Sejong, "King Sejong the Great and the Golden Age of Korea," *Asia Society*, accessed Nov. 25, 2021. <https://asiasociety.org/education/king-sejong-great>

¹¹⁶ The Annals of King Sejong.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 277

¹¹⁸ Young I. Lew, "The Reform Efforts and Ideas of Pak Yǒng-Hyo, 1894—1895." *Korean Studies* 1 (1977): 21–61.

the Enlightenment Party. Gapsin refers to the year 1884.¹¹⁹ Although the reformers were young, few in number, and low in rank and position, they called into question the capacity and ability of the government to provide the proper leadership. The members of the Enlightenment Party had all been abroad, and many of them had studied at universities in foreign countries. For the task of national revitalization, these Korean intellectuals established the Independence Club (Tongnip Hyophoe) and its daily newspaper (Tongnip Sinmun). Tongnip Hyophoe was founded through the initiative of Philip Jaisohn (Seo Jae Pil), Yu Kil Chun, and Yun Chi Ho on July 2, 1896.¹²⁰

The reformers emphasized the importance of women's intellectual power and urged the government and the public to give serious attention to women's education to maximize the number of people who could protect the state from Western and Japanese imperialism. Until this time, only a small proportion of upper-class women, the daughters of the literati and yangban, could access the teachings of Neo-Confucianism indirectly; they received an informal education in the inner chambers of their homes from family members or as they peered over their brothers' shoulders as the boys were schooled at home. For women of the lower classes, there was virtually no access to education.¹²¹ This movement urgently called for the involvement of Korean women in political, economic, and social activities, which required women to be educated. In this political milieu, Korean women participated in the movement for the nation's independence before they fought for their rights as women.¹²²

However, the coup failed and set back the cause of reform for almost a decade.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Jinwung Kim, *A History of Korea: From "Land of the Morning Calm" to States in Conflict*. (New York: Indiana University Press, 2012).

¹²¹ Younho Oh, "Korean Picture Brides in Hawai'i: Historical and Literary Narratives," *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, (Ewha Womans University, Seoul, December 2017)] Vol. 7, No. 12, 1632-1644

¹²² Jinwung Kim, *A History of Korea*.

Although women's issues were not the intellectuals' direct concern at the time, the petition made by Pak Yong Hyo was considered the first progressive effort to deal with women's issues. The leaders of the coup sought a wide range of reforms, in which progressive political elements attempted to overthrow the conservative pro-Chinese government. Among the reforms he sought were several aspects of women's issues such as an equal opportunity for education for boys and girls above the age of six, a ban on child marriages, a ban on concubinage, and permission for remarriage.¹²³ Most Sirhak scholars also pushed for women's education, but unlike the leaders of the Gapsin coup, they regarded women's education as another step toward achieving Korea's modernization rather than an issue of women's rights and equality.¹²⁴

In the final decade of the Joseon dynasty, the country was in upheaval because of the "opening" of the country to Imperialism, the attempted Gapsin coup, and peasant uprisings during the reign of King Kojong in response to the Tonghak Peasant Revolution. Japan's ambition of expanding its settlements in Korea in order to create a trade bridge between Japan and China was particularly alarming for Korean people.

As a response to these threats and challenges, the Joseon rulers embarked on a series of reforms known as the Kabo Reforms (1894-1896).¹²⁵ The reforms abolished the Confucian examination system and created a new Ministry of Education in 1894, although these reforms did not have much impact on women's education. However, many of the lower-class concerns, including women's grievances, were addressed later through the Kabo Reform generated by Sirhak and Tonghak movements. Eventually,

¹²³Young I. Lew, "The Reform Efforts and Ideas of Pak Yōng-hyo, 1894-1895." *Korean Studies* 1 (1977): 21-61.

¹²⁴ Michael J. Seth, (2011). *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 237.

¹²⁵ Marius B. Jansen, *The Cambridge History of Japan* Volume 5 The Nineteenth Century. (Cambridge University Press, 1989.)

remarriage for widows, concubinage, child marriage, slavery, and many other forms of determining social privileges were legally abolished in the Joseon dynasty as part of the Kabo Reforms.¹²⁶

Although the Kabo Reform was considered a pro-Japanese-sponsored reform because it was led by young, ambitious Korean literati who had been educated in Japan, the spirit of Kabo persisted as a driving force for social and political reform and shaped the subsequent emergence of modern Korea.¹²⁷ The social and political unrest of the late Joseon dynasty eventually generated its fall in 1897, leading to the creation of the Korean Empire (1897-1910). Kojong became the Gwangmu Emperor, the first imperial head of state. The Empire aimed to modernize but became increasingly submissive to the imperialistic power of Japan.

Government ordinances for the modern school system were established, and the opportunity for education was open to everyone.¹²⁸ The *Tongnip Sinmun*, which reported on the youth section of the Independence Club led by So Chae Pil, said the government should not discriminate against girls and expressed the necessity of women's education and the equality between men and women.¹²⁹ Although public opinion was not yet favorable enough for the government to take these steps, the notion of women's education and equal rights for every citizen was familiarized as a means of spreading enlightenment during the 1880s and 1890s. Thus, education became the means of constructing modern nationhood.¹³⁰

During this period, not only was the general attitude toward women's education

¹²⁶ History Controversies Study Agency (1994). [*The Nokdu Flower Blooms Again: Testimony of Tonghak Peasant Descendants*] (in Korean), (History Bipyongsa), 1–400.

¹²⁷ Yung Chung Kim, 215.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹²⁹ *Tongnip Sinmun*, May 12, 1896.

¹³⁰ Theodore Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea; Education, Labor, and Health, 1910-1945*. (University of California, 1972.) 45.

still negative and women themselves not yet ready to react, but also most government officials, who were conservative Confucians, fervently opposed the new form of education. The Minister of Education, Sin Ki Son, announced in 1896 that adopting the Western style of hair and clothes would make Koreans like savages, and he encouraged the use of desirable Chinese characters, otherwise Confucian society would be destroyed.¹³¹

Simultaneously, men expressed hatred of certain groups of women such as courtesans (kisaengs) “the lowest ” and a few educated women whom they considered “the dared” who challenged manhood.¹³² Korean men had felt threatened, embarrassed, and disapproved of by the educated women and kisaengs, whom men thought had violated the fundamental principles of Confucian womanhood such as the Seven Evils and the Three Obediences.¹³³ Men believed that they had stood as creators or owners of the state and had tried to establish its proud history, and some argued that the cause of the national crisis was that women had polluted the essence of the Confucian nation. For example, they blamed Queen Min (1851-1895) for irritating male authority with her political involvement, kisaengs for selling their bodies to foreigners, and educated women, called the “New Woman (Sinyosong)” for imitating foreign women’s lifestyles and abandoning “Koreanness.”¹³⁴ The narratives of Queen Min and two other remarkable women were presented in Chapter IV.

Furthermore, when Korean men lost their long-held power when Japan wanted to control the Korean peninsula for its imperial ambitions, Korean men wanted to blame

¹³¹Yung Chung Kim, 217

¹³² Ibid, 245-46.

¹³³ Kyung Ae Park, *Women and Social Change in South and North Korea: Marxist and Liberal Perspectives*: (Michigan State University, 1992).

¹³⁴ Yung Chung Kim, 285.

somebody else, and made Korean women targets for their loss and humiliation.

Historically, Korean men had been privileged as the heads of families and the owners of the state during the Joseon dynasty, and their masculinity was tied to the dignity of the state. When the state was stable, they held political and economical power, but during a crisis, their privileges could be a burden because they had to protect their families and the state. This expression of fury toward or detesting women was not a new phenomenon exacerbated by Korean men's loss of pride and masculine authority.¹³⁵ They felt their masculinity was violated since they had failed to protect their own women and country, and as an ironic result, they wanted to silence those same women.

These beliefs contributed to an increase in the grave oppression of women. Yet, Korean men realized at the same time that if women's potential competence increased, their accomplishments would increase and these achievements would be beneficial for the men and their country as a whole. The New Woman was a feminist ideal that emerged in the late 19th century and had a profound influence well into the 20th century. A new image of womanhood emerged and began to shape public views and understandings of women's role in society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America. Identified by contemporaries as a flapper, a suffragist, a reformer, a feminist, a college girl, a bicyclist, a working-class militant, or a Hollywood vamp, all of these images came to epitomize the New Woman, an umbrella term for modern understandings of femininity.¹³⁶ The main properties of the trend were to gain recognition of women's humanity and to create a space for themselves; this trend also represented the rise of feminism and the campaign

¹³⁵ Key Ray Chong, "The *Tonghak* Rebellion: Harbinger of Korean Nationalism." *Journal of Korean Studies (1969-1971)* 1, no. 1 (1969): 73–88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23849478>.

¹³⁶ Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, *New Woman in Early 20th-Century America*. Published online: 22 August 2017 and accessed in 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.427>

for women's suffrage, as well as the rise of consumerism and mass culture that defined the first decades of the 20th century. Besides, the New Women movement of the early twentieth century stressed women's explorations of their sexuality and identity, and in Korea, they pushed the limits set by a male dominant society for emancipation from the Confucian patriarchy. Some elite women began to challenge the double standard by claiming the same sexual freedoms enjoyed by men.

Several Korean female students, who were educated in Japan, the West, and missionary schools, had awakened from the oppressive social context in which Korean women had to live. Additionally, the term "New Woman" was introduced in Japan and spread to Korea by these female students during the process of Japanese protectorate and colonization. After acquiring new knowledge, they demanded authority over their rights to choose, for example, lifestyle, hairstyles, and clothing while emphasizing equal education for girls/women.

Patriotism in the light of the Japanese protectorate bolstered the New Woman trend in sowing the seeds of deconstruction; this patriotism was the consistent concept in the educational journal *Yoja Chinam* (Women's guide), in which some intellectual New Women wrote essays emphasizing the importance of women's education and equal rights on education.¹³⁷ Several enlightened women also wrote articles on equality between the sexes and education, but they advocated the patriotic point of view and considered the enlightenment of women a remote hope which had nothing to do with them.¹³⁸ One progressive woman, named Yi KangJa, voiced a strong opinion in an essay in *Yoja Chinam* that women's freedom and rights were lost due to women's dependence upon

¹³⁷ Yung Chung Kim, 246-47.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

men; she argued that women should become educated and achieve economic independence to pursue their freedom and rights.¹³⁹ Several rich upper-class widows founded a Korean women's organization in 1889, Chanyanghoe, which has been referred to as the first women's organization in Korea.¹⁴⁰ The members of Chanyanghoe pleaded to the government to start a school for girls in 1898, and the government founded the first state Sunshung Girls School in 1908.¹⁴¹ The target of Chanyanghoe was to educate and liberate women from Confucian sex/gender segregation and attain the same freedom and equality as enjoyed by the New Women movement in America and other Western countries.

New women were different in many ways from traditional Korean women and were at the center of the deconstruction and reconstruction of Korean female identity while enduring social ostracism, criticism, and ridicule. The ideal woman in traditional Korean society was identified as a nameless, voiceless, selfless woman who performed the duties of a self-sacrificing career. These new women were generally well-educated, opinionated, confident, active, and autonomous, and their status became relatively closer to that of their men.¹⁴² Partially agreeing with the New Woman's modernized ideas as symbols of modernity, civilization, and nationalism, the Sirhak and Tonghak reformers encouraged them to construct new roles and identities for women, but the New Woman rejected the gender performance set out for her by the colonial state and Korean national reformers and searched to correct the gender imbalance in the construction of their identities;¹⁴³ she wanted to write her own script by crossing gender boundaries,

¹³⁹ Ibid, 246

¹⁴⁰ Kyung Ae Park, "Women and Social Change in South and North Korea: Marxist and Liberal Perspectives" (PDF). [June 1992]

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ai Ra Kim, 32-33

¹⁴³ Theodore Jun Yoo, 59.

demanding access to knowledge that had typically been restricted to men, and espousing new mentalities, dress, and ideas of female emancipation.¹⁴⁴ Women wanted to establish their own gender boundaries and demand access to knowledge restricted to men.¹⁴⁵ A growing interest in the proactive and even revolutionary power of women in the Neo-Confucian Joseon dynasty brought out a more dynamic and multifaceted depiction of the New Woman phenomenon of the time.¹⁴⁶

Any change in the status of women was a threat to tradition, especially to the conservatives. These conservatives were prompt to grip the misconduct of a few women and criticized the whole group to prevent any further advancement of women while urging these women not to imitate Western ways blindly.¹⁴⁷ The new women were accused of being offensive because of violation of the ideal of core femininity based on the Neo-Confucian principle--obedient daughters, wise mothers, and good and loyal wives.¹⁴⁸ These women were also severely condemned for selfishly putting their personal issues over national sovereignty.¹⁴⁹ The male-dominant society constructed terms like “the other woman” and “seductive temptress” to distort their image and their assertiveness and to denigrate them in sexual terms.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, men raised issues such as women’s fashions, love and marriage, and birth control, which proved the vulnerability of tradition and prompted the elite to discuss gender identities and roles. Women’s ambition for a career, self-expression, and free love was misinterpreted by the public as young women who were shallow and who loved a lavish lifestyle. The New

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 73.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 198-99

¹⁴⁷ Yung Chung Kim, 276.

¹⁴⁸ Hyaeweol Choi. "Women's Literacy and New Womanhood in Late Choson Korea." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 6, no. 1 (Mar 31, 2000): 88.

¹⁴⁹ Theodore Jun Yoo. 199

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 198.

Woman came to be embodied by the “modern girl,” along with other constructed images by the male dominant society and promoted individuality and free sexual expression.¹⁵¹

Despite this conservative pushback, the era of enlightenment, the work of Christian missionaries, and the establishment of women’s educational institutions prepared Koreans for the New Woman trend. With the trend prevalent, though short-lived due to the Japanese annexation of Korea, systematic prejudices against gender equality held by people in this Neo-Confucian society began to slowly break down and its powerful inspiration paved the way to new domains for career women and set the path toward higher education and more freedom.¹⁵² This response by Korean society may explain the motivation for some brave women to explore a new territory of immigration, including picture brides.

Conclusion

The Neo-Confucian patriarchy constructed a theory that women did not need to be literate to fulfill their bestowed duties. Therefore, until the late 19th century, most women were denied the opportunity to acquire an education. Although Neo-Confucian prescriptions for gender roles persisted, various modernization movements, including Sirhak and Tonghak toward the end of the Joseon dynasty, along with the interactions that women had with each other as a result of sex segregation rules began to open the doors for deconstruction and reconstruction of gender roles.¹⁵³

During a period of modernization and Japanese occupation, Christianity was considered a driving force for Korean nationalism. Starting from Catholicism,

¹⁵¹Joshua Zietz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity and the Women Who Made America Modern* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 8, 23

¹⁵² Theodore Jun Yoo. 60.

¹⁵³ Jacques Derrida". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Britannica.com.

Christianity offered women's education, especially through the girls' schools and the ideals of Western feminism. Women were awakened to reality and the ability to challenge authority; long-held customs began to change as a result of the foreign missionary women's contribution to women's education, the New Woman Movement, and Japanese colonialism in 1910-1945.¹⁵⁴ Both Korean women's contact with Western ideas about women's issues and women's ardent resistance to Japanese colonialism significantly expanded women's involvement in economic, social, and political ventures in Korea. These women's zeal for national independence and search for identity through their unique education system challenged the existing patriarchal Confucian and gender hierarchy, and the seeds of the eventual deconstruction of the patriarchal orders sprouted.

¹⁵⁴ Insook Kwon, "'The New Women's Movement' in 1920s Korea: Rethinking the Relationship Between Imperialism and Women". *Gender & History*. 10 (3): 1998, 381–405

Chapter IV Rebellious Women: Examples of Deconstruction

Women's education is perceived as a necessity for survival and success in the modern world, and being literate is a crucial factor in the social and cultural status of an individual in society; education plays a key role in eliminating gender inequality and can contribute to women's financial independence.¹⁵⁵ Likewise, education is a tool that women need if they are to deconstruct their roles in society.

To emphasize the relationship between education and gender status, the narratives of several rebellious women will be introduced in this chapter. These women include Queen Min, who was politically involved in her husband's government and was killed in 1895 due to her violation of the core value of femininity of Neo-Confucianism. The second rebellious woman described is Esther Pak, who became the first female medical doctor in Korea and represented the importance of education. Kisaeng Aeng Mu, who challenged male authority publically, is the third. The chapter will also describe the heroic participation of other kisaengs, who were considered the lowest of the low, in the National Debt Repayment Movement and the March First Movement for independence from Japan.

A. Queen Min

King Kojong (Yi Myeong Bok) took the throne in the fall of 1864 as the last king of the Joseon dynasty when he was only twelve years old.¹⁵⁶ Because Yi was a minor, his father Daewongun ruled the country as regent for his son. In March 1866, sixteen-year-old Min Ja Young (1851-1895) was chosen by her future father-in-law

¹⁵⁵ Yung-hee Kim, "Under the Mandate of Nationalism" *Journal of Women's History*; Baltimore Vol. 7, Iss. 4, (Winter 1995): 120.

¹⁵⁶ "고종(高宗) - 한국민족문화대백과사전". encykorea.aks.ac.kr. Retrieved 3 December 2021.

Daewongun and married his son, the fifteen-year-old King Kojong. Political considerations were necessary for the selection of a queen because royal marriages were often considered useful for gaining higher positions of power.¹⁵⁷ Daewongun chose an orphaned girl who had beauty, health, virtue, and intellect on the level of the highest nobles in the country. He believed that it would be simple to keep a powerless orphan girl under his authority as a daughter-in-law, assuming that the girl wouldn't be able to disobey him, and knowing that she did not have parents who would interfere in political affairs.¹⁵⁸

On March 20, 1866, Min Ja Young married the boy-king and was crowned the Queen of Joseon, at the age of barely 16. Min ascended to the throne with her husband and received the title “Her Royal Highness/Queen Min,” officially becoming Queen consort of King Kojong, who was the twenty-sixth king of the five-century-long Joseon dynasty.¹⁵⁹ They reigned throughout the years leading up to the end of the Joseon dynasty and Korea's admittance into the modern world.

Unlike other queens that came before her, Queen Min looked down on lavish parties and extravagant fashions. She seldom held parties with the powerful aristocratic ladies and princesses of the royal family unless there were political advantages to be gained from them. Court officials, including Queen Min's father-in-law, expected Min to act only as an icon for the high society of Korea, but Min chose instead to improve her status by reading books reserved for men and teaching herself philosophy, history, science, politics, religion, and foreign languages. Queen Min was energetically involved in her husband's government and demonstrated diplomatic ability and wisdom. Her

¹⁵⁷ Characteristics of Queen of Korea *The New York Times* (Nov 10, 1895).

¹⁵⁸ Michael J. Seth, *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present*: (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

¹⁵⁹ Chu-hyön Yu. *Taewön Kun*. Söul T'ükpyölsi: (Yangudang, Seoul, 1985)

serious study threatened many people who believed she had too much knowledge for a woman and violated the prescription of Confucian feminine principles. Daewongun was deeply concerned and once remarked, “she aspires to be a doctor of letters; look out for her.”¹⁶⁰ Immersing herself in the study, Queen Min paid little attention to her husband, who found entertainment with concubines and kisaengs in his private quarters. Daewongun believed that the reason for his son’s indulgence with kisaengs and concubines was that Queen Min had deserted her wifely duty. Daewongun’s reaction, offering another woman for his son, reflected the idea that women were simply incubators that could be easily replaced.

Min’s curiosity regarding Western technologies and women’s education led her to invite the English traveler Isabell Bishop to Korea. Bishop described the queen as careful not to undermine the king’s authority publicly, despite the fact that she assisted him substantially; Queen Min had to overcome negative public opinion and resistance toward her public role in the male-centered Confucian monarchy. Bishop added that unlike other queens in Asia, Queen Min was “a well-read, intelligent, and strong-willed woman; she was an exceptional politician and diplomat, who devoted her life to her country’s independence.”¹⁶¹

Queen Min’s conflicts with Daewongun surfaced in international relations between Japan, Russia, and China. When Daewongun started as a regent in 1863, he had chosen to adopt a closed-door policy to protect the country that was threatened by foreign imperialistic invasions. During this turbulent period, Queen Min dared to challenge her mighty father-in-law with an open-door policy to improve the state’s economic interests

¹⁶⁰ Paine S.C.M., *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy*: (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 316.

¹⁶¹ Isabella Bird, *Korea and her Neighbors*: (London: Murray, 1898), Reprinted 1987.

and provide access to Western technologies on the principle of maintaining trade and commercial activity. She confronted Confucian patriarchal mores and authorities and actively mediated state affairs more ardently than any other queen consort throughout the Joseon period. Daewongun's hand-picked orphaned daughter-in-law was rebellious, diplomatically brilliant, politically ambitious, and strong-willed.¹⁶²

Recognizing her administrative abilities, charisma, knowledge, and insight into international and domestic affairs, King Kojong awarded Queen Min his absolute trust, and she remained powerful for almost twenty years as the relationship with her father-in-law deteriorated.¹⁶³ The expanding political struggle between Queen Min and Daewongun became public when her son died three days after he was born in 1876.¹⁶⁴ Daewongun, with less power than before, publicly declared Min unable to bear a healthy male child and directed Kojong to impregnate a royal concubine, Yeongbodang Yi; she later gave birth to a healthy son, Wanhwagun. The title of Crown Prince was given to Wanhwagun as a successor.¹⁶⁵

During this time, Queen Min and Kojong's attempts to challenge Japanese domination aggravated the Japanese, who viewed Queen Min as an adversary working behind the scenes to undermine their interests. Miura Goro, a retired army lieutenant-general and the Japanese Minister to Korea at that time, backed the faction headed by Daewongun, whom he considered to be more sympathetic to Japanese interests. The high-ranking Korean officials were not ready to embrace female leadership

¹⁶²Yong-shik Choe, "Blood Feud - Brit Uncovered Choson Royal Family's Infighting" (Journeys Into Choson 29), *Korea Now* (April 5, 2003)

¹⁶³ Eugene Kim and Han-Kyo Kim. *Korea and the Politics of Imperialism: 1876–1910*: (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967). n.p.

¹⁶⁴ Jiyoung Kim, "Fertility and Childbirth among Royal Women in Nineteenth-Century Korea", *Asia Pacific Perspectives*. (Fall/Winter 2013-14, Vol. 12 Issue,) 192.

¹⁶⁵ McKensie. 25-27

when the country was in chaos; they believed that only strong men were capable of leading the nation. Daewongun, with the same mindset, could not accept a mere woman's authority; his wrath was targeted toward the Queen's unconventional traits as a strong, self-assured, and assertive woman. With the help of Daewongun and Japanese sympathizers, Goro, referring to her as an "old fox," began plotting Queen Min's assassination. His plan, named "Operation Fox Hunt," was also known as the "Eulmi Incident." Her assassination was one of the most gruesome events in Korean history.¹⁶⁶

The struggle between traditional and modern factions resulted in Queen Min's death at the age of 43; her assassination could be regarded as an extreme form of typical gendered and sexualized oppression.¹⁶⁷ She was abused, raped, objectified, and brutally killed, mainly because she was a woman involved in politics and diplomacy, which was regarded as a men's realm. According to the Confucian Book of Odes, women must not be allowed to participate in the affairs of government, and it certainly was a crime for a woman to voice her opinion.¹⁶⁸ She did not attempt to outsmart or dominate her husband; all she wanted to do was to make peace. However, Queen Min's political and diplomatic skills threatened Daewongun and many other high-ranking government officers.

In addition to being loved and honored (not only by her people but also by many foreign officials), she was exceptionally competent and extremely knowledgeable of her country's strengths and weaknesses. Unlike her father-in-law, Queen Min properly understood the need for modernization and adopted an open-door policy, asserting that the state needed to learn from modern Western culture.¹⁶⁹ She wrestled to keep

¹⁶⁶ Kallie Szczepanski, "Biography of Queen Min, Korean Empress." (ThoughtCo, Aug. 28, 2020). <https://www.thoughtco.com/queen-min-of-joseon-korea-195721>

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Haun Saussy, "Repetition, Rhyme, and Exchange in The Book of Odes." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 57, no. 2, (Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1997), 519–42,

¹⁶⁹ Katherine Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*. 158.

independence by balancing the interests of foreign powers to Korea's advantage and paid the price dearly with her life for challenging the existing Confucian patriarchal authority. She played the role of a matriarch, trying to mediate the country's conflicts and create a "safety bubble" amongst imperialists.

