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Adrian Scaife

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Esther Kang

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The Rhodes Historical Review

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GRIT AND GRIND

Grit and Grind: Vietnamese Refugees and the Process of Community Formation in Memphis

Adrian Scaife

When people look at American culture they often only see fast food restaurants and television. So generic you don't know what town, city or even what state you're in. We don't think of each piece but only see the whole. How bland, how white bread our society often seems on the surface. - Julianna Hunter, Mosaic Magazine

Memphis history is largely viewed in black and white terms, literally. Today, the Memphis metropolitan area is officially 45.2% White and 47.3% African American.¹ But alongside those two predominant groups live a smorgasbord of minority cultures and communities. This paper will take a close look at the Vietnamese community's assimilation into Memphis, beginning with the first arrivals in 1975 following the fall of Saigon and the South Vietnamese government. The assimilation process is considered in light of the context of Memphis at the time, emerging from a turbulent fifteen years of race-related civil unrest that left the composition and layout of the city significantly altered. Those first Vietnamese refugees, with the aid of national and local

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "2013 Census Population Estimate Table."

charitable efforts, established a foothold that allowed them to incorporate later waves of refugees and migrants more easily. The changing nature of the city itself combined with the values held within Vietnamese society put the new inhabitants in a position to succeed. Examining their acclimation helps us understand how the Vietnamese community, now a vibrant part of the city's identity and culture, maintained their unique cultural values and traditions. Furthermore, examining their assimilation complicates the standard black and white narrative of Memphis racial politics, culture, and history.

When the Vietnamese first began arriving, Memphis was emerging from a period of turmoil that affected the circumstances into which refugees settled. As for much of the country, the 1960s were a tumultuous decade in Memphis. Racial tensions, especially in the South, began to boil over into violent and contentious conflict as blacks pushed for social equality and greater political power. In Memphis, however, the first half of the decade suggested the city had a more progressive attitude towards race relations, and voluntary desegregation occurred in much of the city before the Civil Rights Act of 1964.² This perception of progressivism changed in a significant way when the sanitation workers went on strike in early 1968. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference got involved, increasing national awareness of

² Sharon D. Wright, *Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.: 2000), 55-56, 66.

the event. A rally in March resulted in violent confrontations with police who ultimately killed Larry Payne, a sixteen year-old black Memphian. Later that month King returned to Memphis to continue his support for the strike. One day after delivering his iconic “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech, King was shot and killed. In fall of the following year, a series of Black Monday protests nearly bankrupted the Memphis city schools, as thousands of students and teachers boycotted school to deplete the system’s funds, which were determined by attendance figures.³ In 1971 during an arrest, police beat and killed Elton Hayes, a seventeen year-old black boy, resulting in the largest race-riot in Memphis since 1866.⁴

One consequence of this violent confrontation was an increase in racial polarization across the spectrum of American life. In Memphis, the white (and predominantly middle-class) population fled the inner city for fear of rising crime rates and moved their children into private or suburban schools *en masse*.⁵ Early attempts at voluntary desegregation from the beginning of the decade were revealed to be mere token efforts, as the division of neighborhoods, schools, and workforces left the two communities as separate as ever, in real and perceived ways.⁶ Meanwhile, nationwide and in Memphis, the Civil

³ Bobby L. Lovett, *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee: A Narrative History* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 85.

⁴ Wright, *Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis*, 56.

⁵ Wright, *Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis*, 66.

⁶ Wright, *Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis*, 79.

Rights advocates made the shift “from protest to politics” as it became apparent no real change would come without systemic support. Racial lines increasingly defined elections, where white and black constituents voted for their respective candidates. And as the black voting bloc became increasingly mobilized, elections became more contentious — a trend that continued for the subsequent two decades.⁷ When scholar Andrew Hacker declared that in late-1960s America there existed “two nations: black and white, separate, hostile, unequal,” that designation surely applied to Memphis.⁸ Memphis was a racially polarized place, and the two poles were very clearly the African American and White populations. That was the political and social climate into which the first Vietnamese refugees entered beginning in 1975. How would they navigate this bifurcated society, and where would they fit between these two worlds?

Concurrently with the escalating racial tensions was the ongoing Vietnam War. Most U.S. involvement ended in 1973 following intense and sustained opposition to the war at home. The conflict continued, however, until the fall of Saigon in April of 1975. In the final weeks, the U.S. initiated a massive effort to evacuate American personnel as well as those Vietnamese most closely associated with American involvement. An air of resentment existed within South Vietnam towards the United States, in part for its role in supporting the corrupt government of the South, and in part

⁷ Wright, *Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis*, 80-85.

⁸ Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992).

for their early exit and apparent abandonment, which former secretary of state of South Vietnam, Bùi Diễm, described as “unworthy of a great power.”⁹ Nevertheless, the uncertain and dangerous future under the communist government meant a seat on a plane, helicopter, or boat out of Vietnam was a coveted commodity. As the inevitability of the collapse became apparent, the U.S. State Department arbitrarily decided to evacuate 125,000 Vietnamese.¹⁰ Evacuations from Saigon, first by plane, gave way primarily to helicopter transport after the airport was bombed. Refugees arrived at various processing points before entry into the United States, where, in accordance with the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act signed by President Gerald Ford,¹¹ they were housed at four military bases serving as temporary refugee camps: Camp Pendleton in California, Elgin Air Base in Florida, Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania, and, most importantly for Memphis, Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, some 250 miles away.¹² By the end of December 1975, all the refugees in the first wave were resettled with sponsor families.¹³

The first wave of refugees, however, composed the smallest portion of the total number that would eventually seek asylum from the North Vietnamese regime. Hundreds

⁹ Sucheng Chan, *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation: Stories of War, Revolution, Flight and New Beginnings* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 58.

¹⁰ Chan, *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation*, 62.

¹¹ *Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act*, 1975, Pub. L No. 94-23, 94th Congress, May 23, 1975.

¹² Chan, *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation*, 64.

¹³ *Ibid.*

of thousands of supporters of the South Vietnamese government—soldiers, government officials, or employees of U.S. agencies, primarily—were interned in “re-education camps,” sometimes for over a decade to receive political indoctrination training and perform hard labor. Meanwhile, large communities of parents, wives, children, and friends of the prisoners were left to forge an uncertain new life without any certainty of when they might be reunited with their interned kin. Many of those political prisoners who survived ultimately sought to leave the country with their families after being released from the camps, as did citizens who found life under the communist government oppressive and unsustainable. These dissident and dissatisfied groups fled Vietnam in large numbers and headed for (relatively) safe havens like Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Hong Kong. By spring of 1978, departures reached an average of 1,500 per month.¹⁴ The U.S. government enacted several pieces of legislation to ease the process of relocation into the United States and, after it became clear that refugees were highly unlikely to return home, facilitate the path to citizenship.¹⁵

The first refugees arrived in Memphis shortly after the fall of Saigon. On May 8, 1975, just over a week after the capital fell, an article appeared in *The Commercial Appeal*, the primary periodical of Memphis, describing a group effort to welcome and support a twenty-three year old mother, Vi Thi

¹⁴ Chan, *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation*, 68.

¹⁵ *United States Refugee Act*, 1980, Pub. L. No. 96-212, 96th Congress, March 17, 1980. And: Pub. L. No. 95-145, 95th Congress, October 28, 1977.

Tho, and her infant son.¹⁶ Ms. Warren, the matriarch of the host family, and Jay Vestal, public relations director at LeBonheur Children's Hospital (which provided the infant medical care) decried those unwilling to help refugees. A third volunteer asked that people put aside "racial attitudes." The article reflected a spirit of openness towards the refugees, a recurring theme in coverage of Vietnamese entry. The following week the paper advertised a citizens' group "interested in aiding the resettlement of Vietnam refugees,"¹⁷ and on May 27 *The Commercial Appeal* announced the establishment of that committee under the headline "Memphis Seeks Viet Refugees."¹⁸ By mid-July, some fifty-nine Vietnamese had arrived in Memphis.¹⁹

The meeting described in *The Commercial Appeal* on May 27, led by Rev. John Batson of the Catholic Diocese of Memphis, was attended by representatives from the Interfaith Association, the Jewish Community Service Center, the Lutheran Social Services Center, and United Methodist Church, among others. While the federal government established programs to relocate and aid refugees, religious organizations often took on most of the work, thanks to their desire to provide aid and their extensive volunteer networks. (Four national religious organizations—Catholic, Jewish, Methodist, and Lutheran—contracted with the government

¹⁶ Henry Bailey, "Group Gives Hearts, Home To Vietnamese Mother, Son," *The Commercial Appeal*, May 8, 1975.

¹⁷ "Group To Talk Refugee Aid," *The Commercial Appeal*, May 16, 1975.

¹⁸ Clark Proteous, "Memphis Seeks Viet Refugees," *The Commercial Appeal*, May 27, 1975.

¹⁹ "Refugees Arrive," *The Commercial Appeal*, July 19, 1975.

to assist in resettlement efforts.²⁰) Their contributions included finding host families or affordable housing; identifying employment opportunities; supplying necessities ranging from food to toiletries to adequate cold-weather clothing; providing English classes; and organizing transportation. Without the combined efforts of religious organizations in the city, the relative success of early efforts to provide for refugees would have been hard to imagine.

Even with those charitable contributions, however, the transition was far from easy for many newcomers. Refugees had been coerced into leaving their homes and traveling thousands of miles to an unfamiliar land, oftentimes leaving entire families and all possessions. One refugee recalled arriving by plane to Memphis after dark and, after a Catholic Charities representative brought her to a temporary apartment, feeling apprehensive about the future and frustrated with her helplessness.²¹ The escape itself was often a harrowing experience. Doan Dinh, a Vietnamese refugee who relocated first to Houston before migrating to Memphis in 1990, attempted to escape Vietnam seven times between 1975 and 1980.²² On the last attempt, he and ninety other defectors were picked up in a small fishing boat by a freighter heading to Singapore and then Japan. He spent a year in a camp in Japan, which he describes now as

²⁰ Jerome Wright, "Refugees Find City 'Strange' But Friendly," *The Commercial Appeal*, June 16, 1975.

²¹ Ms. Le, interview by author, Memphis, November 20, 2015.

²² Doan Dinh, interview by author, Memphis, November 18, 2015.

“the most painful experience” of his life due to his feelings of loneliness and homesickness.²³

That sense of despair is only comparable to one other period in his life: the burnout he felt in Memphis while working excessively (albeit necessarily) long hours, attending graduate school, and supporting his wife and two toddler daughters. He was not alone. Thang Khuu came to the United States optimistic that with a strong work ethic and persistence he could establish himself in this new setting. In Vietnam he had been a well-paid engineer, but after two years of trying to balance low-paying sixty-hour work weeks with night classes at Memphis State University, he buckled under the psychological and physical strain. In a story for *The Commercial Appeal* in December of 1979, Thang Khuu admitted he had to make a change: “I can’t labor all my life like this.”²⁴ Other refugees reported feelings of alienation from their homeland and families,²⁵ discomfort with unfamiliar weather conditions,²⁶ and a lingering sense of resentment towards the United States for abandoning the war effort.²⁷ A 1976 Senate subcommittee report claimed that initial optimism among refugees had decayed to feelings of “frustration, failure, loneliness, and general

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Michael Lollar, “Le Tuyet Adopts Another Country On a Day Full of Mixed Emotions,” *The Commercial Appeal*, May 2, 1975.

²⁵ “Viet refugees here called ‘very happy,’” *The Commercial Appeal*, May 30, 1976.

²⁶ Doan Dinh and Ms. Le, Vietnamese refugees, in conversation with the author.

²⁷ Michael Lollar, “Le Tuyet Adopts Another Country On a Day Full of Mixed Emotions,” *The Commercial Appeal*, May 2, 1975.

depression.”²⁸ Though the eventual success of the community does not immediately reflect the early trials of assimilation, for many refugees adjusting to their new lives, that ultimate triumph would not have seemed a guarantee.

The transition was hard on refugees, and simmering bitterness amid some locals compounded the problem. The Vietnamese needed jobs, and as the United States accepted larger numbers of refugees, some native-born Americans began to resent the increase in competition.²⁹ Mr. Dinh recalls one instance in the mid-1980s when, while stopped at a traffic light, two men in an adjacent truck suggested he return to “your country,” Japan. The men then chased him and his friend to attack them while onlookers stood by and did nothing. Mr. Dinh attributes these hostilities to financial frustrations during the economic recession of the early 1980s, which he recognizes are easy to “blame on the newcomer, like a scapegoat.” More seriously, in 1982, unidentified assailants brutally beat and killed an eighteen year-old Vietnamese youth, before depositing his body in a drainage ditch.³⁰

Perhaps the most consistent inhibition for Vietnamese refugees was the language barrier. Deficiencies were especially hindering for first arrivals who had little ability to communicate beyond gestures and pocket dictionaries.³¹

²⁸ “Viet refugees here called ‘very happy,’” *The Commercial Appeal*, May 30, 1976.

