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Marie and Mary: Early 20th Century Korean American Womanhood

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Abstract

The earliest wave of Korean immigration to the continental United States began in the 1900s before ending in 1924, with the aptly nicknamed “Oriental Exclusion” immigration act. Out of the thousand immigrants that arrived before the act was passed, less than half were women and children. My research attempted to illuminate this understudied period of Asian American history, and the immense accomplishments that women had in preserving Korean culture and funding the Korean independence movement. To accomplish this, I studied Marie Park Fujii’s memoir “Growing Up American in Papa’s World” and compared it to Mary Paik Lee’s “A Quiet Odyssey.” Their voices help tell the story of unique Korean American female identity at a time when they were minorities in not only gender, but among the larger Asian American diaspora. Development of this project involved closely comparing their two texts, as well as researching how their unique accounts of growing up as Asian females at a time fit into larger movements and historical trends of the time.

Keywords: 20th Century, Asian American Studies, Immigration, Korean American, Korean Studies, Intermountain West

Since 2012, my family unknowingly enjoyed one of the most valuable first-hand accounts of early 20th century Korean American history. The book, *Growing Up American in Papa's World* (2012) written by my great-aunt, Marie Park Fujji, recounted life as an Asian American woman in 1920s rural America. Her book remains one of a handful of full-length Korean American women's accounts from this era. Another famous text is the book *A Quiet Odyssey* (1990), by Mary Paik Lee, which was hailed as the most famous first-hand accounts of early 20th century Asian American lives. Lee's work depicted a shared Asian American experience of racism and perseverance, and early farming communities on Hawaii and the west coast of the U.S. One 1920 US census reported that just under 400,000 Asian-Ancestored Americans resided in the US.[1] The Japanese made up about 225,000 and the Chinese about 88,000 while Koreans were only about 10,000 in total with only 1,000 in the continental United States.[2] Out of the 1,000 total Koreans in the mainland United States only a few hundred were women. Fujji and Lee's books recount the experience of not only being minorities in the U.S., but also racial and gendered minorities in the larger Asian American diaspora.

This paper explores the immigrant experiences of Mary Paik Lee and Marie Park Fujii and compares the challenges they faced as Korean American women to the larger context of Asian immigration to America. Their accounts described experiences that colored many lives of early Asian Americans, including those who worked on Hawaiian plantations and as farmers. Both women wrote about the additional unique experience of attempting to grapple with a Korean and American identity, as well as their burgeoning womanhood. Lee and Fujii were minorities within the larger Asian American minority, and their stories should be understood within the context of Asian American migration and women's experiences in the U.S. West during the early 20th century. Their memoirs highlight the importance of region, ethnic isolation, and models of femininity that characterized Asian American women's lives.

With such a small population of Korean Americans, there are few sources that documented the lives of these pioneering men, women, and children–save for Mary Paik Lee's book *A Quiet Odyssey* (1990). Mary Paik Lee's book, *A Quiet Odyssey* has long been regarded as one of the most important sources of early Korean American history. Her first-hand account of growing up as one of the few Korean American women in America offered a rare insight into a group often neglected in history. Her account describes the plantations that Koreans (beginning in 1903) and Japanese workers (beginning in 1885) had been recruited to in Hawaii.[3][4] Following her family's migration to the continental United States, Lee described the difficulty farming and growing in a world that saw her and other Asians as a "Yellow Peril."

I am contrasting her story against another Korean American woman memoirist of the same time, Marie Park Fujii, in her memoir, *Growing Up American In Papa's World* (2012). Like

[1] "Asian American and Pacific Islander Migrations - History and Geography - America's Great Migrations." 2020. Washington.edu. 2020. https://depts.washington.edu/moving1/asian_migration.shtml#:~:text=The%201920%20census%20reported%20just,in%20shrinking%20Chinese%20American%20communities.

[2] Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A history*. (Simon & Schuster, 2021), 1.

[3] Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 111.