Well into the 20th century, many Korean men still used a Korean proverb to criticize powerful women: "If a hen announces the dawn in place of the rooster, the house will be in ruins." The fate that Queen Min faced attests to how difficult it is to deconstruct gender roles when society as a whole has such a strong, multi-layered system of reinforcement.

B. Esther Pak

Esther Pak (1876-1910) was the first female medical doctor in Korea; she was able to challenge prescribed gender roles thanks to women's education, the endeavors of Christian missionary women, and the support of her husband. Like Queen Min, Esther Pak was an example of the role that education can play in women's ability to deconstruct society's assigned gender roles. The gendered patriarchal Confucian concepts of their time did not require literary proficiency for women.¹⁷⁰ During the Joseon dynasty, the government discouraged women's education, limiting its scope to the cultivation of wifely virtues.¹⁷¹

Esther Pak's birth name was Kim Jom Dong. Jom Dong was sent off to school by her father to reduce her family's economic burden; her father knew that the school offered food, shelter, and clothing.¹⁷² Kim Jom Dong became the fourth student of Ewha

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Yung Chung Kim, 159-161.

¹⁷² Shelley Clark, J. Bruce, & A. Dude, "Protecting young women from HIV/AIDS: the case against child and adolescent marriage". *International Family Planning Perspectives*. (32 (2): 2006) 79-88.

Hakdang and lived in a newly built school with several other students.¹⁷³ When the American medical missionary Dr. Sherwood entered Korea, she needed someone to help interpret and work at the women's hospital. Fourteen-year-old Jom Dong was chosen to do the job, along with a few other students from Ewha Hakdang. Jom Dong worked half a dozen hours a day to interpret for patients and help with medication, and she even assisted Dr. Sherwood in surgeries. On account of her capability, Jom Dong was sent to help other medical missionaries as well. Together with two or three other girls, Jom Dong was taught physiology; each day they also received practical lessons in the dispensary in storing drugs and learning to care for the sick.¹⁷⁴ In 1891, 15-year-old Jom Dong was baptized by the Rev. F. Ohlinger and given the name "Esther."

When Esther was sixteen years old, her father died, and two elder sisters were married. At this time, her mother and sisters were anxious because most Korean girls were married by the age of fourteen, although the Tonghak movement had demanded that child marriage be outlawed. The official marriage age had been raised to twenty for men and sixteen for women. It was easy to distinguish unmarried girls from married women because girls wore their hair in a long braid tied with red ribbons down their backs as a symbol of virginity. A braid changed to a chignon when girls married. Therefore, people could not help exclaiming when they recognized girls' long braids, "Why, such a big girl, and not married; what can be the matter? (sic)" Esther, who had to meet many patients including their families, tried to avoid their curious questions and feared that marrying would obstruct her dream of going to America to study medicine.

¹⁷³ Rosetta Sherwood Hall, *Mrs. Esther Kim Pak, M. D.: Korea's first woman doctor*. Methodist Episcopal Church. Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. 4.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 4-5

Agreeing with Dr. Sherwood's opinions about Korean women's status, Esther was tormented by the marriage customs of her country. Additionally, her medical education and frequent contacts with medical missionaries had awakened her to the fact that child marriage was dangerous for female children. The reasons for the practice in Korea varied, from poverty to a lack of educational opportunities. Some poor families married off their daughters to reduce their economic burden or earn income. Esther was sent off to school by her father with similar motivation, to reduce her family's economic burden. Without education, girls and adult women have fewer opportunities to earn an income and financially provide for themselves and their children. This reality made girls and women more vulnerable to persistent poverty if their spouses died, abandoned them, or divorced them.

Growing up in an American-influenced environment in which women were more highly valued, marriage seemed to be nothing but an obstacle for Esther, whose desire was to achieve an advanced education. Cultured by the missionaries, Esther believed that women and girls should have the same opportunities as men and boys and that women could be formidable players in economic development. According to Sherwood's diary about her friend:

Esther Pak told me...she would believe God, be good, and when she dies to [sic] Heaven,...when God say [sic] "what you want" she would say she wanted to be boy. [sic] When I asked why, she said go out [sic] and work and make a home for her mother...I told her girls could earn money for their mothers too...she could become a teacher and receive wages..."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Rosetta Sherwood Hall, *Mrs. Esther Kim Pak, M. D. : Korea's first woman doctor*. Methodist Episcopal Church. Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. 1900, 4-5

The desperate search for young Esther's identity could be examined in her letter to Hall:¹⁷⁶ "I am a Korean girl, but I love you like a sister....Jesus is our eldest brother...I am Jesus' sister...you are Jesus' sister..."¹⁷⁷ Jesus, Sherwood, and herself were all different, but her 14 years of logic led Esther to recognize that they were emerging as brothers and sisters as the Bible taught.

On June 27, 1892, Dr. Sherwood married a Canadian missionary, Dr. James Hall, in Korea. After the marriage, she changed her last name to Hall and became Rosetta Sherwood Hall.¹⁷⁸ For missionaries, growing the Christian community was a central goal, and thus an ideal marriage was a union between a Christian man and a Christian woman. The missionaries not only thought that converting women to Christianity was imperative for the propagation of Christian communities, but also that it would be difficult for Christian women to keep their faith if they married non-Christian Korean men. Having seen the dominant power of the husband in the patriarchal Korean family structure, Rosetta Hall and other missionaries searched for a Christian man for Esther to marry because they did not want to lose one of their hard-won Christian women.¹⁷⁹

The Halls and other missionary friends decided upon Pak Yu San, a young man converted to Christianity who worked for Dr. William Hall as an assistant, helping with chores around the Halls' complex.¹⁸⁰ The marriage was arranged, and in accordance with Korean customs, Esther and Pak Yu San were not allowed to see each other until the marriage ceremony. They were married in a Christian ceremony on May 24, 1893, and

¹⁷⁶ Rosetta Sherwood married Canadian missionary Dr. William James Hall in 1892 and her surname changed to Hall.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Katnerine Ahn, 106.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 258-59.

Esther's last name became Pak.¹⁸¹ Rosetta Hall wrote in her diary about Esther's personal feelings toward her husband: "although Esther's husband was not like other Korean husbands who understood her dream and American culture through missionaries, it took over a year she felt love for him."¹⁸²

Medical education by Rosetta Hall and frequent contacts with medical missionaries familiarized Esther Pak with medicine, but it was witnessing Dr. Hall's life-changing surgery on a small girl with a cleft lip and palate that inspired her to enter the field herself.¹⁸³ Rosetta Hall requested financial help from the WFMS for Esther Pak's schooling and missionaries' support in Korea; subsequently, Esther and her husband left Korea and she became the first Korean woman to visit the United States as a student. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported the following on Nov. 10, 1895:

She speaks English fluently with a very slight accent. She has a perfect physique and shows that nature has designed her for the medical profession by her sympathetic kindness and tenderness towards the sick.¹⁸⁴

What praise she received considering the strong anti-Asian immigration sentiment by White Americans at that time! On their arrival in the United States, she worked and studied industriously. Esther Pak's care for the sick and the frail was especially impressive to the medical staff at the hospital where she worked as a volunteer. Her husband, Pak Yu San, supported his wife financially by working on the Sherwood farm and in several restaurants.

The Woman's Medical College of Baltimore accepted Esther Pak as its youngest and first Korean student in October 1896.¹⁸⁵ Her interest in the school curricula was in

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 259-60

¹⁸² Rosetta Hall, 1900, 7.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 4-5.

¹⁸⁴ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* 10 Nov 1895.

¹⁸⁵ Medicine in Maryland, 1752-1920. <https://mdhistoryonline.net/2018/06/02/sch6/>

obstetrics and women's disease treatment. She continued to participate in the activities of the school and achieved excellent academic results. Her husband had pulmonary cancer and died on April 28, 1900, two months before her graduation, having asked Esther to finish her degree.¹⁸⁶ Esther Pak was offered several jobs in the United States, but she returned to Korea in November 1900 and began to work as the first medical missionary delegated from the United States-based WFMS.¹⁸⁷ She wanted to teach Korean women what she had learned in the United States.

During the first ten months after her return, she treated nearly three thousand cases. For ten years it was Dr. Pak's privilege to continue her work as a medical missionary after returning to Korea from the U.S. to help her own people. She was also of great assistance in the Bible Institutes for women, teaching most enthusiastically any subject required, from hygiene to church history. Esther strongly promoted an enlightenment campaign against superstitious healing conduct. For example, she saw pictures on the entrance door or on the wall of houses where she visited to treat people with cholera epidemics. She was told that people attached a picture of a cat when cholera was widespread because they thought the epidemic was spread by rodents. Spreading by rodents' saliva, urine, and feces was right, but the populace thought that because the cat is a natural predator of rodents, the cat picture would scare rodents away and stop spreading the infectious disease.

Esther also took part in circuit missionary performances and devoted herself to evangelical work at Bible Institute as well.¹⁸⁸ In 1909, when Esther Pak heard Rosetta

¹⁸⁶ Rosetta Sherwood Hall, "Esther Kim Park", *The Life of Lev. William James Hall, M.D.* (New York: Press of Eaton & Mains, 1897)

¹⁸⁷ Katherine Lee Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*. 260-61.

¹⁸⁸ Esther Pak received a silver medal from Kojong for thanking her dedication and care for about 3,000 patients for 10 months in the treatment of female patients since she returned home.

Hall's plan to establish the Pyongyang School for the Deaf and Blind, she was actively involved to accomplish her mentor's dream. Esther had known Rosetta's fervent desire to teach the blind since 1894 when Rosetta Hall modified a form of Braille herself and taught a blind girl to read. Teaching blind girls/women was previously unheard of in Korea.¹⁸⁹

Esther Pak had a strong impact on other Korean women, including her three sisters; they became pioneers as a doctor, a teacher, and a nurse, proving the importance of women's education and showing further evidence that their spirits were unbendable.¹⁹⁰ Her faithful husband, Pak Yu San, who was her second-most ardent supporter after Rosetta Hall, also challenged deeply ingrained stereotypes of gender roles and gave his wife a considerable helping hand. Although society as a whole was not yet ready to support women's rights and education, Esther Pak moved her husband to do so thanks in part to her consistent hard work.

C. Aeng Mu

Aeng Mu (1889-1947) was another example of a rebellious woman who stressed the importance of education and sowed the seeds for the deconstruction of the Neo-Confucian viewpoint of women's education and gender roles. Like many other kisaengs, poverty had forced Aeng Mu's family to sell her to a kisaeng academy when she was a teenager and given the name Aeng Mu, which meant "parrot;" she was skilled at poetry, dance, and Chinese characters.¹⁹¹ Over time, she also became a skilled businesswoman, running restaurants and investing in rice fields in Daegu, and a rich

¹⁸⁹ Along with Esther and another Korean doctor's assistance, Rosetta Hall founded the Chosun [Joseon] Women's Medical Training Institute in 1928, with the goal of elevating it to a Women's Medical School. She was forty-four years old in Korea.

¹⁹⁰ Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea*. p. 229.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* 265

landowner. She was noted for her philanthropy and donated large sums of money to the foundation of the Myeongsin Girls' School in 1910 and the Kyongnam School in the 1930s, acknowledging the importance of education for the younger generation. Her generous donation of money to good causes continuously followed.

Aeng Mu's story begins with her important role in the National Debt Repayment Movement. Japan had begun to exert more and more control over Korea in 1904 and 1905 after the protectorate, which gave Japan control including first advisory status.¹⁹² This control soon became the platform for colonization by diminishing the power of the Korean economy through the strategy of Japan's treasury bonds. These bonds were used to construct many facilities that Japan needed on the peninsula and spread to various aspects of the Korean government administration.

In January 1907, a patriotic national debt repayment movement branched out from Kabo Reforms; it was led by a rich merchant named Seo Sang Don at the Kwangmun Company in Daegu.¹⁹³ The movement aimed to pay off the treasury bonds; Seo Sang Don donated 100 won (the value of a mid-sized house at that time) and the members of the company donated about 2,000 won, encouraging other people to participate. Starting with the major daily newspapers, the movement spread across the nation to raise the goal of 13 million won.¹⁹⁴

A newspaper article reported that an 18-year-old kisaeng called Aeng Mu stunned the country by donating 100 won (\$1,481 value of 2022), the same amount as the

¹⁹² Ji-yǒng Pak, *Korea and the United Nations*, [Kluwer Law International, 2000] 6

¹⁹³ Yung Chung Kim, 190

¹⁹⁴ National Debt Redemption Movement Memorial Museum". Retrieved 7 October 2021. http://gukchae.com/eng/board/board.asp?board_id=11

donation from the company vice-president Seo Sang Don.¹⁹⁵ When she was interviewed, Aeng Mu stated, "it is a national obligation to compensate for government bonds, and as a woman, I dare not to pay even a penny more than a man."¹⁹⁶ In other words, she would donate more if a man donated more, but not a greater amount than any man had; she reasoned that there was no difference between men and women in their hearts for the country, and women were equal to men as members of the state.¹⁹⁷ She dared to question men's authority and to show what the lowest women like her could do for her country, challenging the concepts of the predominance of men and a firm social hierarchy structure. Her story spread like wildfire as the first in the modern history of Korea to publicly challenge men, stirring men's egos to generate large sums of money and spawning the participation of women in the government bond compensation movement.

On March 26, 1907, the newspaper Hwangseong reported that Seo Sang Don and Jung Jae Hak, who had initiated the movement, were embarrassed by the daring spirit of Aeng Mu and decided to pay more. Many people followed to donate. A retired kisaeng, Buyong, organized the Jinju Patriotic Women's Association on March 28 and a total of eighteen kisaengs contributed 152 won. The association raised the nation's highest amount, equivalent to an average of 2 won per person. About a month later, on April 30, 1907, in the same newspaper, an article stated that Seo Sang Don had donated 1,000 won, Jung Jae Hak 400 won, and Aeng Mu 100 won for the cause.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Daegu-Gyeongbuk Historical Research Society. (대구-경북 역사연구회). 역사 속의 대구, 대구 사람들 (*Yeoksa sogui Daegu, Daegu saramdeul*) (*Daegu and its people in history*). [Seoul: Jungsim, 1999].

¹⁹⁶ Korea *Maeil* Newspaper on February 6, 1907.

¹⁹⁷ Hyunjoo Seo, [The Forgotten Righteous <5> Parasitic Parrot] "There are no men or women or nobles to pay off national debt. Accessed on 10/20/2022

<https://www.sedaily.com/NewsView/1VE4YA92MA>

¹⁹⁸ Daegu-Gyeongbuk Historical Research Society.

Many Patriotic Women's Associations collected funds in major cities including Daegu, Seoul, Pusan, and Jinju. The women who lived around Jingol in Daegu created a council that became the most active organization for the occasion. These women collected waste material that could be sold and recruited new female members to support the debt repayment movement. A proposal was made that all Koreans give up smoking tobacco and contribute the money saved to the repayment of the national debt. This grassroots movement lasted over three months, beginning on January 29, 1907, and involved more than 40,000 people. To support the will of his people, Emperor Kojong even stopped smoking when he heard about the grand campaign.

More than 30 women's associations participated in the movement and actively encouraged other women to join in, not only to reinstate national power but also to exercise their rights to participate in the movement. Most women who initially joined the movement were wealthy, the wives of yangban and rich landlords. Over time, however, the discrepancy between women and men, young and old, rich and poor, religious and non-religious did not matter, everyone rose to save a country in crisis; most importantly, women took a leading role in raising funds. As they participated in political activity for national rights, women had a growing consciousness of the need to achieve equal rights for themselves as women as well.¹⁹⁹ The National Debt Repayment Movement marked the beginning of the modern women's movement in Korea.¹⁰⁹ Notably, the second largest group of women in the movement was kisaengs.

The participation of Aeng Mu and other kisaengs in the National Debt Repayment Movement could be attributed to the fact that they had sisterhood and solidarity, which was an awareness of shared interests, objectives, and sympathies

¹⁹⁹ Yung Chung Kim, 265

creating a sense of unity of kisaeng groups.²⁰⁰ In 1914, Kisaengs who had been scattered after Kabo Reform gathered to establish the Kisaeng Cooperative.²⁰¹ In addition, they organized the informal kisaeng network, similar in many ways to the anbang network by Bible women, and participated in demonstrations for national independence in various places including Jinju, Suwon, Haeju, Tongyeong, Ansong, and many other cities through their kisaeng guild network.

At the same time, kisaengs' participation in the movement could also have been a protest against the policy of the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. Kisaengs had become a product of labor politics and an increasingly commercialized sex industry.²⁰² The first major change to the kisaengs' status had occurred in 1895, as part of Kabo Reforms, which abolished hereditary occupations and the class system; as a result, about 300 kisaengs were dismissed along with other government workers.²⁰³ In 1908, the Metropolitan Police Department, led by Japanese imperialists, promulgated the "Kisaeng Control Ordinance" and granted business licenses only to those who had joined the sex workers' union; this ordinance further shook the foundations of kisaeng's existence, and ultimately, its tradition ceased, reducing their status from courtesans to simple prostitutes for the sex trade.²⁰⁴

As sex trade demand increased, red-light districts became important places for foreign visitors to seek pleasure after business meetings. Sex workers' bodies became Japanese assets and were mandated to be free of venereal disease for the protection of

²⁰⁰ Merriam Webster, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/solidarity>.

²⁰¹ Insuk Lee, 'Convention and innovation: the lives and cultural legacy of the *kisaeng* in colonial Korea,' *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 23(1) (June 2010): 71–97, 78.

²⁰² Mueller RH. Female Participation in South Korean Traditional Music: Late Chosŏn to the Present Day. 2013. <https://www.google.com/search?q=Mueller+RH.+Female+Participation+in+South+Korean>

²⁰³ Kallie Szczepanski, "Gisaeng: Korea's Geisha Women."

²⁰⁴ Lankov A. *The Dawn of Modern Korea: The Transformation in Life and Cityscape*. (Seoul: EunHaeng NaMu; 2007.)

‘the clientele.’²⁰⁵ Kisaengs’ clientele were Korean men as well as Japanese and Westerners; Christians and Buddhists; rich and poor men; educated elite and uneducated men; cosmopolitan men and provincials. While serving ‘the clientele,’ they were also able to obtain further secret or confidential information from these men and deliver them to independence fighters.

A third explanation for kisaeng's support for the independence movement could be their access to education and their financial independence. Kisaengs had very strict hierarchies within their system - a type of matriarchy and extensive education of “Teaching College (Kyobangwon),” formed by senior kisaengs.²⁰⁶ The kisaeng system considered education to be very important for these women, and they had to attend schooling at the Kyobangwon, also known as the Kisaeng Academy, which encouraged the time-honored tradition of Korean dance and art used to entertain men with the pleasure of music, conversation, and poetry.²⁰⁷ In addition to this formal schooling, kisaengs were educated through their interaction with relatively high-ranking and intelligent men. Thanks to this access to education, kisaengs were financially independent through their services, investment, and businesses with wealthy and or/high ranking men.²⁰⁸ As noted above, Aeng Mu and other kisaengs helped independence fighters financially.

In addition to providing financial support for the movement, kisaengs protested publicly. The first kisaeng protest for national independence took place at Jinju, South Kyongsang Province on March 19th, 1919. Their government and their

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Insuk Lee, “Convention and Innovation: The Lives and Cultural Legacy of the *Kisaeng* in Colonial Korea (1910-1945),” *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 23, no. 1 (2010): 76.

²⁰⁷ Kallie Szczepanski, "Gisaeng: Korea's Geisha Women." ThoughtCo, Aug. 25, 2020. Retrieved on 10/20/2021 [thoughtco.com/who-were-koreas-gisaeng-195000](https://www.thoughtco.com/who-were-koreas-gisaeng-195000).

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

families did not protect these women at all due to the stigma attached to kisaeng, and they knew they would be subjected to terrible torture or even death at the hands of the Japanese. But they rose. According to the records of "People Women's History: Korea" in Jinju, on the evening of March 19, kisaengs gathered and, led by Park Kum Hyang, shouted the slogan, "We are the proud descendants of Nongae." (Kisaeng Nongae [1574 – 1593] had killed a Japanese general by hugging him and throwing both herself and him into the Nam River, where they drowned. Nongae's death was not recognized initially as a sacrifice for the country because of her status as a woman and a despised kisaeng, but her brave endeavor was spread by common people who recognized her patriotism.)²⁰⁹ Their shouts continued, "Don't lose the traditional pride of Jinju courtesans. Mansei! (Long Live Our Country)."²¹⁰ They were all arrested and tortured by the Japanese police, who engraved the Japanese word "eta" ("the lowest class") with a knife on their foreheads, along with cruel body mutilations.

Ten days later, on March 29th, 1919, a collective demonstration of all the kisaengs of the Yegi (artistically skilled) guild followed in Suwon, Kyunggi Province. Demonstrations by the members of the Suwon kisaeng guild marched to the front of Jahye Hospital. The demonstration coincided with the start date of the shameful sexually transmitted disease test, designed to protect Japanese and other high-status clients and reduce the status of kisaengs to mere prostitutes. Despite the government's opposition to the demonstrations, kisaengs were supported by passersby on the street who grew to several thousand protesters. Thirty-year-old Aeng Mu was a member of the Yegi guild in Suwon at that time, and she marched in a group led by twenty-three-year-old Kim

²⁰⁹ Elaine H., Kim; Chungmoo Choi (1998). *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*. Psychology Press, 1998. 172.

²¹⁰ Yung Chung Kim, 141.

HyangHwa. The large-scale demonstration continued throughout Suwon until late at night. They all held the Taegeukgi (Korean flag) and shouted "Mansei" (long live our country) in front of the Japanese military police until their outfits were soaked with blood due to sword and gun wounds.²¹¹

A Japanese court document reported that a group of kisaengs who sang, danced, and sold their bodies rose all at once, waving their national flags and shouting for national independence in front of the Japanese military police. At that time, the media reported it as a kisaeng “mob” independence demonstration. The Japanese were surprised by these women’s collective demonstration because Korea had gone through 10 years of Japanese rule, and the kisaengs knew that terrible tortures awaited them if they were caught. Among the thirty-three who protested, nineteen teenagers whose ages ranged from fifteen to sixteen were arrested at the scene, along with many other protesters. Aeng Mu was arrested and tortured but was released from prison; however, the disappearance of her friends and the leader of the group, Kim Hyang Hwa, caused her physical and mental exhaustion.²¹²

There were more intense independence protests that broke out and continued by kisaengs throughout the country. The sacrifice and contributions of kisaengs to the national causes must not be left out when telling the story of Aeng Mu and her role in publicly challenging the Joseon Dynasty’s prescribed gender roles.

The narrative of philanthropist, nationalist, and educator Aeng Mu gives a clear picture of who kisaengs were. It is uncertain whether Aeng Mu made conscious efforts to

²¹¹ Mi Yeon Hwang, Ilje kangjumki kisaengeu sahoejuk hwaldongwa g yuksajuk eumi. [The Social Activities and Historical Meaning of the Gisaeng in the period of Japanese Colonialism]. *Korean Journal of Folk Studies*. 28: 135–158.

²¹² Sung Dong Ki, *The merits of patriotic kisaeng in Jinju*. *DongA Ilbo*, May. 04, 2019.

promote women's social and political rights with a sense of gender equality or not. However, considering the education she received at the Kisaeng Academy, Aeng Mu became the voice of lower-status women breaking through both colonial and native patriarchal structures intended to silence women. It was certain that she was a great matriarch of the national movement of education for the younger generation. She donated her wealth generously to the people of Korea beyond the social limitations associated with her status.