²⁹ Don Winbush, “More Refugees Expected in Area,” *The Commercial Appeal*, July 12, 1979.

³⁰ Jerome Wright “Death Ends Long Trek To Be Free,” *The Commercial Appeal*, September 26, 1982.

³¹ Don Winbush, “More Refugees Expected in Area,” *The Commercial Appeal*, July 12, 1979.

One article in *The Commercial Appeal* described the case of Tuyet Le, a sixteen year-old girl who found herself unable to communicate or be comforted by classmates and teachers when she learned her brother, still in Vietnam, had been killed.³² Similarly, the eighteen year-old homicide victim spoke no English, and apparently had no American friends. For some refugees used to a strong sense of community in their Vietnamese villages, Americans seemed overly private and distant.³³ Their inability to interact easily with peers fed their loneliness. When differing customs or expectations came into play, the language barrier prevented simple troubleshooting. Pregnant women, for example, found American birthing practices unusual, but were unable to communicate with their doctors.³⁴ Free language classes hosted by the Memphis Inter-Faith Association offered one solution, but long work hours for men and discomfort for women often kept the programs underattended.³⁵

Early struggles were inevitable, but the communal progress despite those struggles suggests a more redemptive narrative. Although some refugees felt overworked, they were, at least, working. In fact, *The Commercial Appeal* ran an article in August of 1975—within four months of the arrival

³² Peggy Burch, "Language Barrier Impedes Resettlement of Vietnamese," *The Commercial Appeal*, November 11, 1975.

³³ Charles Goodman, "Vietnamese Mark Second Year of Memphis Life," *The Commercial Appeal*, April 27, 1977.

³⁴ "Area Vietnamese Refugees Meet to Form Club," *The Commercial Appeal*, November 13, 1975.

³⁵ Peggy Burch, "Language Barrier Impedes Resettlement of Vietnamese," *The Commercial Appeal*, November 11, 1975.

of the first newcomers—highlighting perception among the business community that the Vietnamese were good, hard workers.³⁶ Their intense hours established their determination, and from that reputation extended a well-documented history of Vietnamese economic success in the United States (the “Model Minority”³⁷). According to Trieu Van Nguyen, an early leader within the community, many refugees managed to make better earnings than they did back home, enough to begin saving for the future.³⁸ Likewise, the availability of long hours suggests that competition within the job market remained manageable. Memphis was a city in transition. While the trend of migration towards the suburbs left the city-proper a shell of its former self, the side effect was that fewer workers contended for inner-city jobs. The fears that the Vietnamese would take American jobs were confirmed, and, for Memphis, thankfully so. Although conflicts did result from Memphians’ fear of economic competition, in reality, these conflicts were isolated. Mr. Dinh noted repeatedly the uniqueness of his bad racial confrontation. In fact, for Mr. Dinh, the reason the event made such a lasting impression was that it was so aberrant and shocking. Another former refugee, Ms. Le, recalls feeling welcomed to the city despite language barriers and other inhibitors.³⁹

³⁶ Ruth Jacquemine, “Refugees Find Job Problems,” *The Commercial Appeal*, August 22, 1975

³⁷ Nhi T. Lieu, *The American Dream in Vietnamese* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 22.

³⁸ “Viet Refugees Here Called ‘Very Happy,’” *The Commercial Appeal*, May 30, 1976.

³⁹ Ms. Le interview, November 20, 2015.

Attitudes of despair and depression, like those described in the Senate subcommittee report, were, at least in Memphis, overstated, according to Trieu Van Nguyen.⁴⁰ He stressed the difference between natural feelings of homesickness or isolation from family with the defeatist attitudes of those who wished to “dramatize their situation.” He continued, noting how thankful the defectors are for the freedoms and opportunities afforded them in their new life—a stark contrast to the gradually worsening condition in Vietnam. Instances of discomfort with American ways were common, but that too was expected. One refugee noted how some Vietnamese headed directly for large communities in Texas, Louisiana, or California, “hoping to find community and fishing”—in other words, what they already knew.⁴¹ He believed, however, that the Vietnamese ought to live among other Americans in order to “learn the new ways.” At the same time, rejection of Americanization had its beneficial effects too, as it helped preserve Vietnamese customs and values. The Vietnamese community established traditional eateries and other businesses as well as places and methods of worship. The maintenance of some familiar cultural institutions further enabled refugees to adapt to their new environment.

Part of that adjustment involved navigating the language barrier, which caused so many problems for refugees upon first arriving. While the issue of language still

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Charles Goodman, “Vietnamese Mark Second Year of Memphis Life,” *The Commercial Appeal*, April 27, 1977

persists as a problem for some first generation Vietnamese, various phenomena have lessened the barrier over time. Firstly, English as a Second Language classes and exposure to the language in daily life raised many in the community to a certain level of competency, as it had for Mr. Dinh. And once some early refugees developed a higher acumen for facility with English, they were able to aid others who arrived later, serving as translators and guides.⁴² In fact, Mr. Dinh, trained as a social worker, was offered a job at an insurance agency after he assisted several Vietnamese refugees in acquiring insurance. Secondly, the children of refugees—more integrated through school—did not have the same language barriers as their parents. And, as refugees continued to arrive, so grew their sense of independence and community. In light of this, there emerged a concerted effort to preserve the Vietnamese language. Mr. Dinh enrolled his own children in Saturday classes to teach them Vietnamese language and traditions, hoping to pass down the same values he had embraced.

Many early arrivers lived and worked in a neighborhood of Midtown around Cleveland St. and Jefferson Ave.—it is no coincidence that on this intersection sits Sacred Heart Catholic Church and the Catholic Charities headquarters. And just as with economic opportunity, the context of Memphis allowed for the development of this physical community. The city, in slight decline, offered

⁴² Peggy Burch, "Language Barrier Impedes Resettlement of Vietnamese," *The Commercial Appeal*, November 11, 1975.

large blocks of low-income housing. The communal space allowed the refugees to form bonds within their micro-community and help each other. While media coverage of Vietnamese assimilation focused on early years from 1975 to early 1980s, the reality was that the population stayed quite small for some time. The 1990s, however, witnessed a jump in numbers.⁴³ This population increase was due to a variety of factors: a steady flow of refugees from Vietnam, a growing birth rate as the community settled and grew increasingly independent, and an uptick in migration of Vietnamese residents from other areas of the United States—a sign that the community in Memphis was strong and successful.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, once the community was established, media coverage waned, reflecting the growing self-sufficiency of the Vietnamese in the area, and a complacency among Memphis residents towards the Vietnamese presence; they were no longer a novelty. Religious organizations and federal aid programs continued to support new arrivals and struggling families, but increasingly the Vietnamese transcended those efforts. There exists amongst many

⁴³ Various population figures show wide discrepancies. The 1990 U.S. Census records only 981 Vietnamese in Memphis, but Catholic Charities had already resettled nearly two thousand refugees by 1980. The 2000 U.S. Census only records 2,529 (and that number holds mostly steady through today), while Catholic Charities estimated between 8,000 and 10,000. Doan Dinh's own impression is around 7,000. I suspect the official numbers are less accurate, reflecting the difficulty in recording data within unassimilated communities; I relied more on the statistics produced by Catholic Charities. Regardless, the total population figures clearly made a significant jump during the 1990s.

⁴⁴ Julie Hunter, "Vietnamese in Memphis: Juggling traditional and new cultures in the isolation of America," *Mosaic Magazine*, April 2001, p. 15.

Vietnamese a strong sense of family values, an ethic that extends from traditional Vietnamese attitudes. Ms. Le acknowledged that while the first jobs available to refugees were often rigorous and tedious, they nevertheless enabled families to begin saving money to prepare a better life for their children. For Ms. Le, the top priority will always be family; to teach traditional values like gratitude, discipline, and the importance of hard work is to provide the building blocks for a good person and a good life. “The main thing,” according to Ms. Le, “[is] to become a good person first, and then a good life [follows].” That commitment to building the community from within the family unit empowered the refugees, allowing them to both thrive in their own domains and enrich the larger Memphis community. Mr. Dinh knew from a young age his mission in life was to help others, and upon arriving in America he knew he had “[come] here to serve.” But to best help others, he first needed to establish a stable foundation for himself and his family, because, in his words, “you have to be strong to help yourself first before you can help others.” And help he has. Mr. Dinh has spent his two-plus decades in Memphis employed as a social worker, aiding refugees and immigrants arriving from Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, as well as assisting those with mental and physical disabilities and difficulties with substance abuse.⁴⁵

Movement towards the establishment of a strong community can be seen in the variety of entrepreneurial

⁴⁵ Doan Dinh and Ms. Le, Vietnamese refugees, in conversation with the author.

enterprises that sprang up around the Cleveland St./Jefferson Ave. neighborhood. Hong Nguyen Thi Henson opened *Hong's Restaurant* (Vietnamese and Chinese cuisine) along Cleveland St., choosing her location due to proximity to the Vietnamese grocery, owned and operated by her friend, Kim Nghia.⁴⁶ Doan Dinh and his wife, Mylinh, opened a hair salon on Jefferson Ave. Similarly, Miss Mary's Child Care Center, which originally catered to a diverse clientele, soon served predominantly Vietnamese children after owner Mary Drawdy employed Vietnamese working to improve their English.⁴⁷ Ms. Le, who came to Memphis with some English speaking ability due to her experience teaching French and English literature in Vietnam, got a job working at Miss Mary's Daycare and quickly rose to the level of position director thanks to her linguistic experience, which helped her forge a connection between the business and its Vietnamese clientele. Children and teachers at Miss Mary's broadened their English skills and exposure to American culture while simultaneously interacting with other Vietnamese. Today along Cleveland St. there are several Vietnamese restaurants, including Saigon Le and Phuong Long. Sacred Heart Church holds a Vietnamese mass every Sunday, and caters to a congregation of 600 families. A local Buddhist monastery serves an even larger constituency, and both sites host traditional events and holiday festivals.

⁴⁶ Anna Byrd Davis "Energetic Chef Opens Vietnamese Restaurant," *The Commercial Appeal*, August 12, 1981.

⁴⁷ Wayne Risher, "Center gets Asian kids off to a good start in life," *The Commercial Appeal*, October 10, 1998.

Finding a spiritual community was important for many refugees. Ms. Le believed the Vietnamese who fled to America were a necessarily devout people after their traumatic experiences, and for her family, reestablishing a strong spiritual life was “the first thing we worried about.” Her family joined Sacred Heart Catholic Church in 1992 and remains loyal congregants to this day.

The Vietnamese community now has roots going back four decades, and its impact on the city is undeniable. But according to Wanda Rushing in *Memphis and the Paradox of Place*, the increased international nature of Memphis in the age of globalization has, ironically, led to an added emphasis on local place and culture, thereby relegating the Vietnamese history to obscurity. Tourism injects over two billion dollars into the local economy annually, and as a result, city planners and businesses “[develop] tourist sites for the *consumption* of popular culture.”⁴⁸ When determining how to attract money-spending visitors to Memphis, the city latches on to elements most commonly associated with the *idea* of Memphis. The African American experience of racial subjugation should be acknowledged as a central storyline. But, thinking of Memphis as a *place* leads to a singular focus on the African American experience as complexities, like the story of the Vietnamese (or the Latino/Latina, Muslim, Native American, etc.) community, get reduced. Marketers of the city seeking to promote Memphis as a destination or

⁴⁸ Wanda Rushing, *Memphis and the Paradox of Place: Globalization in the American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 193.

place of historic interest focus on the African American experience as an icon of the *idea*. Consequently, they reaffirm its place within the public lexicon and thereby diminish the roles of alternative narratives. Beale Street (a historically black neighborhood, and now a nexus of “Disneyfied” culture) and Graceland (which, while the former home of a white man, exists within the larger musical context of black ingenuity that defines the city’s identity) are prime examples.⁴⁹ But the production of brand leaves little room for nuances of the Memphis community, and thus outlying cultural features become marginalized. Because the integration of the Vietnamese community developed after the popular conception of Memphis as a *place*, its impact on the city is harder to see because of the reduplication of identity into a marketable asset. But Memphis is more complex than the developers would have people believe, and the Vietnamese community participates in an important way in the cultural dialogue. Recognizing and unraveling their impact—and the impact of the many micro-communities which compose the quilt that is Memphis—adds color to a history that is otherwise told in black and white.