[4] "History of Korean Immigration to America, from 1903 to Present | Boston Korean Diaspora Project." 2015. Bu.edu. 2015. https://sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/issues/history-of-korean-immigration-to-america-from-1903-to-present/#:~:text=The%20first%20significant%20wave%20of,on%20pineapple%20and%20sugar%20plantations.

Lee's, it is possibly one of the only first-hand sources on early 20th century Korean American women and girls' lives in the Intermountain West. *Growing Up American in Papa's World* lacks the notoriety of Lee's work due to the book being distributed largely amongst Fujji's close community. Fujii filled pages about her and her sister's unique experience living in a white rural farming community that had never seen Asians, much less Asian women. Not only did Fujii describe–in rather rosy terms–her childhood games and the friends she had made, but also her family's difficult immigration to the United States. She also captured the alienation that came with being ethnically minority in the United States. In addition to this, Marie discusses how her mother's death severed her main connection with Korean womanhood and how she and her sisters formed their own ethnic and gender identities in the wake of her passing.

Part I: The Story's Beginning (Background)

It is into a complicated world of fast-shifting political machinations and laws that Lee and Fujii's families were able to migrate to the United States. Fueled by a national identity shaped by Christianity, their stories were set against legislation to restrict Asian movement. Not only did these women have to contend with pressures at home from the Japanese annexation, but they also had to exist in a foreign land that increasingly saw them and other Asians as threats.

The late 19th-early 20th century was an enormous time of change in both the United States and Korea politically, economically, and socially. For the United States, it was a time to consolidate its identity as an empire on the North American continent and across the Pacific. Along with the new territorial acquisitions of Hawaii and the Philippines came Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino immigrants–and reactionary movements fueled by racism against them. Meanwhile, in Korea, there were similar attempts to grapple with its changing identity from an isolationist, traditional Confucian society into a nation that had to contend with outside influences from both the East and the West. Japanese and Western encroachment on Korea inspired social and religious reforms.

Before the introduction of Christianity, there was little to unite socially rigid classes in Korea. It was a society defined by traditional Confucian values and had little room for change. For centuries, it had been a tributary state to China, and closely mimicked its structure and isolationist policy. However, three hundred years of isolation were disrupted in 1876 when Japan utilized gunboat diplomacy to force Korea to sign the Treaty of Kanghwa. This unequal treaty was not only a sign of Japan's ambitions to expand its influence on continental Asia, but also flung open Korea's doors to trade with the outside world.

Along with traders that flowed into newly opened Korean ports came eager missionaries like Dr. Horace Newton Allen and Dr. Samuel H. Moffett. Christian missionaries, many from the United States, came to the fabled "hermit kingdom" in the 19th century with hopes of converting the populace. At first, the people of Joseon (as Korea was previously known) resisted their efforts, but progressive ideas in the imperial court helped the spread of Christianity. During the 1884 Gapsin Coup when Queen Myeongseong's nephew was severely injured in an assassination attempt on his life, missionary Horace Newton Allen saved his life using Western medical techniques. The influential queen was impressed with these efforts and used her influence to ease Korea into accepting Christianity. The queen's example mirrored the impact that Korean women held in spreading Christianity in Korea.

Like Queen Min, many early supporters of Christianity in Korea were women. In traditional Korean Confucian society, women's lives were restrictive; they were expected not to leave the home and were expected to play a subordinate role to men. Most women–besides those belonging to the upper class–were not encouraged to become educated. Becoming a Christian gave women a reason to become literate–to read the Bible–and missionary work was an activity that allowed them to leave the home and form community through prayer groups.

Korean nationalism and religion would become intertwined, when in 1910, Japan formally annexed Korea. The event caused many Koreans to rally around the idea of martyrdom and the close communities they formed with fellow followers of Christ. For example, the Japanese government attempted to assimilate Koreans through state-Shintoism, and to worship and acknowledge the emperor as being descended from the Japanese sun goddess Ameterasu. The hope was that the imperial cult would make the Koreans loyal to the emperor, and thus more agreeable with Japanese colonial efforts.