According to legend, 58-year-old Aeng Mu danced up to the sky in a white dress like a crane and fell into the water and died. Villagers collected her body and buried it in the nearby hills. The older people in the area remembered that the abandoned tomb was Aeng Mu's. Even though she received some recognition for her charitable works and brave patriotic activities during the dark period of history, she was largely forgotten.

Aeng Mu was another example of a rebellious woman who sowed the seeds for the deconstruction of the Neo-Confucian viewpoint of women's education and gender roles. During the Joseon dynasty, the government and the society discouraged women's education, limiting the scope of women's education to the cultivation of gender roles of wifely virtues only, but she showed that even a despised kisaeng like her, through education and financial independence, could contribute to the society.

Conclusion

Despite massive obstacles, several remarkable women's life stories demonstrate the possibility of deconstructing the roles assigned to them by society and proved the importance of women's education and economic autonomy. This chapter introduced remarkable Korean women who paved the way for the coming generations. The

narratives of Queen Min, Esther Pak, and Aeng Mu all demonstrated the importance of education, along with financial independence, in challenging prescribed gender roles. They were very influential and important in many ways and had to pay for the challenges with their lives: Queen Min died a brutal death, Esther Pak an untimely death, and Aeng Mu a forgotten death. These women succeeded as individuals in deconstructing prescribed expectations, but society as a whole was not yet ready to change.

Chapter V will analyze Korean immigrant women's challenges to existing Confucian patriarchal authority in a different direction - that is, reconstruction to survive and coexist peacefully. In addition to education and financial independence, other factors led to a more prevalent deconstruction and then reconstruction of gender roles for these immigrant women on discriminatory foreign soil; these factors included their will to survive, a shortage of women, widowhood, and sisterhood.

Chapter V Deconstruction and Reconstruction: Immigration to America

This chapter aims to investigate the historical background of Korean immigrant women and their roles in economic, social, and political ventures in the United States in the early 20th century, and to study the ways that these women attempted to reconstruct their roles. Most studies of Korean immigrant women have focused on their involvement in the Korean Independence Movement and women's organizations, but this study looks particularly at the breakdown of traditional family structure and gender roles for their survival and the reconstruction of these roles after their elderly husbands' deaths.²¹³

Judith Butler aims at deconstructing gender identity because she believes that the construction of gender roles and their aftermath are substantiated by a society's system of established values, norms, or goals and that this construction is authoritarian and harmful.²¹⁴ Another philosopher, Thomas Foster,²¹⁵ says the goal of the deconstruction of the roles is to demonstrate how the roles are constructed and controlled and reduced by the values and prejudices of their own time.²¹⁵ The seeds of deconstruction examined in prior chapters, combined with the impact of immigration on the roles that women played domestically, economically and socially, and politically, led to a substantial deconstruction of Neo-Confucian gender roles for Korean immigrant women.

This chapter focuses on Korean immigration to the United States between 1903 - 1905 and 1910 – 1924. The first part focuses on the motivations of Koreans who chose to leave their homeland, most of whom moved to Hawai'i as sugar plantation laborers; the

²¹³Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Brger Gluck and Daphne Patai, (NY & London: Routledge, 1991.) 11.

²¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*: Routledge Classics. (London, England: Routledge, 2006.) 5.

²¹⁵ Thomas Foster, *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. (New York: Harper. 2003.) 314.

push and pull factors of the migration; and challenges on arrival due to Anti-Asian perceptions and policies. Picture brides, who were invited by the Korean bachelors living in Hawai'i and the mainland, are examined next, along with the process of immigration and picture marriage, facilitated by modern technological photography.

The next part of the chapter focuses on the experiences of Korean immigrant women once they settled in Hawai'i and the mainland United States. Korean immigrant women's will to survive on discriminatory American soil was attested to in numerous ways. As Korean women struggled for survival, they had each other as safety nets in a chaotic society, offering sisterhood while empowering, fortifying, and lifting each other up. They began to construct their own "her-story" – the public and domestic lives of Korean immigrant women. During the process of establishing women's organizations, they learned political, social, and financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills. Widowhood due to their senior husbands' deaths led many women to build their queendoms or matriarchy. Korean immigrant women's lived experiences on foreign soil validated how gender roles had been constructed for them and then deconstructed and reconstructed given the values and prejudices of their own time;²¹⁶ gender roles were altered through their struggle for survival and subsequent rebuilding of family structures from patriarchy to matriarchy.

A. Factors Leading to Migration: Poverty, Japanese Oppression, Missionaries, and Freedom from Neo-Confucian Patriarchy

Many Koreans looked to leave their homeland due to poverty caused by drought, flood, a cholera epidemic, and locust plague in 1901 and 1902, as well as the

²¹⁶ Thomas Foster, "History, Critical Theory, and Women's Social Practices: 'Women's Time' and Housekeeping." *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 73–99.

government's corruption and heavy taxation. Another reason was to escape from Japanese exploitation, especially after the Eulsa Treaty of 1905. This treaty deprived the Korean Empire of its diplomatic rights, making Korea Japan's protectorate state, and led to Japan's colonization of Korea in 1910. From that time, Koreans lived in fear of the Japanese secret police and Japan controlled Korea by restricting immigration to Hawai'i.²¹⁷ Other important factors, especially for women, included freedom from Neo-Confucian patriarchy and access to education. Korean women who were influenced by foreign missionaries practiced Christianity were better educated through Christian missionary girls/women's schools, Sunday school, and Bible study had awakened these women regarding their rights, identities, and roles in the rigid social structure of Neo-Confucianism.²¹⁸ In addition, they were encouraged by the spirit of the "New Woman" trend by that time, which challenged to shape public views and understanding of women's roles in society.²¹⁹

Korea had experienced severe starvation because of natural disasters, and as mentioned above, many Koreans considered leaving their homeland as a result. Most Korean immigrants were poor city dwellers and farmers and were also influenced by the media, which suggested immigration as a solution to the issue of poverty. Newspapers, posters, labor recruiters, and American missionaries all portrayed Hawai'i as a "paradise" where "gold coins were blossoming on every bush." Even the Korean government made a public announcement along with advertisements from labor recruiters to encourage them to emigrate. The advertisement said that each laborer would work 10 hours a day, six

²¹⁷ Frederick A. McKenzie. *Korea's Fight for Freedom*. 1920: (Forgotten Books 2012).

²¹⁸ Ai Ra Kim, *Women Struggling For a New Life: The Role of Religion in the Cultural Passage From Korea to America*. 1996, State University of New York Press. 32.

²¹⁹ Zihn Choi, "Early Korean Immigrants to America: Their Role in the Establishment of the Republic of Korea," *East Asian Review* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2002.) 43-71.

days a week, and earn \$16 a month (65 cents a day), which was equal to sixty-seven Korean won, —enough to buy a small house in Korea at that time. The laborers in Hawai'i were making five times what Koreans were making in Korea. For Koreans, the news was dreamlike. The Hawaiian Sugar Plantation Association (HSPA) also provided free education for children, free housing, wood, drinking water, and access to medical care, leaving laborers to pay only for food, clothes, and personal items.²²⁰ Additionally, the advertisements read that the climate was mild all year round; every island had a university that taught English for free, and it was easy to find a job year after year under the general protection of the law. “We left Korea because we were too poor,” one Korean immigrant explained.²²¹ Kato Motohiro, Japanese Consul in Inchon, reported the applicants for this emigration came mainly from districts where the harvests had been the poorest.²²² The chief of the United States legation in Seoul, an American missionary Horace Allen, agreed.²²³

Christian missionaries also encouraged their congregants to immigrate to Hawai'i in order to escape poverty in Korea, recognizing a shortage of cheap laborers in the Hawaiian sugar plantations. Although some Koreans wanted to emigrate, they were too poor to pay their way to Hawai'i; a banker and recruiter named Deshler solved this problem by funneling funds provided by HSPA and loaned a total of \$100 per person for their steamship fare and other travel expenses, which would be deducted from their monthly paychecks.²²⁴ When Deshler requested a \$7,500 loan from HSPA for Korean

²²⁰ Koo Hagen and Eui-Young Yu, “Korean Immigration to the United States: Its Demographic Pattern and Social Implications for Both Societies.” *Papers of the East-West Population Institute* No. 74. (Honolulu: East-West Center Population Institute, 1981) 74

²²¹ Esther Kwon Arinaga, "Contributions of Korean Immigrant Women," Montage, eds., Nancy Foon Young and Judy R. Parrish, (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i, 1977), n.p.

²²² Wayne Patterson, *The Korean Frontier*. 68

²²³ Bong Youn Choy, *Koreans in America*:193

²²⁴ Wayne Patterson, 9.

laborers, planters sent it three days later, hoping for an influx of Korean laborers.²²⁵

Although \$7,500 may seem to be a large amount for that time, the owners were able to reduce recruitment costs; recruiting an Asian laborer cost \$70 compared to a White laborer's \$250.²²⁶ In addition, Asian laborers' regular wages were about \$16 per month, one-third of the wage of White laborers.²²⁷

Many Korean men left for Hawai'i to escape poverty by working on sugar plantations, and some Korean women were driven by poverty as well to marry men they had never met after exchanging photos; they were called "picture brides." One woman remembered dire conditions when she left Korea as a picture bride. She was born in 1900 in a small mountainous village. Her parents were very poor and experienced serious hardships. One year, she recalled, a heavy rain came and the crops were all washed away. She didn't have anything to eat and decided to emigrate to Hawai'i.²²⁸

Japanese oppression was another factor; during this period, Korea was unable to exercise political or military power in conflict with the Japanese imperial forces. Koreans could not block the Japanese settlers that were arriving in Korea in large numbers; the colonial government designed rules to foster their migration and made purchasing land, trades, and businesses advantageous to the Japanese. An American missionary reported during the early years of Japanese oppression, "The Japanese were buying property right and left,...The people [Koreans] are highly enraged and see no hope of redress. They [Koreans]...are driven out of house and land."²²⁹ The Japanese buyers paid only one-twentieth of the real value of the land.²³⁰

²²⁵ HSPA, Trustee, Minutes, December 11, 1905.

²²⁶ HSPA, Trustee, Minutes, December 14, 1905.

²²⁷ Bong Youn Choy, *The Koreans in Hawai'i*, 92.

²²⁸ Esther Kwon Arinaga, "Contributions of Korean Immigrant Women," 1977.

²²⁹ Frederick A. McKenzie. *Korea's Fight for Freedom*. 2012.

²³⁰ Ibid.

The annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910 influenced many Korean women's immigration to the United States as picture brides. A wave of patriotism extended across the peninsula to demand the restoration of Korean sovereignty, but Japan's oppressive surveillance was extreme and Koreans recognized that they could not change the political situation. To control what they could, some Korean women decided to emigrate to Hawai'i and the mainland United States, and some chose to move to Shanghai and Manchuria, China, and Vladivostok, Russia.²³¹

Some of the patriots escaped to China and established a Korean government-in-exile, also known as the Korean Provisional Government (KPG), formally the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in Shanghai, China, and later in Chongqing, during the period of Japanese colonial rule in Korea.²³² Many other patriots, including Korean immigrants and picture brides, came to the United States to continue their fight for independence and sought America's support. The relatively liberal social atmosphere of America offered these women opportunities to participate in such political causes, which would have been difficult under the Japanese colonization and Neo-Confucian patriarchy of Korea at that time.

Freedom from Neo-Confucian patriarchy was another reason for migration. One immigrant woman, Whang Maria, came to Hawai'i to escape one of the standard patriarchal practices - concubinage - in Korea.²³³ She claimed "she was not allowed to be anything" in Korea. Her husband was a rich man who held a high office and lived with

²³¹ Erica Lee, 226.

²³² *Sources of Korean Tradition*, vol. 2, *From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, edited by Yŏngho Ch'oe, Peter H. Lee, and Wm. Theodore de Bary, Introduction to Asian Civilizations (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 336.

²³³ Christian de Pee, Reviewed Work: *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity: Gender and Social Change in China, 1000–1400* by Beverly Bossler, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Harvard-Yenching Institute, Vol. 74, No. 1 (JUNE 2014) 108-115.

his concubines, which was allowed for a man of his rank at that time. Concubinage, like the kisaeng system, was another common form of sexual exploitation in Korea. It was the institutionalization of extramarital sexual relations between privileged nobility and subservient women.²³⁴ Thus, some elite men expanded to adopt or purchase girls and raise them as their maids and/or slaves for sexual pleasure, some of whom might later become concubines of their masters.²³⁵ The fight against the Neo-Confucian patriarchy by Korean women like Whang Maria paved the way toward gender equality, but many women still clung to the beliefs they had been indoctrinated with: that men deserve the highest rank and respect, while women do not.

Part of women's assigned role in Neo-Confucian society was service to their husbands and their parents-in-law. The fact that most Korean immigrant women came without their in-laws meant that they had no obligation to their husbands' extended families and were able to take on the role of decision-maker with their husbands. They could focus on their nuclear family rather than struggle with the strenuous extended family hierarchy. In the nuclear structure, women had to play different roles than in the traditional family structure. They had input in or control over many decisions, which was rare in Korea under the Neo-Confucian patriarchy.²³⁶

B. Challenges Upon Arrival: Anti-Asian Perception and Policies, Hardship in Daily Life

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, sugar plantations in Hawai'i were experiencing labor shortages and recruited young and healthy

²³⁴ Christian de Pee, Reviewed Work: Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity: Gender and Social Change in China, 1000–1400 by Beverly Bossler, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Harvard-Yenching Institute, Vol. 74, No. 1 (JUNE 2014.)108-115.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Easurk Charr, *The Golden Mountain: The Autobiography of a Korean Immigrant, 1895-1960*, 2nd Edition (*Asian American Experience*, 1996.)149.

Korean laborers without family members to meet the need for low-cost and seemingly docile labor by the United States capitalists for the developing economy. During this time when Koreans were searching for improvement in political and economic situations, owners of Hawaiian sugar plantations turned their attention to recruiting other ethnic groups to counterbalance the Japanese force. Although the Organic Act banned contract laborers, the expediency of HSPA, together with American missionary Horace Allen and the banker and recruiter David W. Deshler who had helped arrange the travel cost for many emigrants, made Korean immigration to American soil possible.²³⁷

The early 20th century witnessed the migration of thousands of Korean immigrants from Korea to Hawai'i and the mainland U.S. The first wave of Korean immigration, which included only a few women, lasted about two and a half years.²³⁸ The first immigrants left Korea for a two-day trip to Japan and continued their historic voyage on the S.S. Gaelic, which departed from Nagasaki on Monday, December 29, 1902, and arrived in Honolulu on January 13, 1903. The history of Korean immigration to the United States officially began on January 13, 1903, with the arrival of the first shipment of 102 Korean people who were granted admission to the territory and immediately sent to the Waialua Plantation.²³⁹ The Hawaiian Star reported under the headline Koreans Are

Arriving: A Large Party Come By The Gaelic:

A possible solution of the problem for labor on the plantations arrived this morning on the S. S. Gaelic... The party was diverse in age and background... fifty-six men recruited as laborers for sugar plantations in the Territory of Hawai'i, as well as twenty-one women and twenty-five children... the party come to Honolulu to seek employment... due to the effects of the recent terrible famines... The Japanese have extensive interests and exercise much

²³⁷ Edward P. Hutchinson, *Legislative History of American Immigration Policy, 1798-1965*: (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 88.

²³⁸ Bong-youn Choy, *Koreans in America*: 226-227.

²³⁹ Wayne Patterson, *The Korean Frontier in America*: 49-50.

influence in Koreans...Another very interesting fact connected with the arrival of the present party is that heretofore few if any women have ever been permitted to leave the country.²⁴⁰

The US Senate's "Statistical Review of Immigration 1820-1910" reports an estimated 7,291 Koreans as free laborers arrived in Hawai'i and the mainland US between 1903 and November 17, 1905.²⁴¹ Among them, about one-tenth were women, largely wives, and children (approximately 673 and 541, respectively). According to a historian, 479 individuals among 7,291 were refused landing because they failed the physical examination in Honolulu and were sent back to Korea - some because they lacked the physical strength needed for plantation work, and others as a precaution of epidemics pervading in Korea at that time.²⁴² The remaining nine-tenths were young, unmarried bachelors in their twenties. Historically, they were recognized as the first Korean immigrants, but due to the lack of accurate records, many of the individual narratives of these people and their exact numbers are still unknown.²⁴³

There was a record that two Korean interpreters helped Korean immigrants to settle.²⁴⁴ Over fifty individuals from this first group were from the church of the Reverend George Heber Jones, who was an American missionary and the minister of Naeri Methodist Church in Chemulpo (part of modern-day Incheon) in Korea.²⁴⁵ Reverend Jones encouraged his congregants, who were suffering under Japanese oppression, to

²⁴⁰ "Koreans Are Arriving: A Large Party Come By The Gaelic." Jan. 1903, S.S. Gaelic. *The Hawaiian Star, Honolulu, Hawaii*. Page 1.

²⁴¹ Yong-Ho Choe & Ilpyong J. Kim, et al, *Annotated Chronology of the Korean Immigration to the United States: 1882 to 1952*. <http://www.duke.edu/~myhan/kaf0501.html>. Thirteen ships were including Gaelic, America Maru, China, Coptic, Doric, Hongkong Maru, Korea, Manchuria, Mongolia, Nippon Maru, and Siberia. Choe

²⁴² Wayne Patterson, *Korean Frontier*, 54-56.

²⁴³ Wayne Patterson, *The Ilse*: 5.

²⁴⁴ Choy, *Koreans in America*. 303; Kim HyungSoon had learned English at the American missionary school, *Paejae Hakdang*, in Seoul. Kim HyungSoon worked three years as an interpreter on Maui and was paid seventy-five dollars per month.

²⁴⁵ These numbers are different; some said 87 were admitted, and others 92. People, who have not admitted due to failures of physical exams, had to return to Korea.

immigrate to Hawai'i. Fluent in Korean, he not only promoted Hawai'i to his church congregants but also to the residents of Chemulpo, the port city where Jones' church was stationed. According to sociologist Kim Hyung Chan, "of all American missionaries, Rev. George H. Jones of the Methodist missions was the most influential person with Korean emigrants." Yoon In Jin wrote, "The intervention of the Rev. George H. Jones of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Incheon was crucial in overcoming Koreans' resistance to emigration."²⁴⁶

However, after the safe passage of the S.S. Gaelic, recruiting Korean laborers became easier for Deshler's recruiting company. With a group already in Hawai'i and testimony of satisfactory conditions, as proved by pictures taken in Hawai'i of satisfied Koreans, Deshler opened nearly a dozen offices located throughout Korea by 1905.²⁴⁷ The Korean population remained small at the beginning due to the changes in immigration policies based on the balance of power between the United States and Japan; the Korean government hoped that Korean emigration would secure support from the United States, but the support was not feasible because of intervention of powerful Japan to protect Japanese laborers in Hawaii.²⁴⁸ The Japanese perceived Korean immigration as a threat to their newly established political control over Korea and its people, therefore, Korean emigration was suspended on November 17, 1905.²⁴⁹

Koreans became the "minority of the minorities" in Hawai'i, composing less than 2% of the Hawaiian population in the prewar era.²⁵⁰ They were an invisible group and

²⁴⁶ Patterson. *The Korean Frontier*: 175.

²⁴⁷ Choy, *Koreans in America*: 75.

²⁴⁸ Houchins, Lee, and Chang-su Houchins. "The Korean Experience in America, 1903-1924." *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 4 (1974): 548.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 554.

²⁵⁰ Hideki Harajiri, *Korea Town no Minzokushi*: (Hawai'i, LA, Ikuno Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho. 2000), 31-33.

faced an identity problem: they were all mistaken for Chinese or Japanese because of many identical last names and similar physical appearances. The early Koreans in the United States had to depend on individual strength because no official protection was possible after the loss of their home country to Japan.²⁵¹ Furthermore, they felt racially discriminated against, a helpless minority who isolated themselves from mainstream society and rarely participated in general social or political issues. Korean laborers represented eleven percent of the total plantation workforce when Korean immigration stopped in 1905.²⁵²

Although the Bureau of Immigration reported that a total of 7,378 Korean immigrants arrived in Hawai'i by 1905, approximately 2,000 of them moved from Hawai'i to the mainland because of higher wages there compared to those in Hawai'i; some went to work on farms near Sacramento, Dinuba, Reedley, Los Angeles, and Riverside. Others went to work in the railroad and mining camps around Denver, Salt Lake City, Butte, and Seattle, where Korean immigrant women often ran boarding houses.²⁵³ About 1,000 returned to Korea before 1910 and as a result, only 4,533 Koreans were counted in the 1910 Hawaiian census.²⁵⁴ A small number of families moved into cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles, where the women found work as housemaids, hotel maids, or other forms of unskilled labor. Some families opened small restaurants and laundries.²⁵⁵

Koreans, primarily men, who arrived in Hawai'i between 1903 and 1924 have historically been recognized as the first generation to establish a Korean American

²⁵¹ Choy, *Koreans in America*: 240

²⁵² Harajiri, 31-33.

²⁵³ Ibid. 107.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Won Yong Kim, *Chami Hanin Osipnyunsa*, 293-294

community in Hawai'i and the continental United States. When Koreans came to the United States, there were already strong anti-Asian sentiments that contributed to oppression in the areas of immigration, labor, and ideology. Racist and gendered immigration policies and labor conditions worked together to keep minority groups, including Korean immigrants, assigned to a marginalized or subordinate place in the patriarchal economy of American culture.²⁵⁶ This system of oppression was furthered by constructed racist perceptions, which rationalized the economic exploitation and social oppression of Asian immigrants, who were considered a temporary and cheap labor solution to power economic productivity.²⁵⁷

Almost a million Asian laborers from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and India - all countries where women were considered dependents to a husband or father - emigrated to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.²⁵⁸ A large portion of the imported laborers with limited skills worked for cheaper wages than Americans, which became a threat to White Americans. Newspapers from The New York Times to the San Francisco Chronicle poured gasoline on the fire, stimulating fears that Asians, with the help of the newly freed Black population, would become a major threat. White Americans implemented some of the most powerful strategies that they could use to handle these emerging threats.

One of these strategies was the construction of “controlling images” for the dominant group, which helped justify the economic exploitation and social oppression of

²⁵⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, "Black feminist thought in the matrix of domination." *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* 138, no. (1990): 221-238.

²⁵⁷ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds. *Third world women and the politics of feminism*. Vol. 632. (Indiana University Press, 1991.) 23.

²⁵⁸ Hawai'i for Visitors, Hawai'i Travel Guide by Kathie Fry. Immigration to Hawai'i by Ethnic Group <http://www.usgenwebsites.org/HIHonolulu/history/immigrants.html>

Asian immigrants over time.²⁵⁹ Asians were refused full American citizenship because of capitalistic motives, “as non-citizens were less expensive to hire,” restricting their economic mobility. Asian immigrants’ images were further constructed in negative ways due to racial discriminatory purposes; Asian women were characterized as an excess of “womanhood,” sexualized as “exotic prostitutes” as a channel of disease and social decay, in contrast to the “civilized” sexuality of White men and women.²⁶⁰ Asian men’s images were constructed as a military threat to the security and welfare of the United States and sexual threats as an overindulgent, deficient, and animalistic sexual danger to “innocent” White women. These constructions became a major weapon for the prohibition of Asian immigration to the United States.²⁶¹ As a result, the Immigration Act of 1917 defined a “barred zone” which prohibited immigration from the Asia-Pacific region, except for picture brides, political exiles, students, and the small number of merchants with passports issued by the Japanese government;²⁶² the Immigration Act of 1924 denied entry to all Asians, which lasted until the liberalization of immigration laws in 1965.²⁶³

The term “Yellow Peril” was created because of the fear that yellow-skinned Asians would one day unite and conquer the world. Mainstream American society also reflected the fear that cultural influence, military prowess, and foreign trade from Asia would lead to fierce economic competition and the invasion of their lands, resulting in

²⁵⁹ Patricia Hill Collins. "Toward a new vision: Race, class, and gender as categories of analysis and connection." *Race, Sex & Class* (1993): 25-45.