⁴⁹ Rushing, *Memphis and the Paradox of Place*, 194.

The Bailiff of Landser: A Biographical Overview of François-Joseph-Antoine de Hell and Events Leading to the Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace

Smith Stickney

Following the French Revolution of 1789, the civil status of the Ashkenazim of Alsace, France's largest population of Jews, featured as a central topic of debate within the newly formed government. The "Jewish Question" functioned as an example of the broader sincerity of the Revolution to bestow equal rights amongst to minorities all citizens living in France. The debate, however, did not suddenly materialize after the storming of the Bastille. Rather, a combination of events taking place before the Revolution, coupled with new ideas stemming from the European Enlightenment, served to influence the reevaluation of the treatment of French Jewry. One of the major events that sparked these discussions took place over a decade prior. In 1777, in the Alsatian town of Landser, a bailiff by the name of François-Joseph-Antoine de Hell orchestrated a massive plot against Ashkenazi money lenders in the province. Although chronicles of the scandal of the Forged Receipts Affair are well documented in

historical writings, a dearth of information exists in scholarly writings regarding the orchestrator himself. This gap in the historiography raises questions regarding who François de Hell was as a man and what motivated him to carry out his crusade against France's Jews. This paper attempts to combine the sparse information regarding Hell scattered throughout other historians' writings with research from primary sources in order to formulate a coherent a biographical account of François Hell.

Little space has been allotted to Hell in historical writings. Sections in Zosa Szajkowski's *Jews and the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848* are the only English language text that has attempted to give a biographical account, however brief, of Hell's life before and after the Forged Receipts Affair. Szajkowski provides the most detail about Hell, giving specific examples of his personal encounters with Jews in court, as well as examples of his financial misgivings. While providing some biographical particulars, in Heinrich Graetz's *History of the Jews*, the author's own disdain of Hell heavily permeates his writing, going so far as to refer to Hell as "this worthless lawyer," though describing the Bailiff as "not without brains and literary culture."¹ A chapter in François Fues's *The Parishes of the Canton of Hirsingue* provides some genealogical history in regards to Hell's family, though this text omits events in Hell's life regarding his corrupt practices as a bailiff and politician and his anti-Jewish publications. Instead, Fues

¹ Graetz, *History of the Jews*. 370.

focuses on Hell's ascent through his positions as a public servant and the honors bestowed upon him by various nobles. All other academic works seemingly focus specifically on Hell's role in the Forged Receipts Affair and analyze his anti-Jewish writings. What follows is a detailed biographical portrait of François Hell and his role in spurring the emancipation of the Jews of France, the first modern Jewish community to achieve equal citizenship.

The Life Early Life of François de Hell



Figure 1. Blason of the Hell family.

Born June 11, 1731, in Hirsingue, Upper-Alsace, François-Joseph-Antoine was the first of six children of parents François-Christoph Hell and Maria-Ursula Hisselberger.² The Hells came to Hirsingue, Alsace sometime in the early Eighteenth Century with the arrival of Adam Hell, François' grandfather. Although of a noble house originating in Frankfort, at the time of François' birth, the family's wealth and prestige waned. In 1748, the young Hell

began studying philosophy and mathematics at schools in Porrentruy and Pont-à-Moussan. In 1749, Hell continued his

² Fues, François Joseph. 1879. *Les Paroisses Du Canton De Hirsingue*. Translated to French by Jean Marie Lidin. Rixheim: A. Sutter, 156.

education in Strasbourg, studying physics and geometry while becoming proficient in Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew. Finishing his studies in 1753, the young Hell sought to practice law, arguing his first case in the court of the Sovereign Council of Alsace in October of that year.³ By 1755, Hell attained the the position of registry-clerk for the Bailiwick of Montjoie-Hirsingue, followed by an appointment in 1761 as the Bailiff of Seppois-le-Bas.⁴ The position entailed a great deal of power, as bailiffs functioned as judges for their district, passing and enforcing the rulings of the Bailiwick court. Bailiffs also held responsibility for the King's treasury within their districts, managing the payroll of government workers, and oversaw the collection of payments for use of Seigniorial lands.⁵

In 1775, matters concerning feudal properties owned by the recently deceased Bishop of Basel required resolution in the court of the King. Unable to make the journey himself, the Bishop's nephew, the Comte de Monjoie, Seigneur of Hirsingue, selected Hell to travel to Versaille as his vassal. On October 22, the Comte signed a procuration that bestowed upon Hell the titles of "Lawyer to the Sovereign Council of Alsace, Bailiff of the Comte de Montjoie, Grand Bailiff in service of the King of the departments Hirsingen

³ Szajkowski, Zosa. 1970. *Jews and the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848*. New York: Ktav Pub. House, 210.

⁴ O'Leary, Margaret R. 2012. *Forging Freedom: the Life of Cerf Berr of Médelsheim*. Bloomington: iUniverse, 131.

⁵ Chisholm, Hugh, ed. *The Encyclopedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*. 11th ed. Vol. 3. Austria Lower to Bisectrix. New York: Cambridge University, 1910. 218-19.

and High Landsers, responsible for the business of the nobility of Upper Alsace.”⁶ Events that transpired in the years shortly after Montjoie’s decree would shape and characterize Hell’s memory as a bailiff, and it is from this seat of power that Hell orchestrated the Forged Receipts Affair of 1777.

The Jews of Alsace

In the era of Hell’s rise through provincial politics, Alsace and the neighboring province of Lorraine were home to around 28,000 Ashkenazi Jews, equaling almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of France’s total Jewish population. Living under French rule since the annexation of the region following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the Jews of Alsace experienced injustices from all areas of society.⁷ Forced into ghettos, they paid unfair taxes for “protection” and were subjected to laws that restricted their mobility, right to own property, and barred them from working most jobs. Their distinct customs, religious practices, and the fact that they spoke Yiddish as a mother tongue instead of French or German, only further perpetuated the image and belief amongst Alsatians that the Jews formed a separate, deviant community within the

⁶ “Dans la procuration signée le 22 octobre 1775 dans le château de Hirsingue, le comte de Montjoie donne les titres suivants à son envoyé muni les pleins pouvoirs : François Joseph Antoine Hell, avocat au conseil souverain d’Alsace, Bailli du Comté de Montjoie, Grand Bailli pour le service du Roi des départements de Hirsingen et Haut-Landerser, chargé des affaires de la noblesse de Haute-Alsace.” (Papers from the registry of the Mountjoie-Hirsingue Bailiwick), Fues, *Les Paroisses*, 156.

⁷ Schechter, Ronald. 2003. *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 19.

province.⁸ Unable to own farmland or enter into the same trades as their Christians neighbors, many Jews made a living through usury, becoming money-lenders and creditors.

Figure 2 Artist depiction of French Jews in the 18th Century



In the 1770's, the peasants of Alsace suffered from extreme poverty, exacerbated by the need to borrow money for grain seed. Often times they resorted to borrowing money in order to survive, even though most possessed no means for repaying their debts. The unlikely prospect of repayment meant that French creditors often demanded inflated interest rates or outright refused to sign loans to the poor. As a result, many borrowed from Jews. Mostly poor themselves, Jewish creditors lent money at high interest rates, yet made themselves accessible to a wider variety of borrowers. Though Jewish lending provided an important service to the impoverished society, thousands of Alsatians wound up owing money to Jews, further exacerbating anti-Jewish sentiments throughout the province.⁹

⁸ Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, 19-21.

⁹ Graetz, Heinrich, Bella Löwy. 1892. *History of the Jews, From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Vol. V., London. 369.

To a poor peasant subsisting at the lowest levels of French society, even a small amount of debt turned into a massive burden. Records from the era exist demonstrating instances of Alsatians attempting to absolve themselves of debts by criminal means. For example, in Metz in 1702, a Jewish lender, Joseh Cahen, made a loan to a butcher named Jacques Durand. When time came for Cahen to collect, Durand murdered him rather than paying the money he owed. In 1758, a lawyer named Hyacinth Renault attempted to erase his debt by assaulting and stealing the relevant documents from his creditor, Isaac Levy. A record from 1767 indicates that a man from Colmar murdered a Jewish creditor over a loan, subsequently receiving a death sentence for the crime.¹⁰ While not unheard of, crimes such as these pall in comparison to events that transpired in Alsace a decade prior to the Revolution.

The Forged Receipts Affair

Late in 1777, Jewish creditors suddenly found themselves at odds with borrowers brandishing receipts showing their debts repaid. With these forgeries appearing by the thousands, lenders fought in any way possible to receive their rightful payments. Unfortunately, Jews found local authorities less than enthusiastic in coming to their aid. Creditors could bring their cases to the local courts, but little guaranteed they would receive a fair judgment. In Hagenau in 1771, two peasants, Henri Mouches and Jean George

¹⁰ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 202.

Oberlin, took a loan from a Jewish lender named Benjamin. In 1779 the loan remained outstanding, yet the pair approached Benjamin with a receipt showing a portion of their debt repaid. Benjamin recognized the receipt as a forgery and called their bluff. In response, the pair attempted to lure Benjamin to a meeting at the public notary's office via a letter. Benjamin realized he might be forced by a local official to accept the smaller payment if he entered the office. Instead, Benjamin wrote the debtors a letter of reply in lieu of meeting in person. The exchange of correspondence made the issue a matter for the district court, where Benjamin could receive a fairer hearing from a non-royally appointed judge.¹¹ Over the following two years, cases of forgeries such as Benjamin's appeared in court with ever increasing numbers, with around 1,900 cases being handled by the Royal Commissioner of the Alsatian Sovereign Council.¹² One source states that as many as 127,000 falsified receipts may have been printed before the Forged Receipts Affair came to an end.¹³ While the Commissioner eventually quelled the furor sweeping through Alsace by granting up to 15 year extensions on the repayment of most outstanding debts, the sheer volume of cases, coupled with outbreaks of anti-Semitic rioting in 1778, prompted authorities to launch an investigation into who was selling the forged receipts.¹⁴

¹¹ O'Leary, *Forging Freedom*, 143-44.

¹² O'Leary, *Forging Freedom*, 146.

¹³ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 203.

¹⁴ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 203.

OBSERVATIONS

D'UN ALSACIEN

SUR L'AFFAIRE PRÉSENTE

DES JUIFS

D'ALSACE.



A FRANCFORT.



M. DCC. LXXIX.

Figure 3. Cover page to Hell's pamphlet
"Observations of an Alsatian on the Present
Affairs of the Jews of Alsace."

The investigation into the Affair revealed the Bailiff Hell to be both the mastermind behind the forgeries, as well as the author of an anonymously published anti-Jewish pamphlet that surfaced at the time.¹⁵ Titled *Observations d'un Alsacien sur l'affaire presente des Juifs d'Alsace* (Observations of an Alsatian on the Present Quarrels of the Jews of Alsace), Hell circulated his pamphlet in order to influence the popular opinion of debtors and members of the Catholic clergy against Jewish usury

and the existence of their communities as a whole. Hell's ninety-one page pamphlet argued that the receipts, while indeed false, were an appropriate response to the unjust practices of Jewish usury. Hell's work used the Christian Bible and historical myths about Jews as the basis for his arguments, conjuring up the all too familiar images of the Israelites as Christ-killers, usurers, and as partaking in

¹⁵ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 203-204.

ritualistic child-murder.¹⁶ The writing in *Observations* used emotive language to instill in the reader patriotic ideals to incite popular uprisings against the Jews, and used widespread instances of Jewish persecution throughout history as evidence and justification for Jewish guilt. Hell perpetuated these ideas to garner legitimacy for anti-Semitic acts against the Jews of Alsace.¹⁷

In *Observations*, Hell describes the Jews as a powerful society, pursuing interests only to profit themselves and their communities at the expense of the people of France. The rhetoric argued that Jews were not true Frenchmen. Instead, the pamphlet describes the Jews as being an unwanted parasite on the French and the peoples of other nations:

“Regarded and treated in every society as plague-bearers, in this province the Jews are a corporation; they meet, they deliberate, they elect and restore their leaders, they have their own judges, even for purely civil matters, privileges, which Protestants of this province, although Christians and good citizens, cannot boast. This is a nation within a nation; in a great state, this is a small powerful state, that protect its subjects.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Hertzberg, Arthur. 1968. *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*. New York: Columbia University Press. 288.

¹⁷ Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, 68-9.