However, many Korean Christians refused to bow to the Japanese emperor, even with threats of torture and death, viewing this act as akin to idol worship. Though this was partially motivated by theological beliefs, their subsequent imprisonment and martyrdom intertwined their faith and patriotism to the populace. Beyond creating martyrs for Koreans to rally around, Christianity acted as a tool for unity for how it was able to cross traditional class barriers and clan loyalties. Under Japanese rule, the umbrella of Protestant Christianity allowed revolutionaries to move with ease and coordinate the March 1st movement. The movement was the largest protest against Japanese rule at the time, and united Koreans from all over the social strata, ages, and genders. Importantly, the intertwining of Korean national identity and Christianity arguably was separate from Western missionary intervention. During the March 1st movement, the Western missionaries were caught unaware, despite the prominent place that many Korean Christians had in the movement. Despite fervent efforts under Japanese occupation the number of Christians steadily dwindled in Korea, whether from persecution or having been forced underground.

Thus, Christianity was a major factor in pushing Koreans to immigrate to America. Though Koreans had been pushed, like the Chinese and Japanese, to immigrate due to social and political upheavals at home, the Koreans were unique in how religion played a large part in motivating them to go to a "promised land." Lee's father for example had been a pastor in Korea, and interwove his religion and revolutionary actions together in America. When the family faced tribulations, like many other Korean American Christians, the struggles were equated to the martyrdom of early missionaries to Korea. While Christian themes were not as explicit in Fujii's memoir, her family was able to openly practice Christianity and never missed a day of church. Fujii's father often continued working on Sunday, but would occasionally attend. Her memoir did not write of a perceived connection between her father, Christianity, and the Korean independence movement.

While Korea grappled with its emergence into the world, the United States questioned its identity as an empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The same manifest destiny that pushed America to make California into a state and annex the Kingdom of Hawaii in the nineteenth century also influenced them to incorporate the Philippines in their burgeoning sea empire. As America expanded east, it increasingly had to contend with its interactions with Asia and Asian migrants.

How America chose to deal with Chinese immigrants in the 19th century set a tone of exclusion and alienation for all immigration from Asia. Particularly on the West Coast of the United States, there were increasing concerns about the "Yellow Peril," the derogatory phrase white Americans used in reference to the Asian immigrant diaspora. In cartoons, Asians were portrayed as hideous caricatures and the downfall of Western society. The men were depicted as rapists, threats to American masculinity, and out to destroy the economy of the United States. Notably, the 1875 Page Act regulated very little immigration allowed for women, due to the fear that they were prostitutes or would encourage the men to settle down in America. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first major law to explicitly target a race in immigration law, and would not only significantly slow Chinese immigration for decades, but also set a precedent for racial discrimination in border enforcement.

Following the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the economic demand for cheap labor saw the movements of Japanese immigrants to fill these roles. Unlike the Chinese, the Japanese would enjoy a largely unrestricted flow of movement in the late 19th to early 20th century. During 1901-1908, over 127,000 Japanese immigrated to the U.S. and settled in Hawaii or the West Coast of the U.S. However, mounting pressures led President Theodore Roosevelt to sign a 1907 gentleman's agreement with the Japanese government, barring the issuing of valid Japanese passports to the U.S. The exception was for Japanese women, who were allowed entry into the U.S. so long as their husbands already resided there.

In the early 20th century, Korean immigration to the U.S. began its first wave in 1903 with the arrival of Korean workers to plantations in Hawaii. Plantation owners sought to replace Japanese workers who had increasingly begun to unionize, leading to the arrival of about 10,000 Korean workers–1,000 of which made their way to the mainland through Hawaii. However, when Japan annexed Korea in 1910, Koreans too became subject to Japanese and U.S. immigration laws. The gentlemen's agreement curbed the immigration of men, save for some Korean picture brides.