²⁶⁰ John Röhl, *The Kaiser and His Court: Wilhelm II and the Government of Germany*: (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁶¹ Annika Mombauer, "Wilhelm II, Waldersee, and the Boxer Rebellion": *The Kaiser*, Annika Mombauer and Wilhelm Deist, Eds: (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 91–118.

²⁶² Bong Youn Choy , *Koreans in America*: (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 69-70

²⁶³ Christopher Miyares & Airriess, C. A. . *Contemporary ethnic geographies in America*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 39.

violence such as burning homes, businesses, and farms, and raping and murdering individuals.²⁶⁴ To make matters worse, the depression of 1876 resulted in a disastrous economy and tensions erupted in the United States. The Workingmen's Party in California, which called this period “the driving-out time,” complained that the Chinese were taking away their jobs.²⁶⁵ Many Americans adopted the slogan of the Workingmen’s Party: “the Chinese [Asians] must go!”

Anti-Asian campaigns built on fear, stereotypes, and racism that had been present since the 1850s, and Chinese immigration came to an end in 1882, when Congress passed the most substantial Chinese Exclusion Act, signed by President Arthur.²⁶⁶ As a result, most Chinese laborers were lost, and HSPA desperately needed replacements and sought “subservient and cheap labor.”²⁶⁷ Large numbers of Japanese laborers were brought to Hawai'i and California beginning in 1885.²⁶⁸ Initially, they were welcomed. However, while the Chinese were driven out for not assimilating, the Japanese were loathed for wanting to integrate. Recognizing that their circumstances were similar to the conditions of slavery, Japanese laborers started demanding better treatment, while demonstrating their collective power—protesting the long hours and harsh conditions, demanding better wages and safer working environments, and even threatening to monopolize the sugar industry.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America*: (Harvard University Press, 2018).

²⁶⁵ Erika Lee. *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2003.)

²⁶⁶ Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*; The act was initially intended to last for 10 years but was renewed in 1892 and made permanent in 1902.

²⁶⁷ “Hawai'i: Life in a Plantation Society”: Library of Congress.

<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/japanese/Hawai'i-life-in-a-plantation-society/>

²⁶⁸ Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*.

²⁶⁹ Yingda Guo, "The Model Minority Myths: Racism And Sexism Against Asian-American Community" (Student research, 2017). <http://scholarship.depauw.edu/studentresearch/66>

Threatened by this Japanese ambition, the planters applied the “divide and conquer” strategy, pitting one ethnic group against the other and shattering the Japanese’s labor monopoly dream.²⁷⁰ As Japanese immigrants grew powerful in numbers and financial stability, rumors began to circulate that Japan wanted to annex Hawai’i. The controlling image of an “Asian menace - Yellow Peril” - was applied this time to the Japanese. An issue of LIFE magazine, published in 1997, remarked with reference to this time period that “if the purpose of the media was to portray the Asians as brutal hangmen, slave drivers, and mass murderers, they succeeded. Leering, bestial yellow men were shown menacing White women - a favorite subject of propagandists.” Asians were depicted as feral, rat-faced men lusting after virginal White women, reinforcing the fear that Asians would contaminate the Anglo-Saxon bloodline.²⁷¹

In addition to discrimination and anti-Asian policies, Korean immigrants faced challenges in daily life. When they arrived in Hawai’i, they realized the streets were not paved with gold, and stories of hardship were common. The facade of capitalism was revealed as offering false and rosy promises to laborers from poor and colonized countries while exploiting their labor. They found themselves working all day long in sugarcane fields for 16 dollars as their monthly wage in 1905.²⁷² The day began early in the morning: waking up at five o’clock, eating breakfast, and going to the fields, which became extremely hot and dry as the day progressed. After working in the sun all morning, the laborers ate lunch and started the afternoon work at one o’clock, continuing until five o’clock, and finally reaching home at approximately six o’clock.

²⁷⁰“Timeline of Asian American History”. *Digital History*. Archived from the original on 22 April 2009.

²⁷¹Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 138.

²⁷² Alice Chai, "Korean Women in Hawai'i: 1903-1945," *Women in New World*, eds. Thomas, Hilah F. and Rosemary Skinner Keller, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 1981.)

Women were expected to work in the fields in addition to doing their domestic chores, and the difficulty of these duties was multiplied by the number of children they had. One Korean immigrant woman expressed her experience of the long days on a plantation, which was extremely hard and painful.²⁷³ Many other women shared the same stories of the work they did to supplement income for their growing families.

Plantation and agricultural lives for Korean immigrant women in Hawai'i started in overcrowded camps with run-down shacks. The barracks were separated by ethnicity, with the Japanese in one area, the Chinese in another, and the Koreans in yet one more. HSPA provided the living quarters, but laborers had to pay for everything else, including meals and laundry. Alongside her husband on farms and plantations, a woman labored for an average of ten hours a day, six days a week. A Korean immigrant woman's daily wage was at the bottom of the labor market: fifty cents, compared to sixty-five cents for a Korean man.²⁷⁴ As a minority and immigrant women, they had limited employment opportunities, but they contributed significantly to the whole process of cultivation in Hawaiian plantations and farming on the mainland by planting, hoeing, weeding, cutting, gathering, hauling, and harvesting. The process was backbreaking work, which did not permit pausing even to stretch one's back or exchange a word with a fellow laborer.²⁷⁵

Another physically demanding aspect of fieldwork, which was usually assigned to women, consisted of stripping the dried cane leaves from the sugar stalks. Women needed heavy clothing to protect themselves against the needles of the cane leaves.²⁷⁶ Hands became blistered and faces and arms were torn and scratched by the sharp cane leave in

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Esther Kwon Arinaga, "Contributions of Korean immigrant Women," in Montage, eds. Nancy Foon Young and Judy R. Parrish (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1977), 74-75.

²⁷⁵ Margaret N. Harada, "The Sun Shines on the Immigrant," *Kodomono tameni: For the Sake of the Children*, ed. Dennis M. Ogawa, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1978).n.p.

²⁷⁶ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore*: (Library of Congress, 1989) 136.

the oppressive heat. Moreover, plantation owners mistreated Korean laborers. “We [were treated] like draft animals... rather than as human beings,” said one Korean laborer.²⁷⁷

Right after their wedding ceremonies, almost all Korean picture brides were sent to sugar plantations on the islands of Hawai'i and the mainland - rural rice-farming areas in Dinuba, Willows, Redlands, and Riverside, where they began working outside the home to supplement their husbands' incomes.²⁷⁸ Their husbands' wages did not cover household expenses, especially when there were children to feed. There were numerous kinds of work available in sugar and pineapple plantations, rice farms, and orchards in Hawai'i and the mainland. Korean laborers on the sugar plantations were scattered in camps, and within every camp, there were usually thirty or forty single men and three or four married men and their families. HSPA sent a Korean family to a plantation so the women of the family could cook, do laundry, and sew for single men. Many Korean bachelors' meals were provided from these kitchens.²⁷⁹ Due to the sex/gender segregation rule that was so ingrained, many husbands initially hesitated about their wives doing such work, but their growing children's hunger was a stronger force.

One woman was sent to one of the plantations in Honokaa by HSPA to start a boarding house for bachelors. She charged each man six dollars per month for room and board, barely covering her expenses.²⁸⁰ She arose at three-thirty in the morning to start working; she had to prepare meals for her husband and the other twenty bachelors on the plantation; six days a week at five o'clock, she fed them a breakfast of rice, soup, and

²⁷⁷ David Matsumoto, “Cultural similarities and differences in display rules.” *Motivation and Emotion* 14 (1990): 116.

²⁷⁸ *Sinhan*, April 6, 1916

²⁷⁹ Alice Chai, "Korean Women in Hawai'i: 1903-1945," *Women in New World*, eds. Thomas, Hilah F. and Rosemary Skinner Keller, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1981.

²⁸⁰ Young Ho Son, “From Plantation Laborers to Ardent Nationalists: Koreans' Experiences in America and Their Search for Ethnic Identity, 1903-1924.” (*LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses*. 4744.1989), 159-160.

kimchi, and packed twenty-one lunch tins with rice and dried salt fish. Shortly after lunch, she needed to prepare for their dinner: usually soup, rice, kimchi, meat or fish, and sometimes a dish of corned beef and onions.²⁸¹ At night, after washing dishes, she would iron clothes until midnight, so her working hours lasted from three-thirty in the morning till midnight. Each bachelor paid her one dollar per month for her services.²⁸² She had to plant peppers, cabbages, and other vegetables to supplement and collected beef intestines from a slaughterhouse to make soup, which helped her meet her expenses.

Some chose to run boarding houses because they could stay home with their children rather than work in the fields, but the boarding houses involved undertaking even more work, such as raising animals and growing vegetables. The work was demanding, but it was better than leaving their babies and toddlers at home untended.²⁸³ Despite extreme poverty and the indoctrinated sex segregation rule, one picture bride, Kim Myong Sook, leased farmland with two Korean bachelors who had been farming with her family and treated them as members of the family. Forming such a support system with other Koreans and relatives was one of the social adaptive strategies that Korean immigrant women applied for survival. Kim Myong Sook explained that she had experienced similar challenges before and did not know whether she would face them again in the future:

There was room in the house,...food to share, and we'd probably need them as farmhands in the spring....and it was hard to ignore them. I washed their clothes and cooked their meals on our farm....So long as there was food, our situation wasn't a struggle. Thus, we survived the winter.²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Bong Youn Choy, *Koreans in America*: (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 99.

²⁸² *Ibid*, 96-97.

²⁸³ Sonia Shinn Sunoo, 2002, 172-178.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 292-294.

The determination to survive in spite of extreme conditions including lack of food, shelter, and water made these Korean immigrant women stronger, and they believed that the more they endured hardship together, the easier it would be. The belief that togetherness performs better on complex problem-solving than the best of an equivalent number of individuals led these women to form women's organizations; these organizations are discussed later in this chapter.

C. Shortage of Women in the Immigrant Community

Only a few Korean women emigrated to the United States with their husbands and children. Many men left Korea by themselves, but the existence of bachelor societies did not mean that many male immigrants were single:²⁸⁵ a good number married before they came to Hawai'i but left their wives and children behind to take care of their children and parents-in-law until their husbands, sons, and fathers returned.²⁸⁶ The split household was not unique to Koreans; the history of immigrant groups indicates that most men left their wives behind in the first phase of their settlement in a new land. Despite the difficulties faced by split households, some women kept their families intact and eventually reunited with their husbands.

Most of the women who had emigrated during the first wave of immigration of 1903-1905 came with their husbands, not as single women in search of work.²⁸⁷ Over 6,000 individuals were bachelors on the plantations as a result of the gender-based policies of HSPA, which reflected the preference for young, healthy bachelors to guarantee greater profitability. The policies initially worked in practice because the

²⁸⁵ Choy, 88-89.

²⁸⁶ Erika Lee, 112.

²⁸⁷ Eui-Young Yu, Earl H. Phillips, and California State University, Los Angeles. Center for Korean-American Korean Studies. *Korean Women in Transition: At Home and Abroad*. Los Angeles, Calif.: Center for Korean-American and Korean Studies, California State U, Los Angeles, 1987. 5.

unattached male provided a more flexible source of labor who could readily be moved around to meet short-term or seasonal labor needs and expelled when no longer needed.²⁸⁸ However, Korean bachelors experienced various challenges in matters of morals and living arrangements.

This lack of traditional social discipline made many men drift uninhibitedly toward a pleasure-seeking lifestyle. Some men became aggressive, hyperactive, and competitive, and some indulged in undesirable behaviors such as drinking, smoking, and gambling excessively.²⁸⁹ The unbalanced sex ratio was a barrier to many men, who were expected to exhibit normative (hetero) sexuality, marry someone of the other sex, have children, and satisfy important family roles and nuclear family formations within the community.²⁹⁰ Their lives were far from normal: boarding houses and bunkhouses provided their food and shelter, local bars, opium dens, and gambling houses their social life, and brothels their female companions.²⁹¹ The extremely unbalanced sex ratio also constructed problems for the few Korean women who were in Hawai'i, and husbands became uncomfortable because of the bachelors' unwanted attention to their wives.²⁹²

Because of the extremely unbalanced sex ratio, women's value was considerably elevated. Regardless of their appearance or age, single women were highly prized as sexual and marital partners. Even married women had to avert unwanted male attention. Surrounded by bachelors eager to marry, a Korean immigrant woman dissatisfied with her husband and her marriage had more options than her sisters in Korea. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the skewed sex ratio allowed women to take action to free

²⁸⁸ Choy, 1979, 74-76.

²⁸⁹ Hyung June Moon, "The Korean Immigrants in America," pp. 122-23; *Sinhan*, December 14, 1910.

²⁹⁰ Han, S. (2001). *East Asian gay men who came out to their parents*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. New York University, New York. n.p.

²⁹¹ G. Kim, *History of Korean immigration*: (Seoul: Pakyoungsa Publishing, 2005).

²⁹² *Ibid*, 295-296.

themselves from unhappy marriages. One picture bride had witnessed her fellow picture brides who moved from one man to another whose children had each been fathered by a different man, which led to dispute and clash, ending up ruining both parents and children.²⁹³ In the Korean immigrant community in Hawai'i, adultery was frequent enough and runaway wives were also common.

The shortage of women, the racist and gendered immigration policies, and labor conditions further challenged Korean men; in bachelor communities and womanless households, they had to learn domestic skills and take on other traditionally feminine jobs that had gone unoccupied. Korean women had also risen as supporters in the labor market, and the shortage of women offered a source of power that women used to enhance their status not only in the marriage market but also in their relationships with their husbands.²⁹⁴ These factors began to deconstruct the traditional family structure and required its reconstruction, one in which men were losing their economic power and their traditional authority.²⁹⁵

As the Korean community reconstituted from a community of aging bachelors to a community of young families, husbands and wives had to reconsider the concept of traditional gender roles and had to reconstruct a more egalitarian gender division of labor to survive. For example, the domestic skills that men had been forced to learn in women's absence - such as cooking, ironing, and grocery shopping - were still performed by some men even after marriage, even if they complained that these tasks were not men's work.²⁹⁶

Newly arrived wives relied on their husbands' knowledge of American culture, although

²⁹³ Won K. Yoon, *The Passage of a Picture Bride*: 124.

²⁹⁴ Paul F. Secord, "Imbalanced sex ratios: The social consequences." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 9, no. 4 (1983): 525-543.

²⁹⁵ Freeman, 2011, 283.

²⁹⁶ Mei Nakano and Grace Shibata, *Japanese American Women : Three Generations, 1890-1990 / Mei Nakano ; with Okaasan by Grace Shibata*: (Berkeley: Mina Press Pub., 1990), 38.

it was limited, and accepted their opinions about home furnishings, clothing, and food. Many husbands taught their wives how to cook American food – a skill they had learned as bachelors and as restaurant cooks or kitchen helpers, though cooking had been considered women’s work in Korea.

The shortage of women prevented the formation of the traditional Korean patriarchal family structure. This situation led some bachelors to develop womenless family structures that moved beyond heterosexual norms. They tried to construct supportive social networks among bachelors by redefining their sexual behaviors and stretching the boundaries of the family to include non-kin, although research does not explicitly address homosexual behavior in these conditions.²⁹⁷ Even if Korean bachelors had same-sex relationships, few individuals would disclose this fact. There is a great need for research on the issue of Korean bachelors’ relationships during this period.

D. Picture Brides

Due to the racist and gendered immigration policies with capitalistic aims, HSPA recruited mostly bachelors. However, HSPA soon realized the need for a rooted stable workforce and began promoting the importation of women through the picture bride system and encouraged family formation for bachelors. Even then, the number of women allowed to immigrate was comparatively small.²⁹⁸ This section will focus on an analysis of the life histories of Korean picture brides in the early decades of the twentieth century.

A majority of the Korean immigrants were bachelors in their prime who were approaching their thirties and forties. Most of them were not educated or of a socially prominent class. Their dreams were shattered by unexpected harsh labor, difficulties with

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Wayne Patterson, Ilse, 80-82.

language, and differences in culture, and they gradually lost motivation when they realized they did not have a country to return to.²⁹⁹ Out of frustration, some bachelors turned to excessive drinking, gambling, fighting, raping, and adultery.³⁰⁰

When HSPA found that Korean migrant bachelors' marital status negatively impacted their profit-making, they encouraged them to marry Korean women using the picture bride system and helped secure the admission of these brides into Hawai'i.³⁰¹ Korean women's curiosity was piqued when they learned that immigrant bachelors needed wives and that there could be many attached benefits, including the possibility of escaping strict Neo-Confucian patriarchy and receiving a modern education in America, as recommended by Christian missionaries.³⁰²

To address laborers' concerns, HSPA considered "marriage migration," realizing marriage would be beneficial to maintaining a stable workforce.³⁰³ Due to the extremely unstable political situation in Korea and the Japanese imperialist encroachment, picture bride immigration took off. The picture bride system originated with Japanese bachelors who had emigrated to Hawai'i and the mainland U.S. and who later sought marriage after the passage of the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1908 that prohibited Japanese (laborers) from traveling to Hawai'i and the mainland.³⁰⁴ The Gentlemen's Agreement between Japan and the United States in 1908 was signed to ban the influx of Asian laborers, but it made it possible to supply "brides" to Japanese bachelors - including Korean women,

²⁹⁹ Ronald Takaki, *A different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*: (New York: Back Bay Books.1993), 234-236.

³⁰⁰ Hyung June Moon, "The Korean Immigrants in America," University of Nevada, Reno ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1976. 122-23; *Sinhan*, December 14, 1910.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, 90.

³⁰² Wayne Patterson, *The Ilse: First-Generation Korean Immigrants in Hawai'i, 1903-1973*: (University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu. 2000), 8-9.

³⁰³ Ronald Takaki, *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawai'i, 1835-1920*: (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 1984),123.

³⁰⁴ Erika Lee. 194-195

who were considered Japanese subjects due to Japan's annexation of Korea. Only the laborers' families were allowed to enter the United States, and Korean bachelors took advantage of this practice to bring brides from Korea.³⁰⁵

Korean bachelors hoped for the family stability that came from a woman's ability to provide companionship, bear children, and raise the next generation.³⁰⁶ This emphasis on the role of women's fertility and companionship for their male counterparts constructed the role of picture brides as being responsible for restoring the health, fertility, and productivity of the Korean community's population.³⁰⁷ As far as marriage was concerned, Korean bachelors had three options: 1) marry a woman of another nationality; 2) return to marry in Korea, or 3) rely on a matchmaker for the picture bride system. The first option was not practical due to legislation based on racial prejudice; for example, Federal law, the Civil Code, Section 60, prohibited single Asian male immigrant laborers in the United States from marrying White American women.³⁰⁸ Additionally, language and cultural barriers hindered them from finding partners elsewhere; few Korean bachelors managed to marry other ethnic minorities, such as Hawaiian or Portuguese women.³⁰⁹ The second option was to go back to Korea to marry and bring a bride to Hawai'i, but economic factors prevented them from returning home for marriage; the cost of a round trip was too expensive for the laborers and the loss of wages during the leave of absence would be substantial. Furthermore, the expense of a wedding and gifts for family members and relatives would be costly for the individual

³⁰⁵ Wayne Patterson. *The Ilse*: 80.

³⁰⁶ Sharma, 1984m p. 583

³⁰⁷ Alice Chae, "Women's history in public: "picture brides" of Hawai'i." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, (1988).16(1/2), 66.

³⁰⁸ Choy, 1979, 111.

³⁰⁹ Alice Chae, "Women's history", 51-62.

laborer. The third option, a picture marriage arranged by a matchmaker, was the most affordable and attractive and most bachelors chose this option.³¹⁰

However, many of the bachelors could not afford to pay the cost—\$100 to \$200 (the equivalent of \$3,112 to \$6,224 today)—for bringing a picture bride to Hawai'i. This was a great amount for a bachelor, who could only manage to save by working without spending for one or two years. The bachelors and picture brides did not receive any support from the Korean government, and additionally, the complex legal status of Korean picture brides was extremely rocky, especially after Japan's colonization of Korea in 1910. However, almost one thousand young Korean women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five came to the United States with Japanese government-issued passports.³¹¹ It was unclear who could be held accountable if legal disputes rose.

Most of the women who decided to become picture brides had witnessed drastic political changes that Korea underwent in the first half of the 20th century: the fall of the Joseon dynasty and the colonization of Korea by Japan (1910), the March 1st Movement (1919), and the overseas independence movements during colonial rule. During this period, considerable numbers of picture brides (1,115) immigrated to Hawai'i and the mainland United States. Additionally, thanks to the United States adopted an encouraging policy for Korean students, there were 541 Korean independence activists as political refugees and students who came to the United States for freedom and advanced studies.³¹²

While they originated from many parts of Korea, most picture brides were from Gyeongsang and Jeolla Provinces, the southern parts of the peninsula; most of the

³¹⁰ Office of the Historian, The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act), <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>

³¹¹ Alice Chai, "Korean Women in Hawai'i: 1903-1945." *Women in New World*, eds. Thomas, Hilah F. and Rosemary Skinner Keller, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 1981)

³¹² Bong Youn Choy, *Koreans in America*: (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 78.

bachelors, in contrast, were from the middle and northern parts of the country, recruited from port cities such as Inchon and the large cities of Seoul and Pyongyang.³¹³ A difference of approximately 185 -250 miles from the north to the south meant that the men's and women's dialects and lifestyles were different. Although most picture brides were poor and uneducated, a few were well-educated and came from the middle classes and had also worked outside the home as teachers and nurses; even the less-educated picture brides had been deeply influenced and empowered by the prevailing and revolutionary Tonghak movement, Christianity, and the New Woman trend.³¹⁴

Despite this awakening, the prospect of making money in the land in which milk and honey flowed in these women's minds allured them to leave the home country where poverty and Japanese oppression were rampant in the strict Neo-Confucian patriarchal society. The affluent images of Christian missionaries were especially influential in these young women's decision to migrate to Hawai'i.³¹⁵ Many of these young women regularly attended church and Bible classes when they were in Korea, and a picture marriage encouraged by the missionaries was an opportunity to travel and escape from the Neo-Confucian patriarchal restrictions on women in their home country.³¹⁶ In addition, Japanese colonialism in Korea turned them into voluntary refugees who decided to marry unknown men in an unfamiliar land only seen in photos. Although they were sometimes criticized for selling their bodies, they should be recognized as pioneering women who

³¹³ Patterson, *Koreans*, 2000, 104-106.

³¹⁴ Ai Ra Kim, *Women Struggling For a New Life: The Role of Religion in the Cultural Passage From Korea to America*. 1996, State University of New York Press. 29.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* 29-30.

³¹⁶ Alice Chai, "Korean Women in Hawai'i: 1903-1945,"

were barely awakened and became adventurous, independent, and self-confident. Such attitudes and actions played positive roles in their adaptation to a foreign culture.³¹⁷

In the process of exchanging photos, many funny but sad stories occurred. The photographs of the prospective grooms usually featured handsome young men in Western suits. Some posed in front of large plantation houses or fancy automobiles. What the women did not know was that these photographs had been carefully staged and even doctored to alter or hide the fact that the sun and years of hard work had taken their toll. Often, the suits were borrowed, and the photographs were years old.³¹⁸ To the young brides of seventeen or eighteen, the first meetings with their potential husbands at an immigration station proved a shocking, disappointing, and sometimes frightening experience. Their prospective husbands waiting for their brides on the dock were much older and appeared significantly different from the photos they had used; these photos were either a much younger version of themselves or a photo to which touch-ups had been made. One woman's husband had sent a photograph of himself when he was 25 years old and handsome. But when she arrived in Honolulu, the resemblance to his photograph was negligible. "He came to the pier, but I see he's old, old looking. He was 45 years old, 25 years senior to [sic] I am. My heart stuck. [sic] I was so disappointed, I don't [sic] look at him again."³¹⁹ Many felt betrayed after they found out that their future spouses' buck teeth, pigeon legs, and pockmarks did not show in photos, but few had any recourse.

³¹⁷ Duk Hee Lee Murabayashi, *Korean Ministerial Appointments to Hawai'i Methodist Churches* [Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, Center for Korean Studies, 2001], 7).