¹⁸ “Envisagez, traités, dans toutes les sociétés comme les pestiférés de la société générale des hommes, ils sont corps en cette province, ils s’assemblent, ils délibèrent; ils nomment & destituent leurs préposés, ils ont leurs juges, même pour leurs affaires purement civiles,

Hell described the manner in which Jews followed the *Talmud* and used their Rabbis as representatives and community leaders to obstinately avoid assimilation into French society. He accused them of enjoying unfair privileges not granted to other minority groups. Accordingly, Hell argued that the continued autonomy of Jewish communities only served as a means to protect Jewish exploitation of the poor Christians who lived near them through usury. With this confluence of factors, Alsatians began demanding that King Louis XVI deport all Jews from Alsace in order to restore order in the province.¹⁹

Hell and the Jews of Alsace

So what prompted Hell to carry out such a large scale attack on Alsace's Jewish communities? As Szajkowski so aptly wrote, "Hell's entire personality was such that he was forced to become in conflicts with Jews."²⁰ The Forged Receipts Affair was far from Hell's first or last crime. Hell used his civil servant positions as seats of power in which to extort and steal money for his personal use. As the Bailiff of Landser, he proved to be especially cruel and exploitative of Jews unfortunate enough to enter his court. Hell demanded bribes from Jews, threatening to bring false charges against

privileges, dont les protestans de cette province quoique chrétiens, & bons citoyens ne peuvent se flatter. C'est une nation dans la nation; c'est dans un grand Etat, un petit Etat puissant, qui fait protéger son sujet." Hell, François-Joseph-Antoine. *Observations D'un Alsacien Sur L'affaire Présente Des Juifs D'Alsace*. Frankfort, 1789. 66.

¹⁹ Graetz, *History of the Jews*. 371.

²⁰ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 211.

them should they fail to pay. Often when presiding over legitimate court cases, the Bailiff solicited bribes from Jews in exchange for a fair or favorable verdict. One example from a letter in 1765 shows that Hell demanded a bribe of 400 livres from Alsatian Jewish leaders in return for a fair hearing.²¹ Hell's abuse of power extended past simple bribery and extortion, abusing his position to carry out petty revenge in some cases. In 1757, Hell aided a woman in forging the will of her dying husband, Ignac Ilch, by having it signed while the man lay unconscious. Ilch's family believed the new will to be illegitimate and hired a Jewish lawyer named Salomon Ulmann to argue their case. Having beat Hell in court on two prior occasions, the young lawyer already held a grudge against Ulmann. As a result, Hell ruled in favor of Ilch's family and subsequently sentenced Ulmann to life in prison. Hell's decision would only be overturned after Ulmann fought through a fifteen year appeal process.²²

During the appeal process, Ulmann revealed to the public another example of Hell's corrupt and criminal practices. According to a publication by the incarcerated lawyer, a Christian named Joseph Stempfell attacked a group of Jews outside of a synagogue in Durmenach, Alsace. While defending themselves, the Jews injured Stempfell. Hell fabricated a story which portrayed the Jews as the attackers and Stempfell as a hapless victim in order to bring

²¹ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 209.

²² Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 212.

the incident to trial. To corroborate Hell's version of events, Stempfell allegedly took drugs intended to make his injuries appear more severe. The medicine instead killed Stempfell. Hell still brought the case to trial, finding the Jews guilty of murder. The Bailif sentenced one man to hanging and other two to prison. When he received word of Ulmann's writing, Hell allegedly panicked and attempted to write a rebuttal with the aid of his freinds. The Bailiff's response, however, was never published.²³

A cursory reading of Hell's diatribe leads one to believe his motives to be religious and racial hatred. Yet his plot to incite popular support against the Jews seemed to also serve the purpose of ameliorating his own malpractice. The Forged Receipts Affair benefited Hell's personal finances as he and his conspirators did not give the forged receipts away for free, but instead sold them in the thousands. At the same time, his attempt to liquidate debts owed by Christians to Jews during the scandal would absolve his many personal debts to Jewish creditors. It is perhaps the failure of this plot that incited Hell to continue his future attacks on the Jews of France.

Results of the Forged Receipts Affair

If Hell's machinations in the Forged Receipts Affair were to achieve the dissolution of Alsace's Jewish communities, his plot failed. In May of 1780, the Sovereign Council took away the power to try cases regarding usury

²³ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 212.

from the district courts run by the nobility. This power instead became the responsibility of the state counselor.²⁴ But the most profound effect of the Affair was the movement it sparked amongst Alsatian Jews, headed by community leaders Cerf Berr and Moses Mendelssohn, for equality with their gentile neighbors. Berr and Mendelssohn sought the aid of German historian and writer Wilhelm Christian von Dohm, who began writing a piece arguing for the repeal of laws that specifically burdened and oppressed the Ashkenazi Jews of France. The resulting work, a treatise titled *Upon the Civil Amelioration of the Conditions of the Jews*, argued for the equal rights of French Jews in order to assuage the unjust social, economic, and political pressures that served to exploit and burden their existence.²⁵ Dohm wrote of Hell's diatribe in *Observations* as "unworthy of our century and of an enlightened people."²⁶ As Hertzberg writes, Dohm believed that "the faults of the Jews were created by the conditions under which they were made to live and earn a living."²⁷ An attempt in 1782 to distribute a French language version of the treatise, headed by none other than the future revolutionary leader Gabriel Riqueti, the Comte de Mirabeau, failed when an unknown party burned the cache of copies ready for distribution in France.²⁸

²⁴ O'Leary, *Forging Freedom*, 145. and Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 371.

²⁵ Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 373.

²⁶ Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment*, 292.

²⁷ Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment*, 292.

²⁸ O'Leary, *Forging Freedom*, 157.

Though the attempt to reach a broader audience failed due to sabotage, Berr had already sent a copy of the treatise to the King's Council in 1780. In 1781, Berr wrote a letter to the King's Keeper of Seals, Armand Thomas Hue de Miromesnil, in which he outlined similar policies as those written to assimilate the Sephardic Jews of southern France to be instituted for the Ashkenazi Jews of Alsace. Berr wrote, "[The conduct of the Jews of Bordeaux] is in no way objectionable...And those of Alsace can assure [the King] that things will be the same...if they receive...an honest and assured establishment."²⁹ As a result Miromesnil began work on the 'General Regulation for the Jews in Alsace.' It was these writings that eventually influenced the King's publication of his Letters Patent of 1784 that abolished the body tax placed on the Ashkenazim. Many of the ideas in the treatise would later be developed into arguments for granting equal rights as citizens to Jews during the Revolution.³⁰ Hell's attempt to dissolve the Jewish communities of Alsace and liquidate Christian debt backfired.

Prison and Exile

²⁹ O'Leary, *Forging Freedom*, 152.

³⁰ Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment*, 292-93

While in prison for the Forged Receipts Affair, authorities kept Hell and his personal servant in isolation,

allowing neither visitors nor correspondence from the outside. Hell wrote a letter to the War Minister in charge of Alsace, prince of Montbarrey, promising that if freed, he would abstain from involvement in future affairs regarding France's Jews.³¹ Before long, Hell began circulating rumors of a Jewish plot against his life. The Bailiff created a list with the names of eighty-six would be "assassins"



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg

Figure 4. Flyer circulated during Hell's exile.

volunteering to testify that Jews approached them willing to pay for Hell's murder. Legitimately fearing an attempted poisoning, Hell ate nothing but raw eggs while in jail. Hell's confession in prison to authoring *Observations* did nothing to exonerate

³¹ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 209.

him, instead strengthening the case against the Bailiff and increasing the likelihood of him standing trial. Ever afraid of facing consequences for his crimes, Hell redacted his confession and began denying authorship of the pamphlet, claiming he confessed to protect the pamphlet's actual writer.³² Hell propagated a myth that he fell victim to Jewish persecution and cultivated an image of himself as a martyr. Many Alsatians started popular campaigns to secure Hell's release. They claimed Hell as a hero of the common people, whose plot came about in order to assuage the financial woes of helpless, indebted peasants. With the aid of petitions signed by various noblemen and priests, Hell never answered for his crimes. The same cannot be said for his co-conspirators. Of the thirty-two people arrested on suspicion of falsifying receipts, three received light sentences of fifteen days in prison on bread and water rations, ten received varying time in public stockades followed by sentences to prison galleys, and three were hanged. Two of the conspirators turned out to be Jewish.³³

³² Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 209-210.

³³ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 208.

On June 10, 1780, the Bailiff was ordered into exile in the province of Dauphiné, more for his safety than as a punishment.³⁴ The time away proved fruitful for Hell. On

June 1, 1781, while in exile in the city of Valence, Hell married Mélanie de Savoie, daughter of John Baptiste Fortunate de Savoie.³⁵ Hell married upward, as his father-in-law came from a



Figure 5. François-Joseph-Antoine de Hell (left) and Anne-Chretien-Louis de Hell (right)

named Anne Chretien Louis

Hell (Figure 5).³⁶ The Bailiff's exile would not be permanent. Flyers began circulating in 1780 with a picture of Hell's face surrounded by the inscription "The friend and the love of

³⁴ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 210.

³⁵ Fues, *Les Paroisses*, 152.

³⁶ Lehr, Ernest. *L'Alsace noble suivie de le livre d'or du patriciat de Strasbourg*. Vol. 2. Paris: Veuve Berger-Levrault et Fils, 1870, 245.

the citizens.” The Bailiff returned to Alsace after only three-years in exile, received by many as a hero and martyr.³⁷

Return to Alsace and the National Assembly

Hell reentered the political field upon his return in 1782, reassuming his former position as the Bailiff of Landser. In 1786, while representing the Bailiwick in Vienna, the Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph II, awarded Hell with the title of “Knight of the Holy Roman Empire,” reinstating the nobiliary particle into Hell’s name that had long since fallen from use.³⁸ In 1787, Hell gained an appointment in the Provincial Assembly of Alsace as a syndic of the bourgeoisie. In 1788, as head of special committee formed by the the Intermediary Commission of Alsace, Hell spearheaded a proposed “Statute for the Alsatian Jews” that would again attempt to dissolve the semi-autonomous Jewish communities of Alsace.³⁹ Speaking before the commission in September of that year, Hell stated:

“The interest of the state and public well-being, as well as that of the Jews in particular, requires...that the Jews will no longer have trustees nor agents, nor carry out any business in their collective name... in the same manner as Christians; that they will have no other appointee than that of the Synagogue, which

³⁷ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 213-214

³⁸ The decree placed the “de/von” back in Hell’s family name, i.e. “de Hell” as opposed to just “Hell.” Fues, *Les Paroisses*, 153.

³⁹ O’Leary, *Forging Freedom*, 217. and Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 209.

will continue to be appointed by the Lord of the locality."⁴⁰

This statute would have effectively destroyed what little freedom and protection they retained under their self-governance by revoking the mutual support Jewish communities made available to their members. Fortunately for the Jews of Alsace, the statute never became law.

When the French Revolution began in 1789, Hell was appointed as a deputy to the National Assembly of the Third-Estate of the Estates-General as deputy for the combined Bailiwick of Haguenau and Wissembourg.⁴¹ On December 24, 1789, Hell spoke before the National Assembly, where he recycled points made in his previous writings and speeches. His address opened by proposing ways in which to dissolve Jewish communities in Alsace, stating "that Jews contribute to all taxes...they will not have courts other than those of Christians...[and] they will be married with the permission of the provincial state...in order to reduce a

⁴⁰ "L'intérêt de l'Etat et le bien public, même celui des juifs en particuliers, exigent... que les juifs ne pourront plus avoir de Syndics ni agens, ni poursuivre aucune affaire au nom collectif... dans la même forme que les chrétiens; qu'ils n'aient plus d'autre préposé que celui de la sinagogue, qui continuera à être nommé par le Seigneur du lieu." Hell quoted in Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 607.

⁴¹ Fues, *Les Paroisses*, 153.

population already too costly to [Alsace]."⁴² Hell presented seventeen articles in his speech, all concerning how the Revolutionary government should address the issue of Jewish citizenship. For example, Article 8 specified that Jewish money lenders could not request collateral from Christians for new loans, lest all previous agreements become null and void. Article 10 established the number of Jewish households in a place could not exceed one-sixth the number of other religions. Article 11 barred Jews from marrying and remaining in France if they were unemployed, did not own a business or cultivate land, or possess a practical trade skill such as sewing, knitting, or spinning fibers.⁴³

In this proposal, however, Hell took a differing stance from his previous rhetoric with Article I, as he proposed, "Jews born and raised in France, and those born there hereafter, shall enjoy all the rights enjoyed by other French citizens."⁴⁴ As Schechter argues, this appears to be an attempt by Hell to appear to embrace Republican ideals on the surface, while quietly pushing for anti-Jewish legislation outside the public view. His address came amidst the ongoing debate as to who received the rights and privileges

⁴² "Que les juifs contribuent à toutes les impositions, qu'ils n'auront... ni d'autres tribunaux que ceux des chrétiens; enfin, qu'ils ne pourront se marier que sur la permission des états provinciaux...dans la vue de réduire une population devenue déjà trop onéreuse à la province." *Archives parlementaires*, vol. 10, 778.