However, Asian immigration to the U.S. would be further restricted by the Immigration Act of 1917 and the Immigration Act of 1924. The Immigration Act of 1917 would impose literacy tests and a banning of immigration from much of the Asia Pacific region–excluding Japan and the Philippines. However, the Immigration Act of 1924–nicknamed the Oriental Exclusion Act–barred all Asian immigration. The Philippines were not included in this ban since it was considered U.S. territory, and the Chinese were not included because they had already been banned by the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Part II: Plantations

Both Mary Paik Lee's and Marie Park Fujii's families, like thousands of other Korean Americans, began their journey as laborers on the island of Hawaii. Freshly annexed, white plantation owners like the Dole Company needed cheap labor to do back-breaking labor on sugar and pineapple fields. For years that came in the form of Japanese laborers, until they increasingly demanded higher wages, equal pay, and an end to racial discrimination. This culminated in the 1909 Japanese strike, one of the largest labor protests in Hawaii's history.[5]

[5] "History of Labor in Hawai'i." 2024. Hawaii.edu. 2024. https://www.hawaii.edu/uhwo/clear/home/HawaiiLaborHistory.html.

However, six years before the labor strike the first Koreans stepped foot on Hawaii, marking the beginning of the first wave of Korean American immigration. They disembarked from the S.S. Gaelic on January 13, 1903 (a day that is celebrated annually as Korean American Day), and became the first of about ten thousand Korean immigrants that would arrive during this period. Like other East Asian immigrants, namely the Chinese and Japanese immigrants on Hawaii, they faced racial violence, anti-Asian laws, and harsh working conditions.[6] However, the plantations were places of congregation where transnational networks of Korean independence and revolution would take hold.

Lee's family and Fujii's father were likely influenced to immigrate by newspaper advertisements that promised high wages, free housing, and medical care in a "paradise" where "gold dollars were blossoming on every bush." These advertisements came about as a result of American efforts leading to the establishment of the Korean Department of Emigration as well as permission to American businessmen to recruit Korean laborers. One such American businessman named David Deshler was given authorization by King Kojong of Korea to recruit laborers for Hawaiian sugar plantations. Since many Koreans could not afford the expensive voyage, his company offered loans.[7]

It is unclear in Fujii's memoir if her father, Kyung Soo Park, was one of the thousands of Koreans that took one of these loans.[8] Though Fujii wrote about how he refused to sign a contract like some of the other workers, it is unknown if that contract specifically meant a loan. Nevertheless, he was part of the first wave and though not part of *the* first voyage, he too boarded the S.S. Gaelic and arrived in Hawaii during the summer of 1904.[9] Notably, he was 34 and older than the young men who surrounded him, who would come to make up the majority of the first wave of Korean immigration to America.[10] Many of the men came from diverse backgrounds like clergymen, former soldiers, students–and in Fujii's father's case, a carpenter. About 70% of them were literate and 40% were Christian, and many had dreams of Korea free from Japanese meddling.[11]

Though Fujii's father, Kyung Soo Park, left behind two children, Lee's father was accompanied by his wife, daughter, and son. The decision to bring a family was not rare, though it was uncommon and women made up only 10% of the Korean migrants to America in the early years.[12] However, Korean women became essential to surviving harsh realities of life on the sugar plantations. They would oftentimes work beside their husbands and fathers in the

[6] "History of Korean Immigration to America, from 1903 to Present | Boston Korean Diaspora Project." 2015. Bu.edu. 2015. https://sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/issues/history-of-korean-immigration-to-america-from-1903-to-present/#:~:text=The%20first%20significant%20wave%20of,on%20pineapple%20and%20sugar%20plantations.
[7] Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 139.
[8] Marie Fuji, "Chapter 1: From Korea to America." In *Growing Up American in Papa's World*. (Belknap Publishing, 2012).
[9] Fujji, "Chapter 1: From Korea to America" In *Growing Up American in Papa's World*.
[10] Lee, Hee, Jeewon Hahn, Lee, Woo, and Hyun-Jee Oh. 2001. "Korean Passengers Arriving at Honolulu, 1903-1905." Hawaii.edu. Center for Korean Studies, School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manoa. March 2001. https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/items/a914dc9d-b3d8-4cec-bb38-41af274db4b4.
[11] Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 140.
[12] Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 140.

fields and/or manage domestic chores.[13] While Lee's mother found that there was little housework to do in the shoddy hut their family resided in, Lee's father harvested sugar cane under the blistering Hawaiian sun.[14] Like the thousands of other Korean migrants, Lee's and Fujii's fathers dreamed of an escape from the harsh conditions of Hawaiian plantations–and looked westward towards the continental United States.