³¹⁸ Patterson, *The Ilse*, 87-88

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

In addition to the shock of deception by their husbands, many Korean picture brides were unprepared for the harsh lives that awaited them in the United States. Their husbands were barely scraping by as plantation laborers or migratory farm workers. They expected and needed their wives to work for wages, too, on top of performing the work to maintain the house and raise children. “Look at me now,” one Korean woman in Hawai‘i lamented. “My husband doesn’t earn enough, so I have to scrimp and save. I have to take in washing and ironing for unmarried men. And a baby keeps coming every year!”³²⁰ These women’s bitterness and disappointment were deep, but most decided to stay in their marriages; however, some women ran away with other bachelors. Some picture brides had no choice but to divorce their husbands after being abused or living with husbands who were incompetent to support their survival.

An editorial in the *Sinhan* weekly newspaper encouraged “picture marriage”.³²¹ According to the article, picture marriage was a productive practice to help Korean bachelors because plantation owners and Korean leaders realized that men with families were a more stable workforce. HSPA even requested laborers with families when they partnered with their business agents in Honolulu to recruit workers.³²² Some Korean leaders in the United States encouraged the picture bride system to build a healthy and productive Korean community because they feared that interracial marriages would tarnish Koreans’ ethnic purity and cultural homogeneity.

The picture bride system was also viewed positively because of Korean immigrants’ passion for national loyalty to gain back their independence and united

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

³²¹ *Sinhan Minbo* (The New Korea was a Korean-American newspaper) founded on February 10, 1909, by the Korean National Association. It was based in San Francisco and published weekly.

³²² Ronald Takaki, *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawai‘i, 1835–1920*, (University of Hawai‘i Press, 1983), 122

marriageable Koreans; this unity connected them in opposing interracial marriages as well. Even after migration, many regarded producing Korean children as a duty to preserve the Korean identity. This in-marriage preference of the Korean bachelors was based on group solidarity and closely related to the result of the national loyalty to their lost state.³²³ In the *New Korea* newspaper, letters were published to warn their compatriots to stay in the United States because Korea was colonized by Japan; many immigrants regarded this advice and stayed instead of returning to Korea.³²⁴ As a stateless people, some migrants even dreamed of creating a sovereign Korea in Hawai'i and the mainland United States.³²⁵

Despite these reasons to view the picture bride system positively, in 1914 the *Sinhan* weekly published criticism of picture marriage, arguing that its cost was enormous and was the Japanese people's evil custom that betrayed humanity. In response to this, on March 25, 1915, an article in the *Maeil Sinbo* encouraged picture marriage under the headline "Reconsidering the problem of picture marriage," claiming that arranged marriage would prevent the extinction of Koreans in America.³²⁶ Thanks to the encouragement in *Maeil Sinbo*, some bachelors sent their future brides fares and enough security money so that they could return home if they changed their minds.³²⁷

However, the colonized media in Korea frequently represented picture marriage as a business of trading or selling women's bodies; this criticism originated from

³²³Young Ho Son, "From Plantation Laborers to Ardent Nationalists: Koreans' Experiences in America and Their Search for Ethnic Identity, 1903-1924." *LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses*. 1989. 159-160

³²⁴Sun Bin Yim, "The Social Structure of Korean Communities in California, 1903-1920," in *Labor Migration Under Capitalism*, eds. Cheng and Bonacich, [University of California Press, Berkeley, 2020] 518.

³²⁵Hyung Jun Moon, "Korean Immigrants in America: The Quest of Identity in the Formative Years, 1903-1918," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 1976, p. 161.

³²⁶*Maeil Sinbo* (Daily News, a bulletin of the Governor-General of Korea), March 6, 1915.

³²⁷*Ibid.*

Neo-Confucianism;³²⁸ picture brides were described as selfish, dishonorable, and vain and viewed as denying the traditional lifestyle and longing to receive a modern education in prosperous America; many families in Korea responded to the idea of picture marriage harshly. Meanwhile, the mainstream society of that time in Korea and America viewed the culture of the picture brides as “women sold as prostitutes for 50 dollars.”³²⁹ One picture bride, Chung Young Oak, remembered that her parents were angered when they found out that the local Japanese newspaper in Korea had reported their daughter’s story under the headline “Lee Young Oak Sold to Hawai’i for Money.” Although Lee’s parents were upset that their daughter had not even consulted with them on marriage, they were grateful that their daughter was willing to go to a foreign country and marry a strange man in order to support their impoverished family and their son’s education.³³⁰

Regardless of how they were perceived, it is indisputable that these women were brave. No one forced these women to be picture brides. They were rational actors who made up their minds after weighing the same factors as other Korean immigrant women: poverty, Japanese oppression, the New Women trend, and Neo-Confucian patriarchy. They were well aware of the conditions that they would be subjected to if they stayed in Korea under the Neo-Confucian patriarchal values, having witnessed the experiences of their mothers, sisters, and other relatives. These young picture brides, many of them teenagers, came by their own will. They were independent, fearless, and ambitious; they recognized what was going to happen and consciously chose a new life and fate.

³²⁸ *Sinhan*, March 3, 1914.

³²⁹ Chai, 1988, 56.

³³⁰ Won K. Yoon, *The Passage of Picture Bride*: (PacificRim Press, 1985), 29-33

E. Challenges for Immigrant Women: Racial Discrimination, Domestic Violence, Menial Labor, and Widowhood

Korean immigrants faced unique challenges which shaped their lives in the United States in different ways. For them, Korea's sovereignty became principal in almost everything they did. Koreans were angry about Japanese control, and this anger was also felt by Korean immigrants in the United States. They were united in the shared goal to rid Korea of Japanese control and formed a cohesive community around Korean nationalism. An editorial in the *Sinhan* weekly newspaper stated about Korean immigrants, "We are not sojourners...and we are not laborers,...but political wanderers...and righteous army soldiers... we must struggle in exile."³³¹ Both a stateless people and considered another abhorrent racial discriminatory "Oriental" threat, Koreans felt acutely the colonized status of their homeland and their unequal status as Koreans in the US.³³²

The societal roadblocks experienced by Korean immigrant women were particularly challenging. As members of the Korean population, they had few advocates and were the target of constant hostility when they were outside of Korean communities. For instance, a Korean woman, Kim Myong Sook, and her daughter in Gresham, Oregon, were waiting for a bus when a White woman stared at them and cried out, "You Jap! Dirty dirt." Although Kim's English was ineloquent, she responded, "When I look at your face, you look like a Russian. I think you Russian [sic]." A man next to them who was reading the newspaper said to the White woman, "You'd better watch out what you say to this lady."³³³ Kim snarled back to the White woman that although she had an Asian

³³¹ Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 282.

³³² Erika Lee, *Asian America*, 138.

³³³ Sonia Shinn Sunoo, *Korean Picture Brides – a collection of Oral Histories*, 2002, 291-296

appearance, she was Korean; she pointed out that based on her European features, others could incorrectly assume that the White woman was Russian.

The disadvantages experienced by victims of racial discrimination and related bias are well known: limited employment opportunities; segregation; and pervasive poverty are a few among these. The disadvantages faced by Korean women in Hawai'i and the mainland included lower pay for work of equal value, high illiteracy rates, and poor access to health care. While race was one reason for inequality, gender was another, and women in the Korean immigrant community experienced both. The gender gap in earning persisted, with Korean women employed in industry and services typically earning 78 percent of what men earn in the same sector.³³⁴

At this time, Asians in the mainland United States were not allowed to live in a town with White people. All Asians had their shacks outside of town, which were built by the Chinese laborers who had built the Southern Pacific Railroad in the 1880s. Forced to live in the worst parts of town, they were routinely refused service in restaurants, public recreation facilities, and barber shops. A specific example that offers valuable insight into racial discrimination in America is Mary Paik Lee's narrative, which was constructed through her lived experience. One day when she was a high school student in Willow, Mary Paik Lee's friend Margaret Finch invited her and her family to the local church.³³⁵ When Mary and her family neared the church the next Sunday, they saw a man standing in the doorway who blocked them from entering, saying "I don't want dirty Japs in my church." She replied to him that she was not Japanese, but Korean. The man,

³³⁴United Nations 2001 World Conference against Racism. At the Crossroads of Gender and Racial Discrimination <https://www.un.org/WCAR/e-kit/gender.htm>

³³⁵ Mary Paik Lee, 1900-1995. *Quiet Odyssey : a Pioneer Korean Woman in America*. Seattle :University of Washington Press, 1990, 54.

who turned out to be the minister, said, “it doesn’t matter because you all look alike to me....go to hell.” The next day at school, Margaret asked why she had not come to church and Mary Paik Lee told her what had happened. Margaret told her father, who happened to be a local judge, Superior Judge Finch, and a member of the church. Margaret’s father told Mary Paik Lee to come to church the following Sunday. This time, the same minister came out and waited for them with open arms and introduced them to the congregation.³³⁶

Not all interactions were laced with discrimination, however. Some American Christians became friends of some Korean immigrants like Superior Judge Finch, recognizing the stateless Korean Christians as Koreans, not Japanese.³³⁷ One positive memory for Mary Paik Lee was a recognition of her excellence in Bible study by her minister. She recalled attending an American Presbyterian church when she was a teenager. Despite their differences, the minister of the church told her to join his church and said that he would not mind if his congregants did not like it, claiming that as a minister, he was the head of his church. One day a friendly minister asked her if he could speak with her. He was curious about her background and how she had become a Christian. She told him that she had been baptized by Dr. Moffett, who was well-known to American Presbyterian ministers of the day.³³⁸ When she answered the Bible questions that new members were required to answer, the minister was surprised and wondered where she had learned about the Bible. She told him that her father, who was a Presbyterian minister and an authority on Bible history, had taught her. With the support

³³⁶Ibid, 54-55

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Choy, Koreans in America, 144

of the minister, she eventually became a member of the Hollister Presbyterian Church in 1916.³³⁹

The negative consequences of the unfair perception, resentment, and violence against Korean (Asian) immigrants went beyond interpersonal and social interactions, with extensive implications for domestic and international policies. Serving as strike-breakers, miners, and agricultural workers, Korean immigrants and their families met exclusion and inequality regarding school policies and practices for their children's education during periods of changing demographics and economic recession. Despite distinct historic and linguistic differences, Asian nationalities had been clustered and treated similarly not only in the larger society but also in schools.

In 1905, the San Francisco School Board established a segregated Asian Primary School for Asian children to attend, including those who were American-born, saying, "Our children should not be placed in any position where their youthful impressions may be affected by association with pupils of the Mongolian race."³⁴⁰ Koreans were routinely lumped together as unassimilable "Orientals" who stole jobs from deserving Whites and contributed to the country's race problems.³⁴¹

One picture bride stated that she had not felt discriminated against at all when she lived in Hawai'i, but in San Francisco, it was a different story. She was afraid of going to public places such as movies, restaurants, hotels, or barber shops because of being beaten up in the dark.³⁴² She remembered a sad but also laughable incident about a Korean man who went to a Caucasian barber shop for a haircut in Sacramento, San Francisco. He was

³³⁹ Mary P. Lee, *Quiet Odyssey*: 50

³⁴⁰ Asia Society. *Asian Americans Then and Now: Linking Past to Present*. Accessed in March 2022. <https://asiasociety.org/education/asian-americans-then-and-now>

³⁴¹ Howard Brett Melendy, *Asians in America: Filipinos, Koreans, and East Indians* (Boston: Twayne, 1977), 134.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

served, but only half of his hair was cut, reflecting serious racial discrimination at that time period - the idea that Asians were only half human.³⁴³

Although racial discrimination was severe in America, many Korean men felt that they deserved at least to be admired in their homes as heads of the households as they were treated in Korea, whether they brought enough income for the family or not. However, many of them could not shake the feeling that they were not respected and that their family despised and laughed at them because their masculinity was violated. Korean men's insecurity sometimes found a release in dominating the weaker members of the family. The factors that triggered domestic violence varied.

One of the factors that caused violence was the Neo-Confucian patriarchal gender norms of Korea - the concept of the predominance of men over women, which they brought with them when they migrated. Especially when men felt gender threats and were frustrated in adjusting to their new society and facing psychological stress due to their immigration status, they sometimes tried to increase or at least maintain their power by disciplining their wives using physical and verbal abuse.³⁴⁴

Additionally, men had lived under intensified pressure to display gender-appropriate behaviors under the strong Neo-Confucian patriarchy. If they could not fulfill the ideal male standards such as toughness, stoicism, self-sufficient attitudes, and lack of emotional sensitivity, their frustration became intense and led to aggression.³⁴⁵ When Korean men's prescribed status was threatened, some of them tried to reassert their feeling of masculinity and authority by belittling and abusing their wives and children.

³⁴³ Sonia Shinn Sunoo, *Korean Picture Brides: A Collection of Oral Histories*. (Library of Congress. 2002), 70-71

³⁴⁴ Raj & Silverman, 2002 Violence against immigrant women: The roles of culture, context, and legal immigrant status on intimate partner violence. *Violence Against Women*, 8, 367-398.

³⁴⁵ Wall, D., & Kristjanson. L. (2005). "Men, culture, and hegemonic masculinity: understanding the experience of prostate cancer." *Nursing Inquiry*, 12, 97-97.

This is not surprising given that history has proven that men who have been devalued are likely to take their anxiety, self-hatred, and frustration out on those closest to them.³⁴⁶

Another form of reassertion of their authority could be men's refusal to help with household chores and care for children, making women's work extremely difficult. Korean men traditionally considered housework or childcare not for them because only lower-class Korean women worked as domestic servants in Korean culture. Because of Korean men's view of family harmony through women's obedience and endurance, which was prescribed as women's responsibility, women tended to receive their husbands' abusive behaviors and blamed themselves for arousing those behaviors by failing to fulfill women's obedient responsibility.³⁴⁷

Another factor that triggered domestic violence was a financial dependency, including traveling expenses on their potential husbands, when Korean picture brides migrated to America. In the picture bride marriage migration structure, men paid their future wives' travel expenses; these were associated with dominance, power, and status, which could lead to physical aggression, social or economic punishment, sexual aggression, and dominance ideology.³⁴⁸

Even when women wanted to seek help, they had limited access to information about supportive social resources for abused women, so immigrant women were more likely to suffer negative consequences from domestic violence and stay in their relationships due to their desire for a strong and intact family for their children and to

³⁴⁶ Crenshaw, 1989, 185-189

³⁴⁷ Min & Song, Min, P. G., & Song, Y. I. "Demographic characteristics and trends of post-1965 Korean immigrant women and men." In Y. I. Song & A. Moon (eds.) *Korean American Women: From tradition to modern feminism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998.) 45-63

³⁴⁸ Dahl, J., Vescio, T., & Weaver, K. (2015). "How threats to masculinity sequentially cause public discomfort, anger, and ideological dominance over women." *Social Psychology*, 46(4), 242-254.

avoid conflicts.³⁴⁹ If they were in Korea, their extended families would have offered valuable support in situations involving marital conflict and domestic violence. Additionally, Korean women hesitated to talk about family problems, wanting to maintain their pride and fearing that they would bring shame to their families.³⁵⁰ Although social resources were available in America, Korean women still faced multiple challenges in seeking safety and protection including legal, economic, and social challenges.³⁵¹ Their limited English language skills and cultural barriers were serious obstacles to accessing social services and gaining economic independence from their husbands.³⁵²

Even though they encountered numerous obstacles, Korean women contributed to the economic support of their families by working as paid domestic servants, garment laborers, and cannery laborers, while men found work as janitors, gardeners, kitchen helpers, and handymen.³⁵³ As minority immigrant women, they were clustered at the bottom of the economic hierarchy and limited to retailing, domestic service, food service, menial service, and agricultural occupations. They were assigned to marginal work in the most exploitative sectors of the economy – in the sweatshops, domestic services, and food and cleaning service – performing labor-intensive, low-paying, and physically dangerous work.³⁵⁴ Given the scarcity of work opportunities for men, these women’s

³⁴⁹Bui, H. N. 2003: Help-seeking behavior among abused immigrant women: a case of Vietnamese American women. *Violence Against Women*, 9, 207-239.

³⁵⁰S.B. Lee, 2003: Working with Korean-American families: Multicultural hermeneutics in understanding and dealing with marital domestic violence. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 31, 159-178.

³⁵¹Song, 1996 *Battered Women in Korean Immigrant Families: The Silent Scream*. New York, NY: Garland.

³⁵²Adelman E. Erez, et al.: Intersections of Immigration and Domestic Violence: Voices of Battered Immigrant women. *Feminist Criminology*, 2009, 4, 32-56.

³⁵³Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Bernal, Victoria. “Gender, Culture, and Capitalism: Women and the Remaking of Islamic ‘Tradition’ in a Sudanese Village.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36, no. 1 (1994): 36–67.

engagement in even lower-paid wage work was considered a survival strategy, a necessity, and not a choice.³⁵⁵

In labor-intensive businesses, researchers found that owners preferred to hire women because they believed that women would work for less and did not mind dead-end jobs. Furthermore, women had little choice; they needed the income in order not to starve and did not have job security if they quit. Therefore, Korean women with babies and children accepted the least paid and least desirable labor because of opportunities in the job market, in exchange for more flexible work schedules, resulting in heavier burdens because of their usual domestic work.³⁵⁶ Furthermore, these women's desire to stay home with their children turned them to self-employment as an alternative to working in low-wage, unskilled occupations, and they relied on class and ethnic resources to open small businesses. One typical example of opening a self-employed business utilizing the kye system was presented in the next chapter. Yet, more often than not, traditional patriarchy persisted in these family enterprises and reinforced gender inequalities; while husbands ran the business in the front, women and children performed unpaid labor in the back, such as ironing and folding customers' laundry, preparing food, washing dishes in restaurant kitchens, or stocking merchandise in their family-owned businesses.³⁵⁷

Picture brides faced an additional challenge unique to their situations; there was a possibility that they would need to work harder to support their families when their husbands became old and infirm. Worse yet, they could become widows at a very young

³⁵⁵ Karen Sacks and Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *As the World Turns: Women, Work, and International Migration* (New York: Gordon and Breach), 179-180.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Abraham, N . "Negotiating power, identity, family, and community: women's community participation." *Gender & Society*, 1996.

age. Some of them were widowed while pregnant with their last child or when their youngest was an infant.³⁵⁸ Widowhood and becoming the household head was a common life cycle experience for almost all picture brides. Many widows in their thirties and forties with several young children were in the position of having to do whatever they could to ensure the survival of their children. Widowhood became not only a great challenge for mothers but also the older children, especially the oldest daughters, who did for their younger siblings everything their mothers had done for them.³⁵⁹ Many widowed mothers' most painful memories were the sacrifices that their oldest daughters had to make. Daughters of these widows were usually forced to drop out of school at an early age to care for younger siblings, allow their brothers to go to school, and earn extra income to help their mothers by taking in laundry for bachelor laborers, doing domestic work for Caucasian families, and doing plantation, farm, and cannery work.³⁶⁰

Patriarchy surfaced again here. Even today, across racial and ethnic groups, daughters are more likely than sons to assist parents, and wives are more likely to take care of husbands than vice versa. The gendered belief that caregiving is a woman's duty is strongly held, and even after women become widowed, society expects them to care for their husbands' families.³⁶¹ Based on this belief, the construction of legal and moral barriers against the remarriage of widows was originally rooted to ensure that women would be faithful to their husbands beyond death; widows were not allowed to remarry and would remain single to manage the finances of their deceased husbands, educate their

³⁵⁸ Sonia Sunoo, "Korean Women Pioneers of the Pacific Northwest." In *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 79.1. (Spring 1978): 61.

³⁵⁹ Alice Chai, "Korean Women in Hawai'i: 1903-1945," *Women in New World*, eds. Thomas, Hilah F. and Rosemary Skinner Keller, Nashville, TN: (Abingdon Press, 1981). 81.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 81.

³⁶¹ Mignon Duffy & Amy Armenia, et al, "On the Clock, Off the Radar: Paid Care Work in the United States," in *Caring on the Clock: The Complexities and Contradictions of Paid Care Work*, ed. Mignon Duffy, Amy Armenia, and Clare L. Stacey (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 4.

children, and supervise their household.³⁶² The desire of men was to secure a lasting assurance for their patrimony privilege even after they were deceased.³⁶³ In this model, widows should not be touched by other men, and chaste widows are praised for loyalty to their late husbands.³⁶⁴ In other words, men wanted to keep their gender hierarchical privileges even after their deaths because a widowed wife needed to prepare their sons for the competitive society from which even they were excluded.³⁶⁵

However, widowhood, in fact, contributed to reconstructing family structures from patriarchy to matriarchy. Widowed picture brides indicated that financial security would be one important reason to remarry, but these women preferred to remain single, spending quality time with their family and friends. They did not want to serve another husband and did not want to be told what to do. Some expressed a desire to study more to better themselves. Widowed life gave them the chance to spend more time with their family and friends and to spend holidays and go on vacations with them. Many widows claimed that they could be the “boss” of their free time to reach out to a friend or family member and volunteer to help out a community or an individual cause. Single women also chose what to do by their own rules without deferring to anybody else.

Through the process of migration and settlement, certain areas of gender inequality were altered due to the rise in women’s status and their financial independence because of participation in wage employment and more control over earnings, which

³⁶² Christian de Pee, *Reviewed Work: Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity: Gender and Social Change in China, 1000–1400* by Beverly Bossler, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Harvard-Yenching Institute, Vol. 74, No. 1 (JUNE 2014), pp. 108-115.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

resulted in increased participation in family decision-making and relatively elevated positions of power and status in the community.³⁶⁶

F. The Role of Christianity and Women's Organizations as Support Networks

The more the Korean immigrants experienced hardships, the more they depended on Christianity; Many immigrants had practiced Christianity in Korea, and the first Korean church was established six months after the arrival of the first immigrants in Hawai'i.³⁶⁷ Between 1903 to 1918, "thirty-nine churches were built in the Hawaiian Islands alone, and approximately 2,800 Koreans were converted to Christianity."³⁶⁸ There were already about four hundred Korean Christians in the islands, who had converted before they left Korea, and more than thirty among them had taken part in church activities before immigrating. An article published in 1904 stated that among the first 600 Koreans who emigrated to Hawai'i, "three hundred are members of the Methodist Episcopal Church."³⁶⁹ One-third of all the Koreans in Hawai'i were Christians who influenced other Korean laborers' life on the sugar plantations.³⁷⁰ Although Koreans were one of the smallest ethnic groups by population on the Hawaiian Islands, Koreans had the highest average Sunday School attendance among all Methodist Episcopal Churches in Hawai'i. The Koreans in Hawai'i, according to David Yoo, were "overwhelmingly Christian."³⁷¹

Korean immigrants who converted to Christianity believed if they become familiar with the host society through Christianity, it would ease their culture shock and

³⁶⁶ Patricia R. Pessar, "The Linkage between the Household and Workplace of Dominican Women in the U.S." *International Migration Review* 18, no. 4 (December 1984): 1188–1211.

³⁶⁷ Hawai'i," *Eighty-Seventh Annual Report of the Missionary Society*, 386.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ "Methodists in Hawai'i," *Methodist Magazine and Review* 60 (July-December, 1904), 283.

³⁷⁰ Duk Hee Lee Murabayashi, *Korean Ministerial Appointments to Hawai'i Methodist Churches* [Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, Center for Korean Studies, 2001], 7).