⁴³ *Archives parlementaires*, vol. 10, 778.

⁴⁴ "Les juifs nés et domiciliés en France, et ceux qui y naîtront par la suite, jouiront de tous les droits dont jouissent les autres citoyens français." Hell, *Archives parlementaires*, vol. 10, 778.

of French citizenship. The debates not only discussed the status of Jews as citizens, but of non-Catholic Christians as well. The very essence of the debates over the rights of France's minority groups were viewed as a determining measure of the very success of the Revolution as a whole. Hell's attempts to enact laws that continued to oppress Alsace's Jews never passed the assembly. Instead, these debates precipitated the passing of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen in August of 1789.

In the wake of the Declaration, in 1790 Hell again attempted to anonymously publish an anti-Jewish pamphlet similar to *Observations*. A copy of the manuscript, however, fell into the hands of Cerf Berr. When Berr threatened to broadcast Hell's authorship, the lawyer abstained from publishing the document.⁴⁵ As final measure of clarification as to the civil status of France's Jews, definitive emancipation came in 1791. Following more debates in the National Assembly, the President read the following decree on September 27:

"The National Assembly considers that the necessary conditions to be a French citizen and to be an active citizen are secured by the Constitution, and that any man who, bringing together said conditions, takes the civic oath and commits himself to fulfill all the duties that the Constitution imposes, is entitled to all the benefits it provides; revokes any postponements,

⁴⁵ O'Leary, *Forging Freedom*, 304.

reservations, and exceptions inserted in previous decrees with respect to Jewish individuals who will take the civic oath, which will be regarded as a waiver of any privilege previously introduced in their favor."⁴⁶

The decree made all previous legislation regarding Jews forfeit, and allowed Jews who met the same criteria as other Frenchmen to take a civic oath that granted them the rights and privileges of an active citizen. While the decree stripped away special rights given to Jews to run their communities semi-autonomously from Christians, it also made null any previous laws that placed sanctions on them.

After the dissolution of the National Assembly, the Bailiff moved on to be a member of the Departmental Assembly of Upper-Rhine and in 1794, during the "Reign of Terror" in France, Hell's life came to an abrupt and violent end.⁴⁷ The Bailiff was a lifelong monarchist and outspoken supporter of the King. Beginning in 1789, Hell came under suspicion of concealing government documents, as well as maintaining correspondence with the governments of foreign nations. Hell also maintained a relationship with his

⁴⁶ "L'Assemblée nationale considérant que les conditions nécessaires pour être citoyen français et pour devenir citoyen actif sont fixées par la Constitution, et que tout homme qui, réunissant lesdites conditions, prête le serment civique et s'engage à remplir tous les devoirs que la Constitution impose, a droit à tous les avantages qu'elle assure ; révoque tous ajournements, réserves et exceptions insérés dans les précédents décrets relativement aux individus juifs qui prêteront le serment civique, qui sera regardé comme une renonciation à tous privilèges introduits précédemment en leur faveur." G. Gabet, *Procès-Verbaux De L'assemblée Nationale*, Vol. III. Paris: 1792. 268.

⁴⁷ Fues, *Les Paroisses*, 153.

friend, Guillaume de Malesherbes, the lawyer responsible for Louis XVI's failed defense. In correspondence with him, Hell referred to the King as "God" and the only legitimate purveyor of justice. As a result, the Committee of Public Safety ordered Hell's arrest. On April 22, Hell stood trial in front of the Revolutionary Tribune in Paris, where the court found him guilty of activities "against the liberty, security, and sovereignty of the French people."⁴⁸ Hell died on the guillotine the same day, alongside Malesherbes, with whom he shared a cart ride to the scaffold.⁴⁹

The Character of Hell

So what can be said about the character of a man who seemingly focused his career on the exploitation and oppression of a disenfranchised minority? Greed and an apparent stubborn aversion to personal accountability are an evident legacy left by Hell. Though born to a poor, minor family, Hell strived to maintain the lavish lifestyle typical of nobility during the period. As a result, Hell's finances suffered from overspending, failed financial ventures, and a tendency to borrow money he had no way of repaying.⁵⁰ The extent to which Hell's greed and mismanagement influenced his choices in life can be best exemplified through his marriage. His father-in-law's status as a member of the

⁴⁸ Robinet, Adolphe Robert, and J. Le Chaplain. 1899. *Dictionnaire historique et biographique de la révolution et de l'empire, 1789-1815: ouvrage rédigé pour l'histoire générale*. Paris: Librairie historique de la révolution et de l'empire. 160.

⁴⁹ Fues, *Les Paroisses*, 153.

⁵⁰ Graetz. *History of the Jews*, 349.

Royal Council and Lieutenant General of Police of Grenoble, as well as his wealth, played no small part in Hell's decision to marry his wife. From Hell's end, the coupling appears opportunistic rather than affectionate, evidenced by Hell informing his wife he would leave her should her father ever refuse to loan him money. In 1787, Hell followed through with his threat. The Bailiff stole 40,000 livres from the King's treasury and, in an attempt to replace the missing funds before the discrepancy was noticed, the Bailiff demanded 30,000 livres from Savoie. His father-in-law refused to give Hell the money as the loan was too large and would leave him broke. As a result of her father's refusal, Hell abandoned his wife. Hell borrowed money from other sources as well, including local governments, other nobility, and creditors. For example, records indicate that Hell took out a loan of 6,000 livres from a creditor in 1775. A decade later, he took another loan of 20,000 livres from the city of Basel in 1787, at which time Hell's liquid assets in land and personal property amounted to just over 12,000 livres. As Hell would later admit in court, many of his creditors were Alsatian Jews.⁵¹

Hell did not limit his exploitation and corruption to Jews. The lower classes and poor gentiles of Alsace suffered from Hell's abuse of power as well. In at least one recorded instance, Hell committed outright theft of treasury funds allotted as wages to the employees serving his district. As was typical of many of his contemporaries, Hell put little

⁵¹ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 211.

energy into the formulation of projects that might alleviate the hardships of Alsace's impoverished farmers and landless peasants. When asked by the Alsatian Provincial Assembly in 1788 to help create a plan for the redistribution of public land to peasants, Hell declined. On the contrary, the lawyer argued vehemently against the idea. Hell reasoned that the poor would be forced to take out unpayable loans from moneylenders in order to pay for the land. The Bailiff predicted that the peasants, as a result of inherent laziness, would leave the land uncultivated and unproductive, in turn defaulting on their loans, with creditors ultimately seizing the property. Instead Hell believed that the more economically stable bourgeois ought to have a right to the property rather than Alsace's masses.⁵²

Hell's corruption did not go unnoticed by the peasants, demonstrated by the rioting that broke out in Alsace in 1789 at the beginning of the French Revolution. The public unrest stemmed from the hesitance of the ruling nobility to carry out the distribution of communal land to peasants. In Hirsingue, where Hell currently served as bailiff, peasants sued the towns seigneur, Comte de Monjoie, for their rightful share of the land. On July 21 of that year, a mob attacked the Bailiwick where Hell's brother, Louis, worked as a clerk.⁵³ The violence that subsequently befell Louis resulted from attempts to conceal the Montjoie family's records from the public. The mob set upon the

⁵² Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 213.

⁵³ Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, 213.

younger Hell, “where he was bound, gagged, and had to endure all kinds of insults.” Although the physical victim of the attack, the peasants reportedly shouted, “It’s not you that we want...but you must pay for your rascally brother!” The mob specifically decried the elder Hell as an unjust judge and an unfair collector of taxes.⁵⁴ While the peasants were subject to Hell’s abuse, Alsace’s Jews still faced the majority of the Bailiff’s corruption.

Hell’s notoriety in life is evidenced by what little has been written about the Bailiff’s death. Very little focus is given to the man in historical writings outside the realm of the Forged Receipts Affair. Yet what does survive leaves a wholly negative image of the man. His attempts to perpetuate the misery of French Jews ironically served as a catalyst for movements towards their emancipation. While seemingly influential and well known during his life, Hell’s legacy as a corrupt public servant and bulwark against Jewish civic equality in France has led to the Bailiff’s obscurity in the overarching historical record. Nonetheless, as a major antagonist in the era of Jewish emancipation, a fuller portrayal of François de Hell enables a deeper understanding of the historical events he precipitated.

⁵⁴ Hoffmann, Ch. 1907. *La Haute Alsace à la veille de la Revolution. La Haute-Alsace durant l’administration provinciale ... III. Les Etats généraux ... IV Les trouhes de 1789*. Colmar: Hüffel, 48.

Sino-Soviet Relations during the Cold War: Nationalism, Disconnect, and Schism

Mitchell de Kozan

Introduction

The Sino-Soviet alliance in the early stages of the Cold War created a unified Communist front in East Asia, seemingly united in ideology and brotherhood. However, this alliance quickly unraveled as the changing landscape of the Cold War began to cause a rift in this united ideology, caused in large part by traditional Chinese ideals. These ideals, namely the inherent nature of nationalism in Chinese culture, the strict adherence to a familial, hierarchical power structure, and an intense contempt for imperialism dictated Chinese foreign policy during the Cold War. The eventual schism between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union changed the dynamics of the Cold War, as China aimed to become self-reliant, asserted itself as the dominant force for the spread of Communism in East Asia, and emerged as an independent player in the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this

paper I will generally explore Sino-Soviet relations principally during the 1950's and 1960's, and answer the following questions: what effects did the schism between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union during the 1950's have on the Cold War in East Asia, how did the disconnect between Chinese nationalism and Soviet belief in their own superiority lead to worsening Sino-Soviet relations in the 1950's and 1960's, and finally, how can this disconnect be seen through Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policies and Mao Zedong's social programs?

Chinese National Identity

When discussing China and its relations with other countries throughout its history, Chinese national identity may be the single most important factor driving foreign relations. Chinese nationalism and national identity stem from ancient Chinese beliefs, namely the beliefs of China as the "Middle Kingdom, and the familial tenets of Confucianism. Chih – yu Shih succinctly describes the Middle Kingdom in Chinese culture, and how it further relates to Chinese foreign policy as a whole. Shih states, "From a simplified Confucian point of view, society is hierarchically structured. Heaven is at the top. China, the 'under – heaven' is ruled by the son of Heaven. The masses of people are his son – citizens (*zimin*)."¹ As China believed itself to be the center of the Middle Kingdom, it instituted a tributary system in order to spread its values with

¹ Chih – yu Shih, *The Spirit of Chinese Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 40.

neighboring kingdoms through good will and friendship. Shih asserts that, "China, like a father, treated the surrounding countries as its sons, rewarded them, punished them, forgave them, and protected them. In return, these countries were expected to respect China. A tribute system was set up as the channel for them to submit gifts."² Thus, China has maintained a traditional view of itself as superior, both morally and culturally, and that it is China's duty to lead others to improvement through adoption of Chinese tenets.

China's belief in its own preeminence, not only regionally amongst its former tribute states, but also internationally stems from this historic belief. However, China's Middle Kingdom mentality was nearly destroyed during what has become known as "the Century of Humiliation" in China. Chinese defeat during the First Opium War in 1842 left China defenseless against the imperialist goals of the West. As Rebecca E. Karl emphasizes, "Euro – America – Japan had multiple practical links to china that set them in direct relationships of domination and power vis – à – vis China."³ Further, Karl states that, "By 1895, a half – century of massive internal rebellion and continued assaults by European imperialist powers on China was capped by the defeat of the Qing armies in Korea by the rising power of Meiji Japan."⁴ Thus, during the first 50 years

² Ibid., 59.

³ Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 11.

⁴ Ibid, 12.

of this degrading century for China, imperialist powers increasingly exploited the weakened Chinese state, Chinese national unity was in disarray, and one of China's longest standing tributary partners had been conquered by imperialist Japan.