Part III: Farming in America

Fujii's story diverged from the traditional narrative of Koreans settling on the West Coast, when her father moved to the Intermountain region of the United States. Out of the thousand Koreans that immigrated to America at this time, many–like Mary Paik Lee's family–settled in California, Oregon, and Washington to seek support from the Korean community. Fujii's memoir pointed to the little studied Korean communities outside of these states, when her father Kyung Soo Park attempted to join Korean beet farmers in Montana. Unfortunately, due to a mix-up, Fujii's father misheard Mountain Home, Idaho as Montana–and stepped off the train in a one road town with not a single other Asian American for miles.[15] Lee's family immigrated through Angel Island in the San Francisco bay in 1906, and quickly followed other Korean immigrants to the first Koreatown in America located in Riverside, California. Pachappa camp, as the settlement was named, was a community of early Koreans that joined the millions of other Mexicans, Japanese, and African Americans that followed the migratory patterns of California crops. Many Koreans chose to stick close to others in the community and often found refuge in the other Asian minorities that clustered around orange orchards or rice fields in California.[16]

Both Lee's and Fujii's memoirs exemplified the experiences of early Asian Americans to find community in a foreign land, struggles against racial oppression, and the migratory nature of their lives. Despite how little is known about the Koreans residing outside the West Coast, Fujii's father's move to join a settlement of beet farmers was similar to how Lee's father joined the group of Koreans at Pachappa camp. These efforts were similar to other Asian American groups of the time, for example how early Filipino American migrant workers clustered around Stockton for a sense of community and safety.[17]

Koreans, like many other Asian American groups at the time, were largely farmers despite anti-Asian legislation that sought to prevent them from accessing land. A series of Alien land laws were passed beginning from the 1880s, that prevented "aliens ineligible for citizenship" from owning land. Since Asian immigrants were prevented from becoming citizens, the laws attempted to prevent Asians from permanently settling in America. However, the enduring spirit of Asian Americans prevailed, with many like the Japanese putting the farms in

[13] Lili M. Kim, "Redefining the Boundaries of Traditional Gender Roles: Korean Picture Brides, Pioneer Korean Immigrant Women, Their Benevolent Nationalism in Hawaii," in Shirley Hune & Gail Nomura, eds., *Asian/Pacific Islander Women: A Historical Anthology* (New York University Press, 2003).
[14] Lee et al., *Quiet Odyssey*, 9.
[15] Fujji, "Chapter 1: From Korea to America." In *Growing Up American in Papa's World*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Belknap Publishing; First Edition , 2012.
[16] Lee et al., *Quiet Odyssey*, 11-13.
[17] Mabalon, Dawn Bohulano. *Little Manila Is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California*. Duke University Press, 2013. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv12102xp.

their American children's names. Children born in the United States were automatically considered citizens and could hold land. However, renting a farm was one of the easiest ways for Asian Americans to become farmers.[18] In Fujii's case, her family moved from Idaho to Oregon and then to Wyoming–but never was able to buy a farm.

Part IV: Formation of Identity

Lee was a first generation Korean American woman, born in Pyongyang in 1900 in what is today North Korea.[19] Fujii meanwhile was born in 1919 in Oregon and was the youngest daughter in her family.[20] Though both were Korean American women and part of the first wave of immigration to America, their identities tended to diverge from one another and converge–which displayed the diversity of Asian American women's experiences. Both women grappled with what it meant to be Korean American, as well as their own identity as women.

Unlike Lee and many other Asian American memoirists of the time, Fujii did not grow up with a strong Korean presence in her life owing to her mother's early passing and the lack of Korean communities in the Intermountain West. Fujii's mother died from an infection caused by childbirth when Marie was six, thus severing the family's primary channel to pass on Korean culture.