³⁷¹ David Yoo, "Nurturing Religious Nationalism: Korean Americans in Hawai'i," 107.

process of settlement during the period of severe anti-Asian sentiment. A desire to be accepted, approved, belonged, and protected by American society played a crucial role for many people in converting. The church not only offered its members chances to share their experiences and resources but also offered a sense of belonging and a place to share social or business matters.³⁷² During this difficult period, immigrants needed to cling to Christianity to find solace and peace. According to one immigrant woman, Kim Hye Won, who spoke about her experience with Hawaiians, Christianity connected with everyone without boundaries; they were even welcomed to join the nearby Hawaiian natives' Christian church, only because they were Christians.³⁷³ Although they didn't know the language, they attended and shared services with Hawaiians; Kim and her family were subsequently baptized, and that was how they started to attend church.³⁷⁴

As a result of such positive experiences, Koreans in Hawai'i and the mainland accepted Christianity without much resistance. They built Christian churches which became the center of the Korean community. Most Koreans wanted to live near the church because almost every Korean, whether they were Christians or not, went to church on Sundays to meet, share information, and help those in trouble. Unlike the mainland United States, where immigrants had to interact with others in English, speaking English was not necessary to live on the plantations in Hawai'i. The church functioned as a central force supporting Korean culture and nationalism since church and community were deeply intertwined.³⁷⁵ Christian churches were the sole places to share Koreanness

³⁷² Steve Shim, *Korean Immigrant Churches Today in Southern California*: (San Francisco: R. and E. Research Associates, 1977), 61.

³⁷³ Sonia Shinn Sunoo, *Korean Picture Brides*, 2002, 154-166

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Choy, *Koreans in America*, 97

and its cultural cohesiveness and fortify their ethnic identity because church-goers spoke the same language and shared the same norms and values.

Korean women attended church regularly with their families on Sunday in their best outfits and served as deaconesses and trustees. Besides regularly attending choral and worship services, prayer meetings, Sunday school classes, Korean language programs, and Bible classes, they participated actively as teachers, helpers, and committee members in various church activities ranging from event planning, fundraising, and teaching in youth ministry.³⁷⁶ Some women shared their difficult times with each other; they also shared how they thrived while sewing quilts or children's clothes under kerosene light in the quiet evenings, practicing their Bible readings, and murmuring hymns that had sustained their spiritual strength during those challenging days.³⁷⁷

Korean Christian churches became these women's training ground for community service and leadership skills for political activities and became the organizational foundations for the Korean independence movement against the Japanese.³⁷⁸ Churches also served as centers for political activities. Women's and Church organizations raised funds and helped organize activities for independence movement leaders.³⁷⁹ 290 women who had taken the lead in the independence movement in Hawai'i and the mainland, working with seven women's organizations, collected funds to support the movement, reaching \$7.1 million (2022 value).³⁸⁰

³⁷⁶ Ibid. 248-249.

³⁷⁷ Melvia Choy Kawashima, "In Remembrance," in 75th Anniversary of Korean Immigration to Hawai'i, 1903-1978 (Honolulu, 198), 38.

³⁷⁸ Alice Chai, "Korean Women in Hawai'i: 1903-1945," Women in New World, eds. Thomas, Hilah F. and Rosemary Skinner Keller, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 1980.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Mary Adamski, *100 A Better Life*: Honolulu, Starbulletin, Sunday, January 12, 2003.

Although women's organizations in Hawai'i and the mainland contributed much to Korean immigrant women and the immigrant community, the absence or under-representation of women from the involvement of the Independence Movement and the ethnic periodicals still indicated the gender marginalization common within the patriarchal culture preserved both in Korea and in the immigrant community. The lack of conventional self-representations by Korean female pioneers could also suggest they had fewer privileges than the men to present themselves. Some were often remembered by their descendants; one immigration descendant recalled the "spirit of giving" among the women. She remembered that her mother and the others worked hard all day and then came to the church at night to make kimchi and other food to sell so that they could raise funds for the cause.³⁸¹

Korean women drove themselves into the nationalist movement through church activities with intensity and Korean nationalism was central to impacting the process of community and identity formation for Koreans in America. The women's movement in Hawai'i started even before the fall of the Korean Empire. Shin Myung Women's Association was organized in Hawai'i in 1908, two years before Japan's annexation. These women focused not only on education but also contributed their energy and money to the cause of their country's independence, especially focusing on women's organizations as one of the significant support networks. The Korean Women's Association, which was founded in California in 1908, and the Korean Women's Educational Association in 1909, while claiming their interest in their children's

³⁸¹ Richard S. Kim, *The Quest for Statehood: Korean Immigrant Nationalism and U.S. Sovereignty, 1905-1945* (2011; online edn, Oxford Academic, 19 Jan. 2012), 8-10
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195369991.001.0001>, accessed 18 Nov. 2022.

education.³⁸² The Korean Women's Society (KWS) in Hawai'i in 1913 was aimed at one or more of three goals: promoting nationalism, offering opportunities for education and religion, and sisterhood network, also known as the anbang network. The roles of the anbang network, along with the Bible women system, were significant to develop the process of a form of matriarchal society as it had been when missionaries needed to spread Gospel messages. Therefore, reviewing how the anbang network worked in the immigrant community is necessary to understand these women's endeavors.

The network influenced women and gave them more chances to share information and resources such as housing, business, and food.³⁸³ The anbang network as an advocate played an important role in buffering the stresses of daily life for women in general. Immigrant women constructed sisterhoods like the anbang network in Korea and shared their experiences with each other about such subjects as poverty, illness, job loss, family issues, and pregnancy and childbirth, and led women to understand and help each other and gave them chances to develop sisterhood. Through sharing difficulties and happiness, these women's sense of belonging and deep connection with other women through women's organization activities, while feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation decreased.

Although many picture brides did not attend official schools, they learned and were enlightened and empowered by the anbang network through church activities including Sunday schools and Bible studies.³⁸⁴ Besides, women felt more comfortable being around other Korean women who understood the experiences of living as Korean

³⁸² Mary Adamski, 2003.

³⁸³ Tomaskovic-Devey, D., Zimmer, C., Stainback, K., Robinson, C., Taylor, T. and McTague, T. (2006) Documenting desegregation: Segregation in American workplaces by race, ethnicity, and sex, 1966–2003. *American Sociological Review*, 71, 565–588.

³⁸⁴ Alice Chai, "Korean Women in Hawai'i: 1903-1945," *Women in New World*, eds. Thomas, Hilah F. and Rosemary Skinner Keller, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 1981).

women in the United States. They felt the need for a community association to offer broad support to Korean women. Korean churches grew with great enthusiasm and prospered with the influx of Korean picture brides and their roles in the anbang network.

As discussed in Chapter III, Bible women were first and foremost active evangelists, whose notable successes Korean women accomplished in the United States. Their involvement and great ministry through Bible studies influenced so many young picture brides to become Bible women. They found their vocation in the community and made time to serve others while initiating the reconstruction of gender roles as evangelists, health educators, social workers, teachers, mothers, wives, and spiritual leaders in the Korean community.³⁸⁵ The anbang network of the Korean Methodist Episcopal Church during this era was mostly run by Bible women, who were educated and could spend much of their time proselytizing for converts.³⁸⁶

Neo-Confucianism restricted women's sphere in society, but Bible Women could visit many places to spread the Gospel. They also visited plantations in remote areas for preaching, teaching, sharing resources, collecting tithes for the church, fundraising, and holding services with or without the pastor.³⁸⁷ The civic participation founded by the anbang network described the actions of Bible women who actively engaged their communities through event planning, fundraising, and church participation, and managed everything related to church life both inside and outside, although their work was frequently unrecognized and undervalued and they were not allowed to serve at the altar

³⁸⁵ Everett N. Hunt Jr, *Protestant Pioneers in Korea*: (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), 59.

³⁸⁶ Roberta Chang & Wayne Patterson and Wayne Patterson. In *The Koreans in Hawai'i: A Pictorial History, 1903-2003*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2003. 111-113

³⁸⁷ Kelly Chong, *Deliverance and Submission: Evangelical Women and the Negotiation of Patriarchy in South Korea*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

and preach.³⁸⁸ While spreading the Gospel, these women were not only violating sex/gender segregation law, but also the fundamental principles of Neo-Confucian patriarchy that Korean women were not allowed to participate in politics and civics. These Bible women learned organizational skills and leadership through their civic participation in women's organizations and church activities. They became increasingly exposed to politics, society, and economics due to the Japanese colonization of their home country along with the survival of immigration life in Hawai'i, giving them the skills they learned from building women's organizations.³⁸⁹

The anbang network and the Bible women system helped to redefine the scope of the Korean independence movement by addressing the overall needs, including the financial stability of Koreans in Korea and the United States. To start it, the Korean Women's Society members put on traditional Korean clothing and marched through the streets of downtown Honolulu, singing patriotic songs. They raised money by selling food and copies of the Korean Declaration of Independence, as well as by working energetically and economizing at home. The KWS recruited about 300 members and prompted Korean women to take part in the process of the national independence movement. When the news of the March 1st Independence Movement in 1919 in Korea spread, 41 female representatives from the other organizations of Hawai'i and the mainland gathered to support the independence movement in Korea. The society produced a play called "3.1 Stage Performance" while holding fundraising activities such as selling kimchi, fish, egg, rice cake, clothes, and soybean paste. The society also

³⁸⁸Jung Ha Kim, "The Labor of Compassion: Voices of Churched Korean American Women." In *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*. David K. Yoo, Ed. (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 202-217.

³⁸⁹Eui Young Yu & Earl H. Phillips, *Korean Women in Transition: at Home and Abroad*: (Los Angeles, CA. 1987), 174.

marched in hanbok (Korean traditional clothes) and taekukki (Korean flag) at the international event in Honolulu.³⁹⁰

KWS merged with the Korean Women's Relief Society (KWRS: Daehan Pun Gujae Hoe) along with other three groups.³⁹¹ On April 1st, 1919, the members of organizations decided to focus primarily on what they could do for Korea's independence movement such as encouraging Korean women to participate actively and voluntarily in fundraising and diplomatic, collaborating with the male organizations.³⁹² The Korean Christian churches provided key leadership to the Women's Relief Society, a social service collective in the islands with strong church ties, and played a key role in the shaping of the early Korean immigrant women's lives in Hawai'i.³⁹³ Through activities like these, women learned the skills and grit that they possessed offered a unique opportunity in which women could depart from traditional male-dominant norms while making additional income for the family by doing other odd jobs.³⁹⁴

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the motivations of Korean immigrant women who chose to leave Korea accompanied by their husbands and children to work in the sugarcane plantations of Hawaii and picture brides who were invited by the Korean bachelors living in Hawaii and the mainland. Factors leading to migration were poverty due to widespread famine, Japanese oppression, the influence of missionaries, and freedom from

³⁹⁰ Jiang Hong, *Koreans in Hawai'i – Duk Hee Lee Murabayashi*, Interviewed by Jiang Hong, THINKTECH ASIA HONG JIANG March 8, 2017.

³⁹¹ Roberta Chang, 2003, 16.

³⁹² Ibid; In preparation for the relief project, the association made efforts to relieve Koreans in hardships and disaster, \$1,500 (\$46,152 today) was sent to the family of the patriotic governor who was injured during the March 1st Independence Movement. Additionally, relief money was sent via the YMCA, The Dong-A Ilbo, and the Chosun Ilbo, whenever there was a disaster in Korea.

³⁹³ Harvey, Young Sook Kim and Soon Hyung Chung "The Koreans," in *People and Culture of Hawai'i*, eds. John F. MacDermott Jr. et al., University of Hawai'i Press, 1980, 137-38.

³⁹⁴ Warren Y. Kim, *Koreans in America* (Seoul: Po Chin Chai Printing Co., 1971), 10.

Neo-Confucian patriarchy. The Korean government and mass media encouraged Koreans to immigrate as a solution to the issue of poverty. Recognizing a shortage of cheap laborers in the Hawaiian sugar plantations, Christian missionaries also encouraged their congregants to immigrate to Hawai'i. Additionally, after the Eulsa Treaty of 1905, the treaty deprived the Korean Empire of its diplomatic rights, making Korea Japan's protectorate state, and Japanese oppression reached an extreme. Koreans lived in fear of the Japanese secret police and Japan controlled Korea by restricting immigration to Hawai'i. Another important factor, especially for women, was freedom from Neo-Confucian patriarchy and access to education.³⁹⁵

However, they realized that their hope of being rich was not achievable in the near future. As soon as they arrived, they were challenged by anti-Asian perceptions and policies based on race and created images of yellow peril. Additionally, they found themselves working all day long in the fields. Furthermore, women had to experience domestic violence and widowhood and were expected to work in the fields in addition to doing their domestic chores, and the duties were multiplied by the number of children they had. Women had to work in wage labor to contribute to the income discrepancies due to men's lack of work opportunities, which led to frequent disputes between husbands and wives and eventually to domestic violence. The division between housework to support family life and reproductive work to reproduce family members must be balanced to ensure economic subsistence or to propel the family up the economic ladder.

In addition, because of the more advanced democratic capitalist society of the United States, the possibility of gender equality, compared to that of Korea, was achieved

³⁹⁵ Patterson, *Ilse*, 2-5.

for Korean women.³⁹⁶ As a result, they undertook harsh Neo-Confucian patriarchal gender roles and enhanced their status in their homes and communities. These women's confidence, boldness, and literacy from church activities and women's organizations contributed to reconstructing an opportunity to challenge traditional patriarchy.

³⁹⁶ Glenn, 1986,11-12.

Chapter VI Unconquerable Women: Matriarchs and Reconstruction of Gender Roles

With the background of Christianity and women's organizations as the support systems that Korean immigrant women drew strength, this chapter will examine the narratives of three remarkable women to show how their gender roles were reconstructed and how they reached the status of matriarchs. These narratives serve as examples of how these immigrant women attested, through their life experiences, that society would benefit enormously if women's rights to equality and justice were upheld.³⁹⁷ The accounts in this chapter were collected from various oral narratives, news articles, and novels, representing in detail the patriarchal and nationalistic discourse prevalent in America. Life histories of Korean women in Korea and the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century offered moving narratives of courage, ingenuity, and power of personality; they will be analyzed as personal narratives and integrated with the gender construction theory. The Korean women's activities and their life experiences on foreign soil serve as a quintessential example of how gender roles have been deconstructed and reconstructed in foreign setting communities.³⁹⁸

The deconstruction and reconstruction of women's culture reflected women's struggles to attain autonomy and emancipation from patriarchal cultural assumptions.³⁹⁹ Korean immigrant women had to change from homemakers to laborers for economic survival; in doing so, they reconstructed their roles as women, becoming decision-makers, breadwinners, and business partners. The typical pattern of a

³⁹⁷ Younho Oh, 1632-1644.

³⁹⁸ Jiao Huan, "Gender Differences in Motivations for Identity Reconstruction on Social Network Sites," *International Journal of Human Computer*; (2018, 34.7.) 591-601.

³⁹⁹ Nancy Schrom Dye, "Clio's American Daughters: Male History, Female Reality," *The Prism of Sex*, eds. Julia A. Sherman and Evelyn Totton Beck, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press. 1979) n.p.

dual-laborer immigrant family, who confronted a language barrier, cultural barriers, limited economic opportunities, and the sheer pressure of daily survival became frustrated with their lives. They used to come home late, cook dinner, and feed the kids while their husbands just sat around smoking pipes or drinking alcohol.⁴⁰⁰ Their husbands refused to help with housework since their husbands expected to be served as they had been in Korea. At the root of this tension was a decline in the power and authority of the husbands, who felt useless and frustrated due to their wives and children's independence.

Women's need to balance full-time work outside the home with the responsibilities of childcare and housework was intense. As women continuously struggled with a heavy workload, the disruption between husbands and wives deepened. To supplement their meager incomes, wives were inclined to work two or three jobs or in higher-paying evening and night shifts. Given the long hours of wives' work schedules, some, if not most, husbands had to take care of children and other household responsibilities in their wives' absence.⁴⁰¹ Due to the wives' financial independence, wives held a relatively strong position to reconstruct their roles in traditional patriarchy, and husbands attempted to reclaim their status by increasing possibly physical violence, creating new leadership roles for themselves in families, churches, and communities because of humiliating role reversals.

The accumulation of wealth by individuals and the acquisition of private property brought changes to the marriage and family structure under the patrilineal family system. Emerging female leaders could control the family and the community and enjoy newly

⁴⁰⁰ Alice Chai, "Women's History in Public: "Picture Brides" of Hawaii." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 1988: 58.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

gained authority.⁴⁰² Most Korean immigrant women were arguably matriarchs, whether they were important or not, rich or not, recognized or not, because they constructed an egalitarian family of harmony in which the leading female was at the center.⁴⁰³

Contrary to popular belief, Korea was not always patriarchal. Long before male-dominated societies in Korea, scholars believe that there were egalitarian societies of harmony, in which females were at the center because of their mysterious life-giving and nurturing powers. This was rooted in ancient female-oriented egalitarian ‘societies of peace’, also called ‘matriarchies.’⁴⁰⁴ The common definition of matriarchy is “mother rule” with the connotation of “female domination,” but in this dissertation, the concept of matriarchy is a society that honors mothers and considers the values associated with motherhood to be the highest values.⁴⁰⁵

Although there were definite discrepancies in law and practice, an equal right to property inheritance was recognized by the law during the Goryeo dynasty and even the stipulations in the *Kyongguk taejon* in the middle of the Joseon period. Korea was a society where inheritances were passed on from mothers to daughters, which allowed women to remain economically independent; during this period, if married, husbands moved into the homes of their wives’ families.⁴⁰⁶ This custom of staying with the wife’s family home for a certain period later changed to a couple of days’ visit to the wife’s home, which deprived women’s status in marriage and began a shift toward patriarchy.

⁴⁰²Frederick Engels 1972. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. New York: International Publishers), 87-93.

⁴⁰³ Ai Ra Kim, *Women Struggling New Life*. 48-49.

⁴⁰⁴Judithmu Ochshorn, “Goddesses and the Lives of Women,” in King, ed., *Women and Goddess Traditions*, 380.

⁴⁰⁵ Janine Canan, "A conversation with Heide Gottner-Abendroth, world authority on matriarchy (March, 2013)." *Femspec*. 2013, 12 (2): 43.

⁴⁰⁶ Theodora Yoon., 2019. “South Korea: More Than Just the ‘Beauty-Obsessed’ Capital of the World”. *The Art of The Op-Ed* 1 (1).

When Neo-Confucianism was adopted as the dominant ideology to govern the Joseon dynasty, men's position as the head of the family became stronger. The formal law during the Joseon dynasty stipulated joint ownership, but in practice, women seldom exercised the right of joint ownership since all the power within the family resided in the hands of the head of the family.⁴⁰⁷ As to the legal ownership of the wife's property before and during the Japanese colonial period in Korea, the husband retained the right to own the common property and to control and maneuver the wife's possessions as well, although he could not dispose of them without her consent. Yet, the husband never shared his possessions with his wife or concubines.⁴⁰⁸

Under a regime like this, women had to construct their organizations under the queenship's control and manage them by holding rank as officers.⁴⁰⁹ One example of this was the kisaeng system, which included entertainers, palace ladies, medicine women, and shaman women. These systems, which were constructed as a result of the strict sex segregation rule, were in effect matriarchies within the Neo-Confucian patriarchal system.

Korean matriarchies would appear once again among the immigrant community of the early 20th century. America was a more advanced democratic society where the extreme form of patriarchy was eroded, so it was much easier for Korean immigrant women to claim gender equality and rights both at home and in society. These women used the shortage of women in the community to their advantage to enhance their status in terms of decision-making power and voiced their opinions in the early Korean immigrant community. In addition, many of their positions in the family and the

⁴⁰⁷ Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea*: (Ewha Womans University Press, 1976), 102.

⁴⁰⁸ Yung Chung Kim, 267.

⁴⁰⁹ Myung Ho Shin, *Gungnyeo – The Flower of the Palace* (궁녀 – 궁궐의 꽃) (in Korean). (Sigongsa, 2004).

community were significantly elevated due to their economic power-sharing through hard labor. Korean women's ability to establish a matriarch system increased due to this economic power.⁴¹⁰

One of the factors that contributed to constructing matriarchy was that Korean women did not have parents-in-law to tie them down within the patriarchal family structure. Another factor was that many did not even have husbands who may have confined them in the family due to their senior husbands' deaths. Additionally, women's recognition of the importance of education through women's organizations and church-related activities allowed them to learn more about gender equality and gave them an opportunity to deconstruct traditional male-dominant cultures.⁴¹¹ Women had to take on predominantly men's roles such as resource acquisitions, trade, investments, businesses, and dominance of households as decision-makers, thus reconstructing the gender roles. With rapid modernization and industrialization, men's physical power was no longer necessary to maintain a household and with newly earned wealth, skills, and confidence, women acquired financial literacy and strengthened their authority as matriarchs.

Matriarchies can be found at the spiritual level, the social and cultural level, and the economical level. In the remainder of this chapter, I will introduce the stories of three respective matriarchs who challenged gender roles constructed under Neo-Confucianism: Moon Dora, Whang Ha Soo, and Roh Jung Soon.

⁴¹⁰Ridgeway, C.L. and Bourg, C. (2004) Gender as status: An expectation states theory approach. In A.H. Eagly, A.E. Beall and R.J. Sternberg (eds), *The Psychology of Gender*, 2nd Edition, 2004, 217–241. New York: Guilford Press.

⁴¹¹Bussey, K. and Bandura, A. Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 1999, 106, (676–713).

A. Moon (Kim) Dora: Spiritual Matriarch

Kim Dora was born on August 18, 1877, in Pyongyang, Pyongan Province, the youngest of 13 children in the Kim family, who had a rice wholesale business. After she got married in 1893 at the age of 17, she enrolled in Methodist Mission School in Pyongyang and learned how to read and write Korean and English through teacher training and Bible study. On August 18, 1896, she was baptized as “Dora,” a short form of Dorothy, by Pastor William Arthur Noble, who was an American missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Pyongyang and Seoul from 1892 to 1934. Her four-year-old daughter was also baptized as Wilha, a feminine variation of William. Kim Dora served as a Sunday School teacher and a Bible woman at the Methodist Church in Pyongyang. A hymn written by Dora Kim was published in the January 1901 issue of *Sinhakwolbo* in Korea. She received the title “evangelist” from the Pyongyang Methodist Church.

On New Year’s Day in 1901, helpless in the face of her father-in-law’s rage about her Christian faith, she was divorced by her husband and returned to her parents’ home with her daughter. Returning to her natal home was not only shameful and disgraceful for her personally, but also for her family; still, she had no choice but to go back to her parents’ home.⁴¹² The divorce damaged her closest familial, spousal, social, emotional, and economic bonds. Divorced women were shamed and looked down upon in society in Korea; Dora suffered from this and from the emotional challenges of single motherhood, a sense of loneliness and depression, and a lack of financial support.⁴¹³ The custom of

⁴¹² Kim Ai Ra, p. 6-7

⁴¹³ David Brady & Ryan, “Single Mothers Are Not the Problem.” *The New York Times*, 10 Feb. 2018.

“kidnap marriage” might have also concerned her and played a role in her decision to emigrate.

Dora’s life and even her daughter Wilha’s life would be destined to be like these divorcees and widows. Yet, the more obstacles Kim Dora encountered, the stronger she became. Through her Christian education, Dora recognized the importance of being educated, thus, she enrolled at Ewha Hakdang in Seoul to further her studies.⁴¹⁴

In May 1903, about 400 young people gathered at a youth group meeting of the Methodist Church, and the women were asked to write an article on the theme of the hearth; three articles would be selected and published in the *Sinhakwolbo*. Kim Dora’s article was selected.⁴¹⁵ Dora seemed to seek comfort in religion and spirituality; in her article, spirituality is considered a common human experience that forms a vital part of every individual’s pursuit of a happy and meaningful life, beyond doctrine and cultural differences, while religion embodies certain rituals, practices, values, and beliefs about God or a higher power.⁴¹⁶

That same year, she was asked by the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea to accompany Korean laborers to help them settle in Hawai’i. It was a good chance for Kim Dora and her daughter. Dora’s first ocean journey was a short trip from a Korean port city to Kobe in Japan, where immigrants boarded a large ship bound for the twenty-two-day voyage to Honolulu. Life on a ship to the United States was Dora’s first experience in an open society; traveling on a merchant ship did not offer gender comforts or protection for these women that would have been a standard on a passenger ship; this was due to she

⁴¹⁴ No record was found when she was enrolled at Ewha Hakdang.

⁴¹⁵ *Sinhakwolbo*, May, 1903.