The second half of this century saw China dominated by Japan. Mao Zedong in his "On Coalition Government," described this domination, stating, "The atrocities, plunder, rape and humiliation suffered by our brothers and sisters in the occupied areas at the hands of the Japanese aggressors and their servile lackeys have aroused the burning wrath of all Chinese . . ." ⁵ This century drastically diminished the Chinese view of themselves as the Middle Kingdom, as China had been exposed as inferior in many different facets, such as militarily, industrially, and economically. However, nationalism was still an important aspect of Chinese culture. Mao, in "On Coalition Government," lays out his ideas for cultural programs, asserting, "The Chinese people's culture and education should be new-democratic, that is to say, China should establish her own new national, scientific and mass culture and education." ⁶ Although this was a nominally new cultural and nationalistic policy, necessitated by the Century of Humiliation, Mao does hearken back to traditional Chinese national identity. In a speech given at the

⁵ "Mao Zedong, 'On Coalition Government,'" April 24, 1945, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Translation from *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 3 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1961), accessed November 4, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121326>.

⁶ Ibid.

First Plenary Session of the CPPCC, Mao stated that, "The Chinese have always been a great, courageous, and industrious nation, and it is only in modern times that they have fallen behind."⁷ This concerted effort to restore China to its position as a central world power would eventually manifest itself in Chinese foreign policy. As Shih asserts, "After the Communists came to power, the need for an unambiguous hierarchy still persisted. One essential quality, which all modern Chinese leaders display, is their imprinted belief in the relevance of Chinese cultural views and lifestyles as an inspiration to guide the peoples of the world."⁸ Further, although China was not one of the preeminent powers in the world at the beginning of the Cold War, they did find themselves as a leader in the intermediate zone, over which the United States and Soviet Union were attempting to assert their respective influences. Shih states the Korean War, "not only put China under Russia's tutelage but also North Korea under China's," and that, "The socialist hierarchy in the East was thus formed."⁹ Although China was clearly the junior partner to the Soviet Union during the early years of the Cold War, the Korean War created a sense of the old Chinese national identity and tribute system, with North Korea being subordinate to China and relying upon them for protection. For example, when examining the

⁷ Mao Zedong, "Opening Speech at the First Plenary Session of the CPPCC" in *the Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976, volume I*, ed. Michael Y. M. Kau and John K. Leung (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1986), 5.

⁸ Shih, *The Spirit of Chinese Foreign Policy*, 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

hierarchical structures of the coalition of Chinese and North Korean military forces during the Korean War, China is seen by all parties involved as the unquestioned leader between the two. In a telegram to North Korean officials Peng Dehuai and Gao Gang, Mao describes his discussion with Joseph Stalin about Chinese military preeminence. Mao states, "I sent a telegram to Filippov [Stalin] with the comments on the North Korea situation and suggestions that were stated in [your] Peng's telegram and my observations on the war situation . . . [He] completely approves of a single central command led by Chinese comrades . . ." ¹⁰ Thus, although there had been changes to the Chinese national identity after the Century of Humiliation, there was still a sense of the nationalistic, Middle Kingdom mentality, especially regarding the tribute – as exemplified by the relationship existent between China and North Korea during the Korean War.

Therefore, this sense of nationalism was a direct factor in the intervention of China into the Korean War, and played a pivotal part in the Cold War in East Asia. More importantly, when assessing Sino – Soviet relations during the Cold War, is that the traditional Chinese view of nationalism still influenced Chinese foreign policy during

¹⁰ "Telegram from Mao Zedong to Peng Dehuai," November 17, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (CPC Central Historical Documents Research Office) and Zhongyang dang'anguan (Central Archives), eds., *Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao* (Zhou Enlai's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC), vol. 3, trans. Jingxia Yang and Douglas Stiffler (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2008), 515, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114234>.

the Cold War. It is the staying power of this national identity that shows just how important nationalism was to the Chinese psyche, and would later influence the Chinese foreign policy regarding the Soviet Union.

Historical Background: Pre-War and WWII Relations

Since the inception of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, the Soviet Union exerted special influence over their Chinese comrades. Michael H. Hunt states that “By the 1920s the USSR had in addition begun to command respect as a model for China’s renovation and hence as the fountainhead of revolutionary doctrine and direction”¹¹ However, although China saw the Soviet Union as a model for revolution and improvement in China, did not assure constant, harmonious relations between the CCP and the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union was reserved in their support of Mao Zedong and the CCP during their struggle against the Japanese during World War II and the subsequent Chinese Civil War against Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang nationalists. In fact, as Hunt states, the Soviet Union was hesitant to heavily support the CCP until it was nearly certain that the CCP were in control of China, and were sufficiently anti – American in orientation. Hunt asserts, “Only in the latter half of 1949 – with CCP victory assured, state – building well underway, and relations with the

¹¹ Michael H. Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 102.

United States festering – did the Sino – Soviet connection finally take form.”¹² Further, it is clear that Mao was not so desperate for Soviet assistance as to compromise the Chinese cause. Hunt asserts, “Already between 1937 and 1941 Mao had begun to attack ‘dogmatic’ and ‘formalistic’ application of Soviet approaches, analysis, and models in what was a barely veiled critique of those inclined to make the party subservient to Moscow.”¹³ In fact, in 1956 Mao had a conversation with Pavel Yudin, a Soviet Ambassador, in which Yudin relays Mao as believing “. . . Stalin also incorrectly evaluated the situation in China and the possibilities for the development of the revolution. He continued to believe more in the power of the Guomintang than of the Communist Party.”¹⁴ Yet, once the Soviets allied with the newly formed People’s Republic of China, relations became familial, and resembled traditional Chinese tenets. For example, in 1949, after Sino – Soviet relations began to warm, Mao stated that, “Internationally, we belong to the side of the anti-imperialist front headed by the Soviet Union, and so we can turn only to this side for genuine and friendly help,” and that, “The Communist Party of the Soviet Union

¹² Ibid., 180.

¹³ Ibid., 143.

¹⁴ “From the Journal of Ambassador P. F. Yudin, Record of Conversation with Mao Zedong, 31 March 1956,” March 31, 1956, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation (AVPRF), fond 0100, opis 49, papka 410, delo 9, listy 87-98; also Center for Storage of Contemporary Documentation (TsKhSD), fond 5, opis 30, delo 163, listy 88-99; see also *Problemi Dalnego Vostok* 5 (1994), 101-110, trans. Mark Doctoroff, accessed October 28, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116977>.

is our best teacher and we must learn from it.”¹⁵ This shows that China still believed in the hierarchical structure of the world detailed in traditional Chinese beliefs. Thus, although Mao disagreed with the initial Soviet approach to China and the CCP, once the PRC decided to join the communist bloc, they understood their role in the hierarchy and treated Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union with the respect they had once demanded as the Middle Kingdom. For example, in an address given by Mao after the death of Stalin, Mao declares that Stalin was, “the greatest genius of the present age, the great teacher of the world Communist movement, and the comrade – in – arms of the immortal Lenin . . .”¹⁶ This seems to mirror classic teachings in Chinese culture, namely, “Render filial piety to your parents,” “Respect your seniors by generation and age,” and “Remain in harmony with clan and community members.”¹⁷

Therefore, although, as Yan Mei says in his article “The Maturing of Soviet – Chinese Relations,” “Mao accepted the Soviet claim to leadership although he was even then embittered by Stalin’s insistence on a superior Soviet position,” Mao still showed Stalin and the Soviet Union the respect they felt they were owed out of adherence

¹⁵ “Mao Zedong, ‘On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship: In Commemoration of the Twenty-eighth Anniversary of the Communist Party of China’,” June 30, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Translation from *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 4 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1961), 411-423, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119300>.

¹⁶ Mao Zedong, “The Greatest Friendship,” in *the Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976, volume I*, trans. Michael Y. M. Kau and John K. Leung (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1986), 329.

¹⁷ Shih, *The Spirit of Chinese Foreign Policy*, 40.

to traditional Chinese value. However, these harmonious relations between the Peoples Republic of China and the Soviet Union would soon deteriorate with the death of Stalin in 1953 and Soviet divergence from the Marxist – Leninist model serving as the catalysts.

The 1950's: Maoism vs. Soviet Revisionism

The 1950's saw Mao Zedong achieve an unprecedented level of power within China after his successful strategies during the Korean War led to the defeat of perceived American imperialism. In the Soviet Union, Stalin's death led to the elevation of Nikita Khrushchev as the new head of state. Khrushchev's belief in revisionism diametrically opposed the policies of earlier generations of Soviet leadership. Khrushchev, in a letter to Josip Broz Tito, described his new policies as, “. . . acceptance of the possibility of peaceful coexistence and cooperation between countries with different political systems, struggle for prevention of war and consolidation of peace.”¹⁸ Further, Khrushchev asserted that this policy was “aimed at the consolidation of peace in Europe and the whole world.”¹⁹ This policy began to cause a major rift between the Soviet Union and China.

¹⁸ "Letter from Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to Tito and the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia," September 23, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Arhiv CK SKJ, 507 / IX, 119/I-51, trans. for CWHIP by Svetozar Rajak, accessed October 20, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112971>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

In his paper “Mao’s Soviet Policies,” John Garver states, “Issues such as ‘peaceful coexistence’ and the nature of war became deep conflicts between Beijing and Moscow, between the CCP and the CPSU, because of the impulse of the two parties to define the line of the international communist movement in relation to those concepts.”²⁰ Mao was clearly displeased with this divergence from the Marxist – Leninist policies. In an outline of a speech he gave in 1959, Mao declared, “Khrushchev and his group are very naïve. He does not understand Marxism- Leninism and is easily fooled by imperialism.”²¹ With as what Hunt calls, “the transformation of Marxism – Leninism into ‘Mao Zedong Thought’” illustrating “the countervailing influence of an indigenous populist tradition,” this deviation by the Soviet Union became extremely problematic to Sino – Soviet relations.

The combination of Marxism – Leninism with Chinese values forming Mao Zedong Thought led to the Chinese to view the Soviets as having lost their preeminence in the socialist world as a result of the changes within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Hunt states that the projection of Chinese values onto socialism, “served to account for the inability of the People’s Republic of China to

²⁰ John W. Garver, “Mao’s Soviet Policies,” *The China Quarterly* 173 (2003), 199.

²¹ “Mao Zedong, Outline for a Speech on the International Situation,” December, 1959, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, ed., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* (Mao Zedong’s Manuscripts since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China), vol. 8 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993), 599-603, trans. David Wolff, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118893>.

stomach Soviet direction, for its pretensions to a tutelary role in Asia, and for its calculated aloofness from, even contempt for, various forms of international exchange.”²² Further, not only did the deviation from the elder generation of communist leaders cause a rift in the relationship between the Soviet Union and China, but also issues of seniority within the communist bloc became problematic. Yan Mei states, “Mao was personally critical of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and may have felt that, following Stalin's death, his [Mao's] own role as a senior socialist leader was not sufficiently acknowledged by the Soviet leadership.”²³

The unrivaled power Mao held during the 1950's afforded him carte blanche to enact his policies with little or no resistance in China. In defiance of the new Soviet line of foreign policy and the inherent assumption of superiority by Khrushchev, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward in 1958. The Great Leap Forward was an economic and social program instituted by Mao, and was designed to quickly reinvent China as an industrialized, socialist nation, which was a drastic change from its status as predominantly agrarian. This was an attempt by Mao to not only rebuke Khrushchev's attempt to end “personality cults” within the communist bloc, but also to prove that China was the true preserver of Marxism – Leninism by carrying out continuous revolution. Further, a driving force behind the Great Leap

²² Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy*, 5.

²³ Yan Mei, “The Maturing of Soviet-Chinese Relations,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 481 (1985), 72.

Forward was Mao's desire to recapture the glory China had lost during the Century of Humiliation. Unfortunately for Mao, the Great Leap Forward was disastrous for the Chinese economy, and led to the reduction of Mao's influence within the CCP. The massive failures of the Great Leap Forward were amplified by the withdrawal of Soviet aid in 1960. As Yan Mei states, "the Chinese people were reminded by the party that their economic hardships in the early 1960s derived not only from natural disasters but also from the Soviet Union's withdrawal of assistance and its insistence on repayment of Soviet loans."²⁴ This increased the ever – growing distance between the Soviet Union and China. Lorenz Lüthi states that by 1962, Mao had changed his outlook on foreign policy to assert that, "there were in fact two intermediate zones: developed Europe plus Japan and Australia, and the underdeveloped Asian – African – Latin American world. China, leading the large zone of underdeveloped countries, opposed both superpowers."²⁵ Neither the events of 1950's or 1960's, respectively, can be seen as responsible for the schism between China and the Soviet Union. Rather, the events of these decades converge to form a larger narrative of the tenuous relationship between these two communist powers. The final blow to the once unified communist bloc in East Asia came in 1966, due to Mao's radical policies in light of lasting revisionism in the post – Khrushchev era and increasing Soviet imperialism.