"Louvie and Rose started to cry. The boys looked bewildered. I don't remember crying, but I must have too… Mama can't leave me, I'm only five." (Fujji Chapter 6)

Her mother had been the one to teach her two eldest daughters Korean–the oldest being almost fourteen at the time of her passing.[21] Marie's young age contributed to her lack of fluency in the Korean language. Her two older sisters were the only children who would learn Korean of that generation to learn the language, and her brothers would never come near a similar fluency. After the passing of his wife, Fujii's father–perhaps deliberately–chose not to pass on Korean culture or language to his children. Though not a militant effort to eliminate any trace of Korean culture, her father attempted to assimilate his children into the white rural Intermountain farming communities that they found themselves living in. It could have been an act of survival, and to ensure that his children would not be discriminated against and looked down upon like he had been, or it could have been that he was simply an exhausted widower supporting a massive family, and had no time to pass on his culture. Despite cooking Korean and American food, he only spoke in English, preferred to refer to his children by their American names (which he struggled to pronounce), and did not inform his children of any revolutionary activities that he may have been a part of.[22] Thus, Fujii and her siblings grew up with a separation from their Korean background, in favor of a white American one.

Lee did not experience this deliberate alienation from Korean culture, in the same way that Fujii did. Her father ensured that she and her siblings knew how to read and write Korean, as well as understand the plight of Korean independence.[23] Lee also grew up in areas with a

[18] Ichioka, Yuji. "Japanese Immigrant Response to the 1920 California Alien Land Law." *Agricultural History* 58, no. 2 (1984): 157–78. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3742992.
[19] Lee et al., *Quiet Odyssey*, 4.
[20] Fujji, "Chapter 4: Life in Oregon." In *Growing Up American in Papa's World*.
[21] Fujji, "Chapter 24: The Shin Family." In *Growing Up American in Papa's World*.
[22] Fujji, Marie. "Chapter 27: Papa in the Kitchen." In *Growing Up American in Papa's World*.
[23] Lee et al., *Quiet Odyssey*, 80.

large population of Koreans both on the island of Hawaii as well as Pachappa camp. Her memoir, therefore, delved into the historical background of Koreans and related her struggles as a Korean American to the transnational conflict of Korean independence.

Both Lee and Fujii watched Korean women's lives, primarily through their mothers, be defined by a lack of control over their bodies and pregnancy. Fujii's sister Rose, who had been fourteen at the time of her mother's passing, speculated that Rose's deathly illnesses that often plagued her likely came from malnutrition. Rose rarely ate the vegetables her family grew because everything the family raised had to be sold.[24] Fujii's mother's constant pregnancies despite her family's poverty reflected the lack of power she had over her body. Did she really desire to continually be expecting, despite the large toll on her family's meager food supply to the point where her own daughter was becoming ill from a lack of food, or did she not have the power to decide when she became pregnant? The health effects of malnutrition would have been devastating to Fujii's mother especially when four out of her nine children were born back to back.[25] Her final and deadly pregnancy was the only time that Fujii witnessed her mother taken to the hospital to birth the child. Fujji wrote that it was, "unheard of for anyone in the family to be in the hospital, especially Mama. Who would take care of us now?" which hinted to the domestic and reproductive labor, and childcare expected of immigrant Korean women.[26]

As Fujii matured, so did her family's food security, and even dedicated an entire chapter just to her father's many kitchen creations.[27] Unlike Lee's account which was characterized by her constant hunger, Fujji never indicated that her family suffered food insecurity. Instead, she recalled how, "I knew that we were poor, but we always had food on the table" amidst the Great Depression.[28] Perhaps her family's increased food security and her young age when her mother passed, prevented her from fully comprehending the hardship of being a Korean woman. She never mentioned a lack of food in her memoir, and only seemed to remember a single difficult pregnancy for her mother.