⁴¹⁶ Aldwin, C. M., Park, C. L., Jeong, Y. J., & Nath, R. (2014).

had to travel by third-class steamship like most Korean women traveling.⁴¹⁷ Having lived in a strict sex-segregation society, women were initially embarrassed and ashamed to be in the same space as men. Additionally, not knowing much about where they were heading or what was waiting for them in a stranger's land made the immigrants anxious, although they expected to become rich quickly as advertised by the Hawaiian plantation owners.

Their expectations for a better life in Hawai'i were first challenged when they were packed like sardines into a large cargo hold of a ship; bunk beds were stacked three-store high, and the smell of vomit saturated the ship. Kim Dora could empathize with these immigrants' spiritual and religious needs because she had been shunned by her husband and in-laws due to her Christian faith, followed by extreme poverty, loneliness, and hardship as a single mother; additionally, she had suffered open contempt as a divorcee, being despised by society. Like Kim Dora, many immigrants found solace in spirituality and religion in the face of suffering, uncertainty, and the inexplicably strong indoctrination in constructed cultural and social norms such as the stigma attached to a divorced single mother. From the beginning of their journey, the insecurities of Korean immigrants shaped and drove the demand for religion and spirituality. Because of uncertainty, they sought comfort in belief in a higher power and desired strict and predictable rules.⁴¹⁸

Kim Dora was there to guide them; with her strong beliefs, she helped them to find a guiding light to attain purpose in life, physical well-being, and internal peace,

⁴¹⁷ Young Ha Kim, *Black Flower*: (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

⁴¹⁸ Aldwin, C. M., Park, C. L., Jeong, Y. J., & Nath, R. (2014). Differing pathways between religiousness, spirituality, and health: A self-regulation perspective. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 6(1), 9-21.

including mental health.⁴¹⁹ Her impact began on that first boat ride and continued to the end of her life in the United States. Kim Dora offered her fellow immigrants prayers, companionship, and support, and she comforted the ill, which moved many Koreans' hearts and eventually guided them to convert to Christianity.

After arriving in Hawai'i, Dora lived with her daughter. On May 27, 1904, she married Moon Hong Seok (1864-1933), whom she had met on the ship. They married at the home of superintendent Pearson, who officiated the wedding ceremony. It was the first Korean wedding to be recorded in Hawai'i. She took his surname and became Moon Dora.⁴²⁰ Her husband was 13 years her senior and said that he attended Tokyo University.⁴²¹ Her husband came to Honolulu after losing his wife. As soon as he arrived, he started working at the Kanjo Hanseong Hotel not far from the Korean Missionary Church in Honolulu, which was run by a Japanese man named K. Higa. Her married life made it difficult to fulfill her desire to be an evangelist because babies came almost every other year and Moon was busy simply trying to survive; she had to take responsibility for the family, making buttonholes at a tailor shop because her husband's various businesses failed. Fortunately, her daughter Wilha was old enough at twelve to be able to help her mother. Although Moon was busy caring for her family, Korean immigrants depended heavily on her because of her ability to speak English and her strong faith.

Moon Dora and her husband moved to Ewa Farm to find a better wage because of their state of suffering from poverty, where Moon Dora had a busy life caring for her children, doing laundry for single men, and working in the farm canteen kitchen.

⁴¹⁹ Inglehart, R., *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1990.

⁴²⁰ The superintendent's home was with the church on the corner of Miller and Beretania Streets. It is near the Eternal Flame War Memorial next to the current governor's residence and a bus stop.

⁴²¹ Though it cannot be confirmed due to the lack of resources. Moon Hong Seok arrived in Honolulu on January 23, 1904. As soon as he arrived, he started working at the Kanjo (Hanseong) Hotel, which was run by the Japanese K. Higa.

Although immigrants were not prepared for challenges such as the language barrier, financial difficulties, and racial discrimination, which were massive hindrances to their social integration into the United States. Still, the expectation of the immigrant community was too high for her, which was demonstrated in an article in the weekly “Shinhan National Treasure”; it criticized Dora’s not being able to fulfill her duty as an evangelist and a compatriot. Moon had to take care of her growing family.⁴²² Despite this period of hardship which may have limited her mission for a time, she never gave up her dedication to church ministry and Korean community work.

In 1905, she formed a small prayer group near Honolulu Harbor, which later became the First Korean United Methodist Church. Moon Dora acknowledged through the group experiences in church that the more Korean women were affiliated with churches and Bible study classes, the more they felt strong sisterhood, which was possible through the anbang network. The anbang network played the role of an extended family for Korean immigrant women, who felt strong social support and sisterhood that helped them buffer the hardships they faced. Moon devoted herself to a variety of women’s issues such as the language barrier, financial difficulties, and racial discrimination, and organized the Korean Women’s Society (KWS); she taught them the Korean language, basic English, and American culture with the goal of backing churches and patriots and their families in Korea.⁴²³ Moon Dora was there for them and acted as a mother, sister, and friend and provided spiritual support for Korean immigrant women.⁴²⁴

⁴²² "Dora Moon." *Manoa* 14, no. 2 (2002): 31-31.

⁴²³ Matthew Dekneef, "15 extraordinary Hawai'i women who inspire us all. We can all learn something from these historic figures". *Hawai'i Magazine*. Honolulu. Archived from the original on March 8, 2017.)

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

As more picture brides came to Hawai'i, Moon Dora disbanded the KWC to form a bigger and better group: the Korean Women's Relief Society (KWRS). She helped organize the KWRS in Honolulu in April 1913, which was the first Korean women's association in Hawai'i to encourage children's Korean education and to discourage the use of Japanese-made items for the household. She was involved in establishing most of the Korean women's organizations in Hawai'i. In the process, Dora did not remain solely a wife and evangelist, but she became a local leader who contributed to the independence movement in many ways.⁴²⁵ In 1914, she supported the establishment and expansion of branches of the Korean Women's Association in Kauai and Koloa. When the March First Movement occurred in 1919, the KWRS supported the independence movement, raising funds to help the families and children of the independence activists in Korea.⁴²⁶ Moon Dora's family decided to move to Honolulu in the late 1920s, and although her family continued to struggle for survival, she tried hard not to neglect her duty as an evangelist. As a result of her efforts, the Methodist Episcopal church was able to produce many Bible women under Dora's leadership.

Appointed as a preacher by the Methodist Mission in Hawai'i at the annual banquet in 1931, Moon Dora became one of the first Korean female preachers in Hawai'i and functioned as the primary representative and role model of the Korean Christian community. She was assigned to congregations where she was certified to administer the sacraments, oversee funerals, perform other church duties, and worked with pastors to fulfill the mission and vision of the congregation. She devoted all her energy to helping the community, which became a focal point of social and economic assistance, and she

⁴²⁵ Yoon-Jung Kang, *Picture Bride*, Lee Hee-Kyung expanded the independence movement in America. Gyeongsangbuk-do Independence Movement Memorial Hall. 2016.

⁴²⁶ Nadine Kam, "Out of the Shadows."

planned social hours at which women could share information and resources with each other.⁴²⁷ Some Korean women sought reliable resources for their husbands who had domestic violence, alcohol, and drug addiction problems. Others needed help staying active to achieve a longer and healthier life.

Serving as a preacher was a great honor and was difficult to achieve it even in America. Due to the Confucian patriarchal belief that a woman's place was in the home, very few Korean women were traditionally accepted as teachers for Korean adult men, although they could teach other women and children. It was unthinkable at that time that any woman could have the authority to hold Christian services over men or that preaching could come from a woman's voice. Critics of women in the ministry indicated that women should be banned from holding authority over men, and women should remain silent in the church. However, supporters of women in ministry claimed, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus," as cited in Galatians 3:28. In any case, male congregants gradually accepted Moon Dora after watching her ministry and many years of dedication to serving and educating Korean immigrants. While she was fighting for her rights as a woman and a female preacher, her husband died in 1933.

In addition to her work as a preacher, she organized the Korean Missionary Society to evangelize the community. By 1940, the First Korean Methodist Church, where Dora held a major church office, had grown to more than four hundred members, which proved that her ministry was successful. During a period when a woman's place was confined to the home and a woman could not be recognized as a leader in the church

⁴²⁷ Hirschman, C. (2004). "The role of religion in the origins and adaptation of immigrant groups in the United States." *International Migration Review*, 2004, Vol. 38(3).

- especially a minority immigrant woman - she was well-respected as a preacher, a mother, and a leader monarch of the Korean community. Yet, Moon Dora was recognized and respected as a matriarch in the Korean community. Her granddaughter described her as “such a strong person. In church, you could see her standing with the men. They respected her convictions. My family often said, ‘Grandmother should have been a man!’”⁴²⁸ Although this was intended as a compliment, Moon would arguably have liked to be held in high regard as a woman, with people instead simply saying, “She was a great woman!”

During Moon’s ministerial career, she reconstructed women’s roles in a field traditionally dominated by men. Until her death in 1971, at age ninety-three, she continued to serve the community.⁴²⁹ Unfortunately, there are not many records available reflecting Moon’s achievements and struggles in detail except the following recognition: she was ranked by Hawai’i Magazine in March 2017 as one of the most influential women in Hawaiian history.⁴³⁰ According to the Hawai’i Council for the Humanities, Moon Dora was recognized as one of the “pivotal organizers of a modern Korean women's movement in the Territory of Hawai’i.”⁴³¹ Moon’s daughter, Wilha, followed in her mother’s footsteps and became a lay leader and later a pastor - and another great matriarch in Hawai’i. It was evident that none of their work would have been possible in the traditional Confucian society of Korea, where they would have been despised as a divorcee and her daughter.

⁴²⁸ Dora Moon. *Manoa* 14(2), 31. 2002.

⁴²⁹ Roberta Chang & Wayne Patterson, *The Koreans in Hawai’i: A Pictorial History, 1903-2003*: (Hong Kong: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 24.

⁴³⁰ Matthew Dekneef, "15 extraordinary Hawai’i women who inspire us all. We can all learn something from these historic figures". *Hawai’i Magazine*. Honolulu. Retrieved May 7, 2017.

⁴³¹ "Hawai’i Council for the Humanities presents 7th Annual Distinctive Women in Hawaiian History Program He Ho’olaule’a No Nā Mo’olelo o Na Wahine, A Celebration of Women's History". Hawai’i Council for the Humanities. 25 August 2013.

Women could gain recognition and status in Korean society only by producing male heir(s). Men's role in continuing the Korean bloodline was honored, in contrast to women's role, which was considered just incubating a baby. Due to this unjust misconception, it was understandable if single Korean women like Moon Dora, whether widowed or divorced, with children (daughters), decided to migrate in search of better opportunities in America. In Korea, another fear for women was the strict social restriction of remarriage law. Many women, who became involuntarily widowed or divorced, were destined to face lifelong loneliness, poverty, and misery because they were strictly banned to remarry; they were often encouraged to kill themselves to preserve their family names, and to prevent being contaminated by any other man. Some single women, who were divorced or/and spinsters, became devoted Bible women in Hawai'i and eventually remarried like Moon Dora.⁴³²

The church in Honolulu, called the Korean Center, was set up as the backbone of the Korean Methodist Episcopal Church. Many Korean women, including the bilingual minister Moon (Kim) Dora, bilingual advocate Whang Ha Soo, and businesswoman Roh Jung Son helped each other build the center that acted as a critical intergenerational civic center for Korean immigrants to provide information and resources. The matriarchy of Whang Ha Soo is the focus of the next section.

B. Whang Ha Soo: Cultural and Practical Matriarch

The Korean women who migrated to Hawai'i in the early 20th century engaged in various kinds of social and cultural activities to preserve and teach the Korean culture and language to the coming generations. One of them was Whang Ha Soo (1892-1984), who

⁴³²Arthur Gardner, *The Koreans in Hawai'i*: ([Honolulu, Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawai'i, 1970) 2.

had graduated from Presbyterian Women's College in Seoul, which was run by foreign missionaries, and taught at the Pyosung Academy in Sunchun, Korea.⁴³³ Because she had attended missionary school in Korea, Whang was able to speak English and was familiar with Western culture. She came to the United States at the age of 27 to further her studies and graduated from the Department of Social Work at Athens College in Alabama in 1919, which was allied with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)'s International Institute.

After graduating from Athens College at the age of 30 in 1922, Whang was on her way back to Korea and stopped in Hawai'i.⁴³⁴ Although she did not intend to stay long-term in Hawai'i, she received a job offer from the Honolulu branch of the YWCA and spent the remainder of her career assisting and advocating for Korean immigrant women, helping them assimilate, and providing leadership training for young immigrant women. Not only did she advocate for Korean women, she also made a remarkable contribution to the maintenance of Korean culture among second-generation Korean immigrant women.

YWCA at that time acknowledged the need to improve the understanding between the mainstream society and the traditional culture of the immigrants' homelands; they established the International Institute to help immigrant groups such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino to adapt to the new environment of the host society. Before the 1920s, Americans referred to services such as those offered by the YWCA as charity or relief, but they covered a wide range of social services, including legal aid,

⁴³³ "Honoring the Leaders" *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. 12 January 2013. Retrieved 4 September 2015.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Miss Ha Soo Whang, Korean Secretary of the International Institute of YWCA, 13 October 1927, RASRL Confidential Research Files, "Korean File," Box 12, Folders 18-19, Special Collections, University of Hawai'i Archives, Honolulu.)

immigrant assistance, and travelers' aid.⁴³⁵ The role of such social services was to resolve hardships faced by needy individuals, especially marginalized ethnic groups or individuals, providing meaningful opportunities for their social and economic growth. They sought to develop productive, self-reliant citizens while promoting well-being, health care, and social equity.

When Whang accepted the YWCA's job offer, she first helped Korean picture brides in complying with immigration requirements and started helping them prior to and following their arrival in the United States by making a reservation at a hotel where picture brides could stay before sailing to Hawai'i. She provided instructions to picture brides and other immigrant women regarding American manners, language, and customs and how to make American-style clothes for their children and prepare nutritional food. Whang's education enabled her vision to construct and empower a strong Korean community.

Working as a female bilingual advocate for Korean immigrant women, she soon recognized Korean women's various needs. She organized a mother's club to teach how to read street signs, receive hospital care, aid in family planning, prevent family violence, understand the purpose of emergency shelters, and establish a crisis network, using the anbang network. She also offered counseling for newly arrived picture brides: services such as providing driver education, financial planning, retirement advice, and home buyer strategies to facilitate picture brides' adjustment to life in America.⁴³⁶ In addition, Whang served as a bridge with mainstream society and invited physicians, nurses, and other health experts as guest speakers to discuss health issues pertinent to sexually transmitted

⁴³⁵ Malcolm Payne, *The Origins of Social Work: Continuity and Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2005.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

diseases, unsafe abortions, and aging; those health experts addressed family planning to improve maternal health and child survival.⁴³⁷

Some Korean immigrant women were aware of social services and tried to utilize them, but they tended to give up due to the language barrier and the complex paper/interview procedures involved. The language barrier made Koreans feel helpless, and many developed a tendency to be dependent, to isolate themselves from American society, and to stay within the Korean community, where they had no chance to learn English and the American way of life. Whang knew through her experiences that a command of English was the most important factor not only in determining one's opportunity for employment, but also in the pursuit of higher education, social adjustment, and economic betterment.

English language skills were the most common of all adaptation difficulties and a significant challenge for accessing needed services in public. As a result, Whang focused on helping women find employment and visit a doctor's office. Most Korean women were especially hesitant to visit doctors' offices as they were uncomfortable showing their bodies to male doctors because of the strongly lingering impacts of the sex segregation rule. Some women tried to visit doctors, but they could not describe their symptoms because of the language barrier. Another difficulty was that there were no public workers who could assist this population other than Whang; thus, these immigrant women turned their attention to informal supporters such as family members, friends, relatives, and neighbors.⁴³⁸ But the English of the friends and relatives was often not good

⁴³⁷ Interview with Miss Ha Soo Whang, Korean Secretary of the International Institute of YWCA, 13 October 1927.

⁴³⁸ Park-Lee, E., & Nakashima, M. *Social and Health Service Needs of Korean Older Adults in Howard County, Maryland*. (University of Maryland Press. 2007)

enough to interpret, so if they needed to visit hospitals or public agencies, they had to make another appointment and then return with an interpreter or give up altogether. The need for a trained social service advocate like Whang who could share the language and culture was crucial for Korean immigrant women to settle into the new environment.⁴³⁹ Whang could assist in accurate diagnosis, assessment, and empowerment of this population. Other important goals for Whang were to assist in the development of individual service plans for Korean women from a non-English-speaking background and their families to establish targeted support and educational programs to empower them to be independent.⁴⁴⁰

Whang also offered Korean women information and referral services so that they could convey their needs correctly. The concept of advocacy for these women meant not only presenting their issues and their experiences within the social service system but also reflecting their ethnic and cultural issues as well.⁴⁴¹ Whang truly understood these women's needs. They would not feel happy with a male advocate representing their womanly needs and could not share their deep concerns including domestic violence, illness, menstruation, child-rearing, and pregnancy. Whang came from a middle-class family in Korea and was well-educated before moving to Hawai'i. Although her social status and educational background were different from many Korean immigrant women, she understood their problems and served as an advocate for voiceless women about their abusive husbands, which was not uncommon among Confucian patriarchal husbands.

⁴³⁹ Judy Van Zile, Judy. "The public face of Korean dance in Hawaii: a story of three women" (PDF). *World Congress of Korean Studies*. 2007, 258-275

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Rai-Atkins, A., Jama, A. A., Wright, N., Scott, V., Perring, C., Craig, G. & Katbamna, S. "Mental health advocacy for black and minority ethnic users and carers." The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002. (<http://jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialcare/352.asp>)

Whang understood what it was like to be uprooted from her homeland, to lose family bonds, culture, financial security, and a support system when there were family conflicts. These immigrant women had to adjust to a new country and had to deal with uncertainty about the future and loss of status in their country before they came. Whang understood that immigrant women also had to go through stressful resettlement in terms of 'desocialization' and 'resocialization.' Desocialization is the process by which an individual experiences role loss and an accompanying loss of associated power or prestige.⁴⁴² For example, Whang Ha Soo was a teacher before she came to the United States and was financially secure through her teaching, but her student status in the United States prevented her from earning an income. Many picture brides, whether educated or not, experienced a loss of social identity resulting in an identity crisis, loss of self-image, and self-esteem, especially when they married uneducated, poor, and much older men than themselves.

They also had to go through resocialization, which is the process by which an individual gives up his or her previous status and tasks and embraces those demanded by the new society.⁴⁴³ Whang understood that immigration creates a tremendous amount of stress because of serious culture shock, social isolation, discrepancies between expectations and achievements, and sociocultural interruption caused by a different culture, language, and unique physical characteristics.⁴⁴⁴ She also addressed the unique needs of Korean picture brides in abusive situations by serving as their interpreter and translator in court. With her sense of public service and commitment to ensuring a

⁴⁴² Furnham, A., & Bochner, S. *Culture Shock: Psychological Reactions to an Unfamiliar Environment*. (London: Routledge.1989.)

⁴⁴³ Eisenstadt, S. N., *The Absorption of Immigrants*. (Glencoe, IL: Free Press. 1955)

⁴⁴⁴Min, P. G. The Korean-American family. In C. H. Mindel, R. W. Habenstein, & R. Wright, Jr. (4th Eds.), *Ethnic families in America: Patterns and variations*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. 1998.) 223- 253.

productive, thriving Korean community, Whang provided much-needed day-to-day services for these women with immediate as well as future implications for the lives of Korean women including counseling on how to respond to domestic violence in the home.⁴⁴⁵

Social supports have consistently been found to reduce the negative effects of stressful life events, and an ethnic minority might develop a sense of connectedness with their ethnic community with support like Whang Ha Soo's.⁴⁴⁶ Whang supported Korean women in both strengthening their ties within the Korean community and assimilating. Compared to other Asian women, most Korean picture brides adapted easily to American-style dresses, showed zeal for learning English and adapting to American culture, used English names, and were actively involved in religious, social, and political organizations.⁴⁴⁷

In addition to serving Korean immigrant women in Hawai'i as a social worker, Whang also made a remarkable contribution in preserving Korean culture. When Whang recognized that second-generation Korean immigrants were in danger of losing their language and heritage since the Japanese occupation of Korea banned the use of Korean language and culture, she looked for ways to preserve them. A club that she established through the YWCA, called the Hyung Jay Club, focused on Korean culture, but later it also reflected a strong desire to integrate with Hawaiian society. Whang helped club members to adapt to American life through the cultural performances of the younger generations. In the cities of Hawaii, Korean immigrants, who previously had rarely

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Mary Whang Choy, tape 12, RWSCC.

⁴⁴⁶ Min, J. W., Moon, A., & Lubben, J. E. (2005). "Determinants of psychological distress over time among older Korean immigrants and non-Hispanic White elders: Evidence from a two-wave panel study." *Ageing and Mental Health*, 9, 210-222.

⁴⁴⁷ Kim Ai Ra, 33

expanded their range of social activities beyond Korean communities, established cultural relations with people of different ethnic backgrounds.

The primary purpose of the Hyung Jay Club was to provide a social space where young Korean girls could learn Korean traditional culture and folkways, aiming to implant a strong sense of Korean identity.⁴⁴⁸ Whang later added leadership training programs for the younger generation of women in 1927.⁴⁴⁹ Many participants of the Hyung Jay Club were second-generation Korean women whose parents had barely survived and barely risen from the poverty of plantation employment to business and other more lucrative jobs in Honolulu. Thus, the club could not rely on the financial support of the Korean community and was sponsored by the YWCA since Whang Ha Soo was affiliated with it.

Recognizing the importance of connectedness between generations among ethnic groups, Hawaiian educational and social institutions hosted various cultural programs where different ethnic groups shared traditional food, games, costumes, and performing arts as assimilation policies for immigrant communities. The cities of Oahu provided opportunities for different groups to share their cultures and customs. In particular, the second generation interacted with other ethnic groups at public schools, workplaces, and social events. Initially, amateur Korean female performers of the younger generations in Hawai'i did not receive much attention, but the performances provided crucial information related to the establishment of Korean cultural institutions to highlight women's power as almost equal to that of men.⁴⁵⁰ The purpose of the Hawaiian

⁴⁴⁸ Trina Nahm-Mijo, interview by author, February 28, 2014, University of Hawai'i at Hilo, Hawai'i.

⁴⁴⁹ Roberta Chang and Wayne Patterson, *The Koreans in Hawai'i: A Pictorial History, 1903-2003* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 127.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

institutions corresponded with Whang's objectives. These amateur female performers of Korean ethnicity in Hawai'i suggested a persistent articulation of cultural adaptation to multicultural environments. Newspapers and interview resources praised her efforts, showing that a Korean woman took the initiative to establish organizations to practice and present traditional Korean music and dance.⁴⁵¹

Although she was a social worker by profession, Whang was credited with spreading the art of Korean dance in Hawai'i. Whang did not teach dance herself, but rather found musicians, singers, and dancers who were willing to teach and connected them with the second generation.⁴⁵² Whang particularly emphasized activities to support the westernization of first-generation women and cultural activities to bridge the first and second generations. Her goal was foremost concerned with the well-being of the Korean community in Hawai'i.

Through her social work in the Korean community, she made good connections with a few traditional Korean musicians. One of the musicians was an elderly male drummer who admired Whang's devotion to promoting Korean heritage when she explained why she wanted him in the Hyung Jay Club; he even gave up smoking and drinking to devote himself to teaching the members. In the Korean Confucian patriarchy, respect for older people, in general, is the most fundamental ethic to be observed.⁴⁵³ Even the elderly from the lower classes held higher status than most women in Korean society at that time, except for yangban class women; the fact that Whang influenced his behavior is an example of the changing expectations of gender roles and elevated

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Shirley Hune and Gail Nomura. *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology*. (New York: NYU Press, 2003). muse.jhu.edu/book/10696.

⁴⁵³ Ae Ra Kim, 53

women's status among the immigrant community. As a young Korean woman, being respected by an elderly Korean man was very difficult to achieve.