²⁴ Ibid., 72.

²⁵ Lorenz Lüthi, "Chinese Foreign Policy, 1960-1979," in *The Cold war in East Asia*, ed. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), 154.

While this schism did not take place until the 1960's, the climate for the Sino – Soviet Split was wrought in the conflicts arising from Khrushchev's revisionist policies and Chinese attempts to recapture lost glory, such as instituting Mao Zedong Thought and the Great Leap Forward.

1960's: Soviet Imperialism and the Sino-Soviet Split

In his book *The Sino Soviet Split: The Cold War in the Communist World*, Lüthi states, "The final collapse of Sino – Soviet relations in the spring of 1966 thus was a function of Chinese domestic politics. Without the break in relations with the Soviet comrades, the Chairman would have been politically unable to launch the party purge that set off the Cultural Revolution."²⁶ However, not only was the Cultural Revolution a shrewd political move by Mao, but it also spoke to the disconnect between the Soviet Union and their divergence to revisionism, and the People's Republic of China and their belief in Chinese superiority as the true socialist nation. In a 1967 meeting with an Albanian delegation, Mao discussed the Cultural Revolution and this Sino – Soviet divide. The memorandum of this conversation details that Mao states "Will it the bourgeoisie or the proletariat? Marxism-Leninism or revisionism? . . . There are two possibilities: The first is that the bourgeoisie emerges victorious, that revisionism takes over. The second possibility is that we overthrow revisionism and the

²⁶ Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino Soviet Split: The Cold War in the Communist World* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2008), 274.

bourgeoise.”²⁷ By stating that a victory for revisionism would equal a victory for the bourgeoisie and overthrowing revisionism would equal a victory for the proletariat, Mao is unequivocally positing China as true Marxist – Leninists.

The effects of the Sino – Soviet Split and the Cultural Revolution on the Cold War in East Asia were drastic. Mao’s domestic policies led to not only the willful isolation of China on an international scale; but also, it led to the isolation of China in East Asia. Soviet Embassy reports regarding the relations between North Korea and China state that “Events in China associated with the so-called ‘Cultural Revolution’ have seriously alarmed the Korean leadership, which has reason to fear its negative influence on the DPRK,” and that, “the Korean leadership began to retreat from a unilateral orientation toward China it made several corrections to its ideological work with the population.”²⁸ Further, tensions began to rise between the Soviet Union and China in the northern border regions, where the two former unified members of the communist bloc now found themselves jockeying for territory. This led to incidents such as the violence Zhenbao Island on the Ussuri River in 1969.

²⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation between Chairman Mao Zedong and Comrades Hysni Kapo and Beqir Balluku," February 03, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1967, Dos. 6, Fl. 12-32, trans. Elidor Mëhilli, accessed November 4, 2015,

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117302>.

²⁸ "The DPRK Attitude Toward the So-called 'Cultural Revolution' in China," March 07, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF f. 0102, op. 23, p. 112, d. 24, pp. 13-23, obtained by Sergey Radchenko and trans. Gary Goldberg, accessed October 20, 2015,

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114570>.

In looking at the incident, it appears that China instigated violence against the Soviet Union, for both strategic and cultural reasons. As Lyle J. Goldstein asserts, the Cultural Revolution could have played a major factor in the Chinese instigation at Zhenbao Island. Goldstein states, "Class warfare had destroyed the fabric of Chinese society and Mao looked to an old formula for unity: the struggle against imperialism."²⁹ Thus, in order to keep attention away from internal strife, China intentionally initiated aggression against the Soviet Union. Also, Goldstein mentions the Soviet Union presence in Mongolia as a strategic threat to China, but it is important to note the cultural significance of this. With so much of Chinese foreign policy dictated by Chinese traditional culture, it must be extrapolated that culture played a part in Chinese aggression after, "the provocative defence agreement signed between the USSR and Mongolia in January 1966, which allowed for the stationing of Soviet troops in Mongolia," thus infringing on traditional Chinese territory.³⁰ Further, the Soviet occupation of Mongolia increased the Chinese perception of the Soviet Union as an imperial power. This perception of the Soviet Union as imperialist had been steadily growing in China, especially after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Therefore, China now saw itself completely opposed to the Soviets, much like they had opposed the United States a decade and a half earlier, due to the Chinese disdain for

²⁹ Lyle J. Goldstein, "Return to Zhenbao Island: Who Started Shooting and Why It Matters," *The China Quarterly*, vol. 168 (2001), 995.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 991.

imperialism. Thus, the Sino – Soviet Split, ensuing Cultural Revolution, and perceptions of Soviet imperialism led to the isolation of China in East Asia, as well as increased tensions with the Soviet Union. However, this set of circumstances would soon open the door for the development of Sino – American relations after the end of Chinese self – isolation.

Post-Split: The Vietnam War and Sino-American Rapprochement

By the beginning of the Vietnam War, relations between China and the Soviet Union had become untenable. This situation was described by the Czechoslovakian attaché, Comrade Freybort, who witnessed discussions between Chinese, Vietnamese, and Soviet officials regarding aiding the Vietnamese revolutionary movement. Freybort states, “Such negotiations could lead to the joint coordination among all socialist countries. The Chinese side rejected the proposal with the justification that the ideological differences in opinion with the CPSU are so big that it is not possible to sit at the [same] table.”³¹ Further, during these discussions, China attempted to assert itself as the superior communist power in Asia through their rebuke of Vietnamese relations with the Soviet Union. Freybort relays that, “During the talks, which Comrade Le Duan had in Beijing following his visit to Moscow [18-23 April], he was

³¹ “Note by the East German Embassy in Hanoi on a Conversation of Comrade Jarck with the Attache of the Czechoslovak Embassy, Comrade Freybort, on 2 June 1965, from 10:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., in the East German Embassy [Excerpts],” June 03, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PAAA-MfAA, Abteilung Sowjetunion, Microfiche G-A 331, 83-84, trans. Lorenz Lüthi, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117715>.

accused by the Chinese side that he has joined hands with modern revisionism too much.”³² The admonishment of Vietnam by Chinese officials for the increasingly close ties between Vietnam and the Soviet Union show that by 1965, China saw themselves as the preeminent socialist country in charge of facilitating revolution amongst these subordinate, tributary – like nations.

However, although China had been the traditional ally of Vietnam, the Soviets made inroads toward diplomatic relations with North Vietnam, which created a competition between the newly formed rivals. As Ilya V. Gaiduk states, “Cooperation with Moscow provided Hanoi an opportunity to rid itself of China’s excessive wardship and to occupy a more independent position in its relationship with Beijing.”³³ With the Soviet Union surpassing China as the leading supplier of aid to North Vietnam in 1968, China became increasingly willing to seek diplomatic relations with the United States. Steven J. Hood asserts, “The United States probably exploited the clash between the Soviet Union and China in order to gain points with Beijing . . . the situation . . . enabled Washington to make overtures to Zhou Enlai.”³⁴ Relations between China and the United States, championed by Henry Kissinger, intensified with Richard Nixon’s invitation and subsequent visit to China in 1972. On this visit, Nixon, Mao, Kissinger, and Zhou met to discuss the future

³² Ibid.

³³ Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 66.

³⁴ Steven J. Hood, *Dragons Entangled: Indochina and the China-Vietnam War* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1992), 25.

of Sino – American diplomacy. During this visit, Mao stated, “At the present time, the question of aggression from the United States or aggression from China is relatively small, that is, it could be said that this is not a major issue, because the present situation is one in which a state of war does not exist between our two countries.”³⁵ Further, during this conversation, President Nixon aimed at solving the major problems standing between normalization of diplomatic relations. Nixon asserted that, “we must examine why, and determine how our policies should develop to deal with the whole world, as well as the immediate problems such as Korea, Vietnam, and of course, Taiwan.”³⁶ This discussion, although mainly over philosophic questions, opened up the diplomatic channels which allowed for groundbreaking developments in Sino – American relations. Most notably, these improvements in relations manifested themselves in the “Shanghai Communiqué,” the most important provision of which states, “The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position.”³⁷ This landmark shift in policy solved one of the

³⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation between Chairman Mao Zedong and President Richard Nixon,” February 21, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, National Security Adviser Trip Briefing Books and Cables for President Ford, 1974-1976 (Box 19), accessed October 15, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118064>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ “Joint Communiqué between the United States and China,” February 27, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Staff

most glaring issues of the Cold War in East Asia, Taiwan and the One – China Policy. Thus, the complete deterioration of Sino – Soviet relations and competition over North Vietnam led to the eventual Sino – American rapprochement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the worsening relationship and eventual split between China and the Soviet Union during the Cold War was rooted in the Chinese belief in traditional values, which defined Chinese national identity. These traditional values led the People's Republic of China to, albeit somewhat begrudgingly, look to the Soviet model as the dominant form of socialism in the world out of respect for the Soviets and Joseph Stalin and their seniority as communist revolutionaries. However, the death of Stalin combined with the changes in policy from constant revolution to revisionism by his successor, Nikita Khrushchev, led to an increasing belief by the Chinese that they were once again the "Middle Kingdom," only this time of the communist world. This belief clashed with Soviet convictions in their own inherent superiority regardless of ideology, and this struggle resulted in the defiance of Mao Zedong, especially through the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. These programs initiated by Mao were direct challenges to the Soviets and their feelings of superiority, and were intended to launch China's return to

Member Office Files (SMOF), President's Personal Files (PPF), Box 73, accessed November 10, 2015,

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121325>.

being a preeminent power. Meanwhile, China declared itself as the true defender of Marxism – Leninism and attempted to be the leader of perpetual revolution in the developing world, increasingly distancing itself from the Soviet Union and leading to the eventual, inevitable split in ideology. This schism between China and the Soviet Union, and the Chinese nationalism that drove it, were a major factor in the Cold War in East Asia. It affected not only China's entrance into the Korean War, but also the policies and structure of their military intervention. Chinese implementation of the Cultural Revolution caused itself to become isolated from the DPRK in the mid-1960s, forcing Kim Il Sung to favor Moscow over Beijing. Further, worsening relations in the 1960's led to open border disputes between China and the Soviet Union, seemingly pushing the two to the brink of a hot war in 1969. The resulting competition over influence and communist preeminence in Vietnam eventually saw Vietnam strengthen its ties with the Soviet Union, leading to the eventual normalization of relations between China and the United States. This initiated a drastic change in the once stagnant Cold War policies in East Asia, as the United States renounced its support of Taiwan, and instead asserted its support of the One – China theory. Thus, these developments were all direct results of the wane in unity and harmonious relations between the Peoples Republic of China and the Soviet Union and greatly affected the landscape of the Cold War in East Asia

Before the Pictures Fade: Understanding the Lives of Korean Picture Brides

Esther Kang

Introduction

The lives of Korean picture brides, young women in the early 1900s who immigrated to the United States to marry Korean laborers, remain hidden or become lost in the master narrative of Korean American history. The very fact that few people know of their existence coupled with little scholarly research and literature examining their lives shows that picture brides have largely been ignored. As women of the first generation of Korean Americans, their lives merit attention and a voice in history because they problematize and diversify the current understanding of the Korean immigrant story. The picture brides became the mothers of the next generation of Korean Americans, instilling values of civic engagement and responsibilities. Neglecting a critical

analysis of their lives not only depreciates their experience, but also deprives ourselves of holistically understanding the foundation of Korean American history and society.

The gap between the expectations these picture brides had for their new lives in America and the reality they faced contributed to the erasure of their story and lives as influential members of the Korean immigrant society in the master narrative. Picture brides did not mindlessly decide to come to America on an impulse. Rather, most picture brides intentionally sought out the opportunity to live abroad, often times overcoming societal and familial criticism. Once arriving in the United States, the women could not achieve their expectations and dreams of continuing their education. The reality of marrying a poor laborer could not provide the time and finances for these women to study, but instead forced them to succumb to traditional gender roles in order to survive. Confining their lives to traditional gender roles due to circumstances permits history to overlook their story and the significance of their lives. Defining their lives by their roles as wives and mothers resulted in the erasure of their place in history because it disregards their ability to bridge the gap between their expectations and reality and become significant members of the Korean American community as independence fighters, teachers, and community leaders. Instead, this article removes the layer of generalization that the master narrative reinforces in the study of Korean picture brides, and exposes the complexity of their lives and the depth of their determination and

resilience. Therefore, this article does not merely serve as a general introduction of Korean picture brides, but critically analyzes interviews of picture brides and previous studies regarding them to detect significant patterns that explain the trajectory and outcome of their lives in America. In order to accomplish this, the origin of Korean picture brides is first contextualized in the broader history of Asian immigration to America. Second, similarities in the women's upbringing and experiences are identified and used to explain how they lived and settled down in their new lives. Third, by extrapolating these findings to the greater American immigrant history, it showcases the legacy and contemporary implications of Korean picture brides in the United States.

Who are they?

Since the inception of Korean American immigration 100 years ago, little is known or studied of Korean American history and in particular of picture brides. The makeup of the Korean demographics in America before the arrival of picture brides was the deciding factor in implementing a systematic approach to marriage. The first wave of Korean immigrants travelled to Hawaii between 1903 and 1905, with a relatively small size, compared to other Asian populations, of 7,226 people.¹ Koreans and Japanese were not the first Asian immigrants to the United States. Rather, their

¹ Sonia S. Sunoo, "Korean Women Pioneers of the Pacific Northwest," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* vol. 79, no. 1 (Spring, 1978), 51.

immigration policy was a response to earlier Chinese immigration. Koreans were encouraged to immigrate to the United States to fill the empty labor force after the Chinese were banned to enter the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 was just the beginning of a series of discriminatory laws that excluded Chinese immigrants from the United States. By 1900, they were unable to enter Hawaii which created a labor deficit that Korean laborers filled.² Japanese immigrants also made up the majority of the plantation laborers. As their numbers grew stronger and their working and living conditions worsened, Japanese laborers protested with strikes creating hostility and tension that fueled anti-Japanese sentiments. Consequently, Korean laborers were recruited to not only take over the positions left behind by the Japanese, but also welcomed by plantation owners in hopes to counteract the strikes organized by the Japanese workers.³ By diversifying the ethnic community of the labor force in Hawaii, the plantation owners wanted to prevent any further uprising that could disrupt the productivity of the plantations.

Because the initial demand for Koreans was faced by labor needs, many of the first immigrants were young men seeking employment. Consequently, only about one in ten adult Korean immigrants were women, mostly who

² Wayne Patterson, *The Korean Frontier in America: Immigration to Hawaii 1896-1910* (University Of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 6.

³ Ibid.

accompanied their husbands.⁴ Therefore, a disproportionate amount of young unmarried men created a restless environment that plantation owners in Hawaii hoped sending wives would placate the distressed Korean men who were mostly laborers. The influx of picture brides not only balanced the gender deficit and contributed to the labor force, but also improved the quality of life of Korean laborers. Marriage and starting a family was a fresh start and a welcome change that broke the monotonous cycle of living every day as a plantation worker. These men were inspired to live and endure the long back breaking hours of work because now they had a family to feed and a future to nurture. It was the picture brides who built a community around these nuclear families that invested in enlightening and cultivating the Korean population. They became actively involved in church activities, the Korean independence movement, and educating the youth.⁵ Many of these brides were more educated than their husbands as well as most of the male population of Korean immigrants, which attributes to their ability to lead and develop a community.⁶ It was these brave and educated young women who aspired to achieve more in their lives than the typical life of a

⁴ Wayne Patterson, *The Ilse: First-Generation Korean Immigrants in Hawai'i 1903-1973* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 80.

⁵ Eun Sik Yang, "Korean Women in America: 1903-1930," in *Korean Women in Transition: At Home and Abroad*, ed. Eui-Young Yu and Earl H. Phillips (Los Angeles, CA: Center for Korean American and Korean Studies, California State University, Los Angeles, 1987), 167-181.

⁶ Eui-Young Yu, "Korean Population in the United States as Reflected in the Year 2000 U.S. Census" (revised paper presented at the annual meeting for the Population Association of Korea, Seoul, South Korea, December 1, 2001).

housewife that a life in Korea would guarantee. This determination motivated the women to not only come to America, but when circumstances in their new lives prevented them from achieving their aspirations it helped them face reality and find other ways to become active and influential community builders.

These young women in their adolescence to their early 20's received the moniker because the only correspondence between the groom and a bride came through a single picture. Usually, a Korean man, already in the States, would send a letter and his picture requesting for a bride to a family member or a friend. This person in turn would become the go-between (*jung-mae-jaeng-i*) and look for young women in the village or town willing to live abroad. The single picture and the word of the go-between became the deciding factor in making a match between potential brides and a seeking groom. Thus, the system revolved around the matchmaker who held the most authority throughout the process. The recruitment method of the matchmakers varied from those who actively sought out women to those who waited for women to initiate the process.⁷ However, the one common task that all matchmakers carefully oversaw was the photograph session. Consequently, they did not spare any expenses in hiring a professional, usually a Japanese photographer, who would accompany the go-between to take pictures of women in their traditional dress, *chima chogori*.

⁷ Patterson, *The Ilse*, 86.

The first impression of the bride or groom from the pictures weighed heavily on both sides of the marriage in agreeing to the matrimony. Therefore, the men, in particular, would send outdated or misleading photos of them that would give an impression of youth, vitality, and wealth. Even though the men were poor laborers, they would pose for pictures in front of the owner's mansion or next to a car to give a false impression of a prosperous life to convince prospective picture brides to choose them. Likewise, men would also send old pictures of them when they first arrived to the States or ask the photographer to edit the pictures so that they would appear younger.⁸ Many men could not afford to send for a wife immediately after their own arrival. Thus, it took years later, often when they were older and past their prime marriageable age to ask for a bride. These strategies of deception served as the men's only viable solution in seeking a bride. Therefore, it was not uncommon for women to be matched with men decades older than themselves. Even though women had the ability to choose their husbands and even expected a significant age difference, many were deceived by not only the pictures, but also by matchmakers who convinced them that age did not matter.⁹ The picture brides later experienced the emotional and economic consequences of marrying an elderly husband and would resent the deception. The age gap also attributed to the inability of the picture brides to pursue their goal for

⁸ Ibid., 88.

⁹ Ibid., 89.

moving to America, an education, because of the unfortunate circumstances of caretaking for an elderly husband and consequently providing for the family.

The matchmakers and interested young women alone could not complete the process. In a highly patriarchal and Confucius society, it was imperative for them to seek the approval of the family, particularly that of the father's, who was the head of household. However, families had mixed feelings about consenting to a marriage abroad. In highly conservative traditional families, many fathers disapproved and even condemned their daughters for seeking the marriage. Sending a daughter abroad was seen as scandalous and damaging the family reputation. It also prevented them from carrying out their filial duties dictated by Confucius principles of taking care of elderly parents and performing ancestral rituals.¹⁰ However, "enlightened" (exposure to Western education and values) or liberal households approved of the marriage. Many of these families were affluent and familiar with western ideals through their Christian faith. Consequently, the difficulty of continuing the process depended on the reaction of the family. While some were able to leave with their parents' blessings, others would steal their father's *tojang* (seal) to forge documents.¹¹ Going against cultural and familial expectations and values at all costs prove that these women sought out a higher purpose than simply escaping the

¹⁰ Ibid., 85.

¹¹ Ibid.

confines of the social structure. Life in the United States symbolized not only the liberation from traditional gender roles but also the chance to live a meaningful life and gain an education.

The variety of responses from each household also reflects the diverse backgrounds of the picture brides. Many of the women came from poor rural backgrounds with little or no education. Confucius precepts discouraging the education of women contributed to the lack of opportunities for women to study. Those with extensive schooling were considered “liberated women” who worked previously as teachers, nurses, or church workers.¹² However, economic improvement was not the only motive. Women from affluent Christian backgrounds encouraged by American missionaries aspired to come to America. American Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries began actively converting Koreans to Christianity since 1884. Due to their efforts, 40% of pioneer Korean immigrants were Christians and motivated to leave Korea for religious freedom.¹³ However, most importantly the exposure to Christianity changed the social and cultural norms and expectations for women, especially through education. Women who were familiar with Christian ideals of equality, education, and freedom saw a potential for a life outside the confines of restrictive gender roles instilled by Confucius values. For these privileged women, America was the land of

¹² Ibid, 82.

¹³ Bong-Youn Choy, *Koreans in America* (Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1979), 44.

independence and opportunity. The political turmoil during the same time became the catalyst for women to act on their desolate circumstances and aspirations.

Japan's imperialism in the early 1900s destabilized Korea's government and threatened its national security. Japan annexed Korea in 1905 and formally colonized the peninsula in 1910.¹⁴ The Japanese quickly encroached on the rights, properties, and lives of Korean citizens, forcing many of them to escape the country and seek refuge abroad. Although, some picture brides left for America to escape the brutal colonization, this paper will focus on the many women who also came with another purpose, pursuing an education. Understanding that the women's primary goal was to seek an education not only explains their high expectations for their new lives in the United States, but also how this ambition sets them apart as women who defied traditional gender roles. My primary archive, *Korean Picture Brides: A Collection of Oral Histories*, by Sonia Shinn Sunoo is the only source that has extensively documented the lives of picture brides¹⁵. The compilation of interviews provide

¹⁴ Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910 (Twentieth Century Japan: The Emergence of a World Power)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 18-24.

¹⁵ Sunoo is a pioneer scholar in the study of Korean picture brides. She conducted interviews with elderly picture brides in their 70s-80s. Therefore, she notes that their memory and recollection of events and facts may be faint. Also, as a descendant of picture brides she is more knowledgeable and invested in the topic and research. This may alter the objectivity of the questions asked and framed, eliciting certain responses. However, her intimate knowledge of Korean culture, history, and traditional values allows her to ask pointed questions that give crucial information to understand motives and justification of the picture brides' action and decisions.

evidence that a majority of the women were motivated to immigrate to the United States for an education.

Building Expectations

The women's ability to foster the ambitious goal of pursuing an education and consequently developing high expectations for their new lives in the States derive from three factors in their upbringing. The women came from similar backgrounds of class and wealth, Christianity, and previous experience in education. Class and wealth were synonymous at the time in Korea. Korean society was highly stratified with clear class distinctions. The nobility, *yang-ban* class, held the most power, wealth, and prestige. Affluent business men, the *sang-in* class, although not revered, were influential because of their money. Apart from these two classes, the ability to elevate one's status was nearly impossible for lower classes such as commoners, *pyeong-min* class, and slaves, *nobi* class. Upward social mobility through hard work could not exist in a society that prized a strict hierarchy steep in cultural and familial traditions, such as one's ancestral name which determined one's position in society.

Therefore, only women from these affluent and reputable families had the opportunity to dream of a life outside of making ends meet. In Korea, most of these women did not have to participate in household chores or work outside the home to survive. They had the time and luxury to plan a life apart from just eating three meals a day

and having a roof over their heads. For example, Shinn Sun-hee, was a picture bride who came from an affluent family in Pyongyang. Her great grandparents were from the “high class” and as a result her family was wealthy.¹⁶ Shinn explained that “rich people did nothing in those days”.¹⁷ Her family was able to afford her trip to Russia to take care of a paralyzed uncle. Even though her family defied some traditional norms by sending an unmarried woman abroad, they did not reject traditional gender roles because her duties were to be the nurse and caretaker for her uncle. Nevertheless, Shinn used this opportunity to push the boundaries of traditional gender roles by persuading her parents to allow her to continue her journey abroad to the States so that she could pursue an education. Because the Japanese would not permit Korean’s to go abroad, she disguised herself as a Chinese women in Shanghai in order to go to Sacramento to marry her husband.¹⁸ Shinn also benefited from growing up in a Christian family that did not uphold traditional Korean virtues where women were restricted from any public or individual endeavors. Not only was her family’s financial feasibility to send her abroad rare at the time, but also their willingness to send a woman abroad was unprecedented. Kang Sung-hak wrote, “In those days it was unheard of for a 10-year-old girl to step out of her home gates”.¹⁹

¹⁶ Sunoo, *Korean Picture Brides*, 57.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 197.

The conservative feudalistic society of Korea not only confined women's roles but also their lifestyle as well. Park Ke-yul best illustrates this separation and constraint on women when describing her home. Living quarters were divided into the "outer rooms facing the street with the main gate to their courtyard, called the *sarang-bahng* (men's quarter)," while women lived in the "inner rooms that faced the inner court. They were away from public view, but within earshot of demands from the males in the front".²⁰ The structure of the house physically separated women from being seen or heard in public. Their primary role was to serve the men as docile wives and daughters. Therefore, wealth alone does not explain Shinn's and other wealthy and upper class families' approval to send their daughters abroad. This action