Fujii witnessed less of the firsthand hardship of early Korean women's lack of bodily autonomy than Lee did. Unlike Fujii who never even witnessed her siblings' births, at the age of 13, Lee helped her mother deliver Young Sun (Lawrence). Young Sun was one of nine siblings and his birth left Lee's mother "so weary and ill she nearly died that night."[29] Despite the pregnancy nearly killing Lee's mother, she continued bearing children. Lee constantly emphasized how hungry her family was, and how she scavenged for scraps at the butcher shop to keep her family alive.[30] The dangerous consequences to Lee's mother's health that came from malnutrition, traumatic births, and linger maladies of constant pregnancies, suggest that she had little power in her decision to get pregnant. Lee's firsthand witness to her mother's

[24] Sunoo, Sonia Shinn. *Korean picture brides: 1903-1920: A collection of oral histories*. Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2002, 226.
[25] Sunoo, Sonia Shinn. *Korean picture brides: 1903-1920: A collection of oral histories*. (Xlibris, 2002), 226.
[26] Fujji, "Chapter 6: Mama and Charles." In *Growing Up American in Papa's World*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Belknap Publishing; First Edition , 2012.
[27] Fujji, "Chapter 27: Papa in the Kitchen." In *Growing Up American in Papa's World*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Belknap Publishing; First Edition , 2012.
[28] Fujji, "Chapter 8: Eagle Town.." In *Growing Up American in Papa's World*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Belknap Publishing; First Edition , 2012.
[29] Lee et al., *Quiet Odyssey*, 34.
[30] Lee et al., *Quiet Odyssey*, 16.

constant pregnancies suggested a powerlessness that came with Korean womanhood. Though Lee's mother was educated, and her daughter followed in her footsteps in that regard, it was demonstrated to Lee that education could not prevent a woman from having bodily autonomy seized from her.

Lee modeled her identity after the Korean women around her, but did not necessarily view her mother as an ideal of femininity to become. Like her mother, she prioritized education and family, but held an undertone of resentment for her mother's pregnancies. At fifteen she leapt at the chance to attend school in another town. Lee justified the move by arguing that "the children were all old enough to take care of themselves, and that Mother did not need me to help at home."[31]As the eldest daughter–and only daughter for fifteen years–Lee was expected to help with domestic labor and childcare. Lee's pursuit of education acted as a way to escape her traditional role. Though she grew to embody an identity that moved beyond what she saw at home and her community, she nevertheless was able to find models of femininity in the women surrounding her. Fujii, due to her mother's early passing and the lack of large Korean communities around her, had to form her identity without the physical presence of Korean women. Ultimately, both she and Lee would be united in their struggles to consolidate their transnational identities, as well as their burgeoning femininity in a country that saw them as perpetual aliens.

Conclusion

Mary Paik Lee and Marie Park Fujii's lives would cross in 1927 with the arranged marriage of Lee's brother Meung Sun Paik, to Fujii's sister Rose Park. Though Lee and Fujii would never write about meeting one another, marriage recognized the close ties of the Korean American community. Whether Fujii's and Lee's fathers met while toiling on the Hawaiian sugar plantations, or whether it was through the Korean independence movement networks that connected Korean Americans to their homeland's overseas struggle; it is remarkable that these memoirists' lives intertwined.

Their memoirs not only shed light on the less than a thousand Korean immigrants to the continental United States, but also on larger trends with Asian American immigration. Fujii and Lee's voices are rare not just because of the lack of full-length sources from this time period, but also because they were women writing during a time when male voices were prioritized over female. They spotlighted how Koreans experienced anti-Asian discrimination and the immense hardship of Hawaiian plantations and farming in the continental United States. Perhaps most importantly, their stories showed similar themes of Korean resilience to Japanese and Filipino migrants, and the larger Asian American community of the time–while also differentiating Korean migrants as focused on independence and religion.

Their stories represented the lives of thousands of early 20th-century Asian American women whose experiences of suffering and triumph were not written down. My great aunt Fujii and her sister-in-law, Lee, had lives that represented and reflected themes of immigration and assimilation to America for early 20th century Asian American women.

[31] Lee et al., *Quiet Odyssey*, 45.

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