Through the club activity, she deconstructed the sex segregation rule and reconstructed it to encourage boys and girls to join together to promote Korean heritage. Whang Ha Soo's niece, Mary Whang Choy (1918-97), who was also hired by Whang to teach at the club, was interviewed in "When the Korean World in Hawai'i Was Young;" she explained her aunt's dedication to preserving Korean culture while reinventing Korean traditional performing arts.⁴⁵⁴ She summarized its impact on second-generation Korean girls/women:

At Hyung Jay Club, we learned old folk culture. My aunt Ha Soo recruited Korean men and women who recently immigrated to Hawai'i with expertise in Korean folk music and dance and had them teach us Korean folk culture... My aunt Ha Soo wrote the play, directed it, and produced it. Young girls would get dressed up and depict old folk tales of Korea....[sic] We never lost sight of the fact that we are Koreans. We had great pride in our heritage. We credit my aunt Ha Soo for her deep feeling for Korea and for carrying on old cultural ways, music, and dance to pass them on to the new Korean generation.⁴⁵⁵

Korean immigrant girls/women produced and performed Korean music at multicultural events. As Mary Whang Choy noted in the interview above, not only were the members of the Hyung Jay Club proud of their performances; but through these performances, Korean people in Hawai'i "never lost sight of the fact that they were Koreans and had pride in Korean cultural heritage."

Although entertainers such as kisaengs were often credited with preserving traditional performing arts, these nonprofessional Korean performers would not have thought of singing or/and dancing in public if it were not for Whang Ha Soo because of

⁴⁵⁴ Roberta Chang and Wayne Patterson, *When the Korean World in Hawai'i Was Young* (Seongnam-si, South Korea: Bookorea Pub. Co., 2012).

⁴⁵⁵ Interview with Mary Whang Choy, "They Called Her Komo (Aunt): The Story of Whang Ha Soo," Tape 12, RWSCC.

the stigma attached to it. When she asked for support from Korean leaders for the cause, the response by leaders of the Korean community was negative; they claimed that respectable Korean women would never dance or sing in public unless they were kisaengs, who were the lowest and despised in society performed in those particular arts.⁴⁵⁶

There is no record indicating that professional entertainers were among Korean immigrants in early twentieth-century Hawai'i; even if there were, they would not reveal their identity as professional entertainers because of the stigma. However, Whang reconstructed the social stigma attached to kisaengs and their performance as an important part of Korean heritage not only to unify Korean immigrant women but also to promote Korean culture to the second generation of women, while offering Western Hawaiian residents "some idea of the charm and beauty of the old Korean customs."⁴⁵⁷

Articles by Honolulu Star-Bulletin and Honolulu Advertiser described various performances produced and presented by Whang and the members of the club; these reports made them more proud because the praise for Korean culture and Korean women closely connected to their sense of national pride and identity.⁴⁵⁸ The contribution of Whang Ha Soo to Korean music and dance in Hawai'i was significant proof that established gender roles and even the concept of the singing and dancing culture of Korea could be reconstructed; the reason that singing and dancing were confined to the kisaeng culture was its stigma attached to loose women - prostitutes. Whang deconstructed the stigma attached to kisaeng and reconstructed it to the idea that anyone, women and men,

⁴⁵⁶ Bernice Kim, "The Koreans in Hawai'i." M.A. thesis, University of Hawai'i. 1937, 116.

⁴⁵⁷ Honolulu Star Bulletin May 2, 1936: B 10.

⁴⁵⁸ Roberta Chang and Wayne Patterson, *When the Korean World in Hawai'i Was Young* (Seongnam-si, South Korea: Bookorea Pub. Co., 2012).

could enjoy singing and dancing; singing and dancing was not for selling sex, but it could help instill a strong sense of Korean identity and preserve Korean pride.⁴⁵⁹

She was a true visionary and charismatic matriarch in helping Korean immigrant women, channeling their patriotism and love for Korea in ways that were meaningful to the younger generations, which was considered an act of defiance against the Japanese and a very effective way to implant ethnic pride. Whang opted to express her “deep love for Korea” by helping to preserve Korean culture and language in Hawai'i among second-generation Korean girls. She was the voice of Korean women who not only represented these voiceless women's issues and experiences but also tried to connect Koreans to mainstream society while simultaneously promoting Korean culture and heritage in mainstream society. When Whang Ha Soo retired from the YWCA in 1942, the Korean YWCA organization ended in the United States.⁴⁶⁰

C. Roh (Kang) Jung Soon: Business/Entrepreneurial Matriarch-Kye System

Roh Jung Soon (born Kang Jung Soon) came to America as a picture bride of Roh Shin Tae and arrived in San Francisco in May 1923. Her aunt in Sacramento was a matchmaker and arranged everything for her. Her husband had come to Hawai'i in 1905 to search for better economic opportunities and initially worked in the sugar cane fields in Hawai'i, but the work was too strenuous and he could not save any money. Because he did not make enough money to bring his wife, she had to wait from the time that she was engaged at 19 until she was 28 years old for him to bring her to America.

Roh eventually became a very successful entrepreneur; her success depended in large part on the kye system, also known as a credit rotating system with other Korean

⁴⁵⁹ Van Zile, Judy. "The public face of Korean dance in Hawai'i: a story of three women" (PDF). *World Congress of Korean Studies*.

⁴⁶⁰ Shirley Hune and Gail Nomura.

women through women's organizations.⁴⁶¹ In order to understand her story, an understanding of the kye system is essential. For some businesswomen like Roh, formal banking institutions were beyond reach. For Koreans, money exchange was formalized by building trust among friends. This perspective has been familiar to Koreans for a long time. It could be interpreted easily that one of the five moral disciplines in oryun, which taught trust between friends under Neo-Confucianism, is the source.⁴⁶² Moral trust is still the basis of the kye system today.

Members of the kye contribute a fixed amount on a regular basis, and each member then receives the "pot" on a rotating basis until all members have received it. If the amount were, for example, \$100 for each member, then a 10-member kye would yield \$1,000 every month. Each member of the kye waited for her turn to be the recipient of the lump sum on a monthly rotating basis. The members' identities, contributions, payments, and dates of payment were recorded by the leader into a "kye chart."⁴⁶³ Kye members usually got together monthly for a social hour, either in private homes or at a restaurant, and each member in turn took the pool until all members had received funding.⁴⁶⁴ An organizer was usually a woman with a reputation for trustworthiness, and she was careful with the recruiting process of the kye members because the system is based on trust.

Under these circumstances, wives played visible roles, connecting the kye system to public and private Korean women's organizations because members of kye usually

⁴⁶¹ The Washington Post. "For Koreans, 'Keh' is Key to Success" By Joel Garreau November 3, 1991

⁴⁶² Michael J. Seth, A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010) 157-158.

⁴⁶³ "The Legality of "kye" Loans in Korean Immigrant Communities" *The National Law Review*. Friday, October 17, 2014.

⁴⁶⁴ Hong Liu. (2014) Beyond co-ethnicity: the politics of differentiating and integrating new immigrants in Singapore. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37:7, 2014, 1225-1238.

consisted of women's church members and members of women's organizations.⁴⁶⁵ Of course, Korean men sometimes used the kye system for the same purposes, but it was rare because they did not maintain such close relations with other men in the community, especially when it came to money. Additionally, if men needed money, they asked their wives to borrow it because of the traditional concept that a man asking someone for money would significantly tarnish their dignity. Women's more flexible work role and more frequent close relationships with their friends and acquaintances through Korean women's organizations gave them the mission of seeking capital in the kye system.⁴⁶⁶ The kye offered freedom from the stressful processing, accounting, and legal fees of conventional bank loans for people like Roh, who was typical of the hundreds of business-minded picture brides who wanted a more stable and comfortable life. In addition, the kye offered paperwork-free money for people with little or no credit history. Without money, many of these immigrant women had to depend on the kye system to start businesses.

For the first two years after her arrival, Roh Jung Soon and her husband leased farmlands and cultivated them with family members, but they could not make enough money to survive. Several of his friends who worked on Sacramento orange farms encouraged him to join them because wages were better there. The Rohs transmigrated to Sacramento, and her husband worked for three years as a seasonal laborer while Roh Jung Soon stayed home with her two babies.⁴⁶⁷ Farm labor was not for her husband, who

⁴⁶⁵ Geunhee Yu. *Pastoral care in pluralistic America: a Korean-American perspective*. (Vanderbilt University, 1988), 13.

⁴⁶⁶ Eui Young Yu & Earl H. Phillips, *Korean Women in Transition: at Home and Abroad*: (Los Angeles, CA. 1987), 80.

⁴⁶⁷ Bong Youn Choy, *Koreans in America*: (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 111-114.

had to follow the crops and was away from the family for long periods, and she disliked being alone with the babies in a stranger's land.

Like many other picture brides who persuaded their husbands to move out of the sugar cane fields, she pushed her husband toward a more fruitful and lucrative life.⁴⁶⁸ When they moved to Sacramento, Roh Jung Soon joined a local Korean church, where she could gather much information and resources. She heard about some Korean immigrants' barbershop businesses in Oakland, California. She thought that if her husband learned to be a barber and opened his own business, he would be able to stay with the family year-round and be more independent. Thus, she urged him to learn barber skills, although he did not like the idea. She encouraged him to think of their children's education and their future altogether. However, they did not have enough money accumulated and could not afford to start the business. Although it was possible to apply for loans from American banks, they were not eligible because they did not have a credited work history.

Roh Jung Soon helped her husband withdraw money from a kye to attend barber school. The kye offered him funds and a chance to gain barber skills for starting a business in 1926 in Oakland.⁴⁶⁹ He opened his own barber business but barely earned enough to pay the monthly rent for the shop and their family apartment. Roh's husband eventually made his barber business profitable by charging less than his competitors to gain more customers and working from dawn to midnight, but the income he brought was still not enough to cover the growing family's survival, and they could not even think about saving money for future security or their children's education.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, 112.

⁴⁶⁹ Sonia Shinn Sunoo, 85.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid. 85

Like many Korean women, Roh Jung Soon's dream was to save money to open her own business.⁴⁷¹ But saving was not possible with her husband's meager income. They could not even pay their rent and had to turn to a Korean church for assistance and food for their three children, and the local church minister helped them apply for programs at the local social services for cash assistance and Food stamps.⁴⁷² Ashamed of being on welfare and believing that financial dependency threatened her dignity, Roh Jung Soon was desperately looking for any opportunity to stop depending on government welfare, church, and charity handouts. She wanted to start her own business to supplement her husband's meager income.

Roh preferred, like many Korean immigrants, being self-employed because it gave them the ability to control their earning potential based on individual commitment rather than having to report to someone else or follow preexisting rules and policies. Being self-employed also allowed them to create their own schedule and decide when and how much to work. It was customary for self-employed individuals to spend many hours building their businesses, which could mean working overtime or on weekends. It took a lot of motivation, dedication, and discipline to push themselves. She made connections with some friends who owned grocery stores or liquor stores, usually in a run-down part of town or in cities, to gather information.⁴⁷³ She learned from them that their businesses were possible by loaning cash among friends or pooling money in a kye.

An opportunity finally came to Roh Jung Soon. A church member introduced Roh to the idea of a "public shower and bath" business, but she did not have the means to start

⁴⁷¹ Choy, *Koreans in America*, 101.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.* 85.

⁴⁷³ Hyung Jung Moon, "The Korean Immigrants in America. The Quest for Identity in th Formative years," 1903-1918. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, (University of Nevada, Reno. 1976.)

one because of the lack of financial capital. She was informed that she could borrow money from a kye, and with that money, she opened a bath house. Her bath business was in the corner of a building where upstairs was a hotel business and downstairs were living quarters with two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a dining room. The business ran successfully thanks to her six children (four daughters and two sons), who assisted whenever she needed helpers to run the business, scrubbing the bathtubs and showers every day. As she learned financial literacy and management skills through participation in women's organizations and church activities, Roh prioritized financial capital development to save money for securing to purchase of buildings and land under the names of her children, who were citizens. Thus, the Rohs was able to save money and bought the whole building where her bath business was located. They renovated the bath and the whole building, which became their main source of income.⁴⁷⁴

She borrowed money from several kyes when she expanded the business, including renting out spaces and opening a laundry business. Soon, she did not have time to prepare even her family dinner. She had a chance to take over another bath business in 1942 after the Japanese owner was taken to a relocation camp. Even with her six children's assistance, she had to work seven days a week, often from dawn to midnight. Her children insisted that she purchase washing machines for her laundry business because they saw that her hands were swollen as a result of continuous handwashing. Although it was not easy for her hands, Roh did not mind doing hard jobs. She eventually purchased washing machines to replace handwashing and enjoyed some conveniences that she could buy with money.⁴⁷⁵ In 1945, she and her husband's combined income was

⁴⁷⁴ Sonia Shinn Sunoo, *Korean Picture Brides* – a collection of Oral Histories) Sonia Shinn Sunoo 2002, 83-90

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. 86

about \$2,000 a month (equivalent to \$33,000 in 2022). Economically stable, they returned the assistance they had received from the Korean community and contributed financial help to Korean churches.⁴⁷⁶

In 1949, the Alameda shipyards (a United States Navy Naval Air Station in Alameda, California) opened up on San Francisco Bay, and crew members of ships became her regular customers. The crew members of ships came to take baths and stopped at her husband's barbershop for haircuts; both of their businesses were booming, though they had to work hard every day and night. The shipyard workers came in after their midnight shift, so they had to keep the businesses open until midnight.⁴⁷⁷ She purchased apartments to rent after selling the building after her husband's death in 1963.

When Roh Jung Soon was interviewed in 1976, she was in her seventies; even at that age, she prioritized her business over her friends and relatives. She was still running her rental business, claiming that she would love to visit friends and relatives in LA, but she had to take care of the tenants and the yard around the apartments.⁴⁷⁸ Nevertheless, her reputation as a business matriarch was matched by her reputation as a volunteer, activist, and philanthropist. She was remembered as a pioneering picture bride entrepreneur who inspired many with her financial independence and business acumen.

Conclusion

Through modernity, Christian education, and financial freedom, Korean immigrant women deconstructed and reconstructed over 500 years of indoctrinated

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. 89

⁴⁷⁷ "Alameda Naval Air Station (historical)." *Geographic Names Information System*. United States Geological Survey.

⁴⁷⁸ Sonia Shinn Sunoo, *Korean Picture Brides*, 2002, 90.

culture. These women became spiritual leaders, activists, educators, advocates, and entrepreneurs.

Kim Dora was a divorcee traveling with her eight-year-old daughter on the passage to Hawaii from Korea. She was shunned by her husband and his family due to her Christian belief when she was 25 years old, but she was sent by the Methodist church in Korea as a Bible woman to help fellow immigrants settle in Hawaii. After she arrived, she functioned as the primary representative and role model of the Korean Christian community. She devoted all her energy to helping the community, helping establish numerous women's organizations which became a focal point of social and economic assistance, and she planned social hours at which women could share information and resources with each other.⁴⁷⁹ She became one of the most influential women in Hawaiian history ranked by Hawai'i Magazine in March 2017.⁴⁸⁰ According to the Hawai'i Council for the Humanities, Moon Dora was recognized as one of the "pivotal organizers of a modern Korean women's movement in the Territory of Hawai'i."⁴⁸¹ She was well respected as a preacher and a spiritual matriarch of the Korean community.

Whang Ha Soo was not only a social worker; she surely also needs to be recognized as a matriarch in the Korean community for providing advocacy and motherly love and for her contributions to Korean immigrant women and their families. She was a charismatic leader for second-generation Korean girls and women, helping them channel their patriotism through preserving Korean culture and heritage. When Whang

⁴⁷⁹ Hirschman, C. "The role of religion in the origins and adaptation of immigrant groups in the United States." *International Migration Review*, 2004, Vol. 38(3).

⁴⁸⁰ Dekneef, Matthew (March 8, 2017). "15 extraordinary Hawaii women who inspire us all. We can all learn something from these historic figures". *Hawai'i Magazine*. Honolulu. Archived from the original on March 8, 2017. Retrieved May 7, 2017.)

⁴⁸¹ "Hawai'i Council for the Humanities presents 7th Annual Distinctive Women in Hawaiian History Program He Ho'olaule'a No Nā Mo'olelo o Na Wahine, A Celebration of Women's History". Hawai'i Council for the Humanities. 25 August 2013.

recognized that second-generation Korean immigrants were in danger of losing their language and heritage, she looked for ways to help them preserve Korean culture. She spoke for voiceless Korean women and tried to elevate them to connect to mainstream society while simultaneously promoting Korean culture and heritage in mainstream society. Even though the Koreans were legally Japanese at that time, Korean immigrant women enjoyed their own ethnic culture within Hawai'i's multiethnic community thanks to the courageous matriarch Whang Ha Soo's efforts.⁴⁸²

Using the kye system effectively, Roh Jung Soon became a successful economic agent, overcoming persistent, gender-based barriers to survive in America. Money through the kye system was used amongst Korean women, who did not have a credit history in America, to foster entrepreneurial success. She and her husband opened family businesses and purchased a building with rental apartment units.⁴⁸³ She recognized that her participation in the household income generated multiple benefits, including her children's access to school and healthcare, her ability to share power with her husband, and enhancements of women-run businesses.⁴⁸⁴ Many Korean picture bride couples like Roh Jung Soon and her husband concentrated on small businesses such as boarding houses, alteration shops, restaurants, and rental businesses mostly funded with the kye system and showed effective business skills in Honolulu.

The three women are representative of the many Korean immigrant women who took on predominantly men's roles such as resource acquisition, trade, investments, businesses, spiritual growth, and dominance of households as decision-makers. In taking

⁴⁸² Van Zile, Judy. "Korean Dance in Hawai'i: A Century in the Public Eye." In *From the Land of Hibiscus: Koreans in Hawai'i, 1903–1950*, edited by Yöng-ho Ch'oe, 256–78. University of Hawai'i Press, 2007.257-270

⁴⁸³ Appenzeller, Alice R. (1944), "A Generation of Koreans in Hawai'i," *Paradise of the Pacific*, 56:12 (December): 81-83.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 111-114

on these roles, women acquired financial literacy and maintained their households with newly earned wealth, skills, and confidence, thus, reconstructing gender roles and building their authority as matriarchs.

Chapter VII Conclusion

In the tradition of Neo-Confucian patriarchy in Korean society, women were subjugated to centuries of gender inequality. From a young age, women were taught the

virtues of subordination, patience, and sacrifice in their roles as a woman: daughter, wife, and mother. Throughout the Joseon dynasty, women accumulated deep-seated grievances about their assigned roles in male-dominated societies; these roles were challenged individually and sporadically, though not in an organized fashion. However, with modernity, Christian education, and financial freedom, Korean women awakened to search for their status and identity. While doing that, they deconstructed and reconstructed over 500 years of indoctrinated culture.

Butler's view of gender as a social product, focusing on the construction of gendering processes - that is, how gender is constantly redefined and negotiated in everyday performances - is exemplified here. The construction of Korean women's roles being prescribed by the dominant male populace, who kept the system for their benefit, demonstrates that the system was a social product. Korean women's roles under the Neo-Confucian patriarchy during the Joseon dynasty were constructed using laws, regulations, and policies. Gender roles and status were clearly defined for the purpose of maintaining order: the social principle of Neo-Confucian belief in the hierarchy - the predominance of men over women, the core feminine principles such as a wise mother and good wife, women obeying three masters (father, husband, and son), and seven evils as suitable causes of repudiation of women. According to the rules, Korean women had to be dependent, passive, uneducated, obedient, stoic, chaste, modest, and confined to the private sphere; women's self-worth and honor were measured by their chastity and fidelity to men. Extremely strict rituals such as ancestor worship to validate male superiority and sex/gender segregation laws were constructed to keep these orders.

The double standards of the role of “other women” (kisaengs) and their femininity were also constructed by the male-dominant society - the elite class. The hypocrisy of this elite class is illustrated in how and why kisaengs’ roles were constructed, contrary to Korean women in general, as being independent, active, educated, vibrant, promiscuous, and coquettish. Kisaengs were encouraged to pursue higher education and artistic achievements because they needed to supply intellectual and emotional companionship for their male guests. To keep these rules, the government made kisaengs’ status extremely low to make upward mobility impossible for them.

These fixed roles began to change as a result of the influence of indigenous enlightenment movements such as Sirhak and Tonghak, the Western influence of Catholicism and Protestantism in the 19th century, women’s education through the foreign missionary women’s contribution, the New Woman movement, and Japanese colonialism (1910-1945). Both Korean women’s contact with Western ideas about women’s issues and their ardent resistance to Japanese colonialism expanded women’s roles and encouraged women’s involvement in economic, social, and political ventures in Korea. Unlike many other countries where the origin of the struggle for gender equality was a conflict between women and men, the original notion in Korea was conceived primarily through modernization, Christianity, and nationalism against Japanese colonialism. These factors sowed the seeds of deconstruction of the Neo-Confucian patriarchal doctrines through Korean women’s education and search for their identities.

The narratives of three rebellious women attested that even with deeply indoctrinated concepts of women’s roles in Korean society, deconstruction of the long-standing Neo-Confucian culture was possible. These women are Queen Min,

Esther Pak, and Kisaeng Aeng Mu, and all three of them challenged traditional gender roles. Their stories illustrate the necessity of women's education for survival, an increase of financial independence, and success in the modern world; being literate is a crucial factor in the social and cultural status of an individual in society; education plays a key role in eliminating gender inequality and deconstructing gender roles.

By emphasizing the importance of women's education, women started to call attention to the search for their identity, which led them to migrate to America. Poverty, Japanese oppression, modernized Christian education, and freedom from Neo-Confucian Patriarchy were also factors in Korean women's migration. The early 20th century witnessed the migration of thousands of Korean immigrants to Hawai'i and the mainland United States.

When Koreans came to the United States, there were already strong anti-Asian sentiments. Challenges for Immigrant Women in particular included racial discrimination, domestic violence, menial labor, and widowhood. While awakening from their deep hibernation, many Korean immigrant women and picture brides raised their status and considerable power-sharing with their husbands compared to their sisters in Korea; their higher status was possible because of the shortage of Korean women in Korean immigration communities due to the labor-recruiters' preference for male laborers. From the very beginning of the Korean immigration wave, Korean women operated boarding houses for bachelors, accumulated financial capital using the kye system, and learned entrepreneurial skills. In order to survive, families had to adopt a more egalitarian manner by deconstructing and reconstructing their roles. Christianity and women's organizations served as crucial support systems and also played a role in the improved status of

immigrant women. Despite their small numbers, Korean immigrant women deserve attention because they demonstrated a quintessential example of how gender roles have been deconstructed and reconstructed in communities in a foreign setting.

Many Korean immigrant women played the role of matriarch, becoming “hoju” (a head of a family) after their elderly husbands’ deaths. Many of these women became influential leaders in the Korean community, such as the spiritual matriarch Moon (Kim) Dora, the practical matriarch Whang Ha Soo, and the entrepreneurial matriarch Roh Jung Soon. Many Korean immigrant women made themselves matriarchs; some were millionaires, some became spiritual leaders like Moon Dora, and some were advocates in everyday life like Whang Ha Soo. My intention in introducing these matriarchs was to commemorate not just these three narratives, but also those of countless matriarchs who dealt with difficult circumstances through a strong will to survive, which led them to work hard, pursue education, develop leadership skills, and achieve financial independence.

Like Moon Dora, Whang Ha Soo, and Roh Jung Soon, many Korean immigrant women reconstructed the character of womanhood prescribed for them from passive to active, from docile to bold, and from quiet to vocal. The emergence of the new womanhood of the 1910s and 1920s in Korea and in the United States inspired them to be awakened and empowered. Korean women helped to reconstruct dynamic gender roles through the *anbang* (sisterhood) networks to support each other and provide services for the Korean community. These factors contributed greatly not only to their survival and the education of their children - and towards the restoration of Korea’s independence -

but also to these women's economic and social participation, eventually reconstructing a form of matriarchy on American soil.

A Note on Romanization and Translation

Korean words in the text are rendered using the McCune-Reischauer system, except for proper names for whom alternative spellings are well established. Korean names follow the standard order—family name first—unless a particular name is traditionally rendered in Western order.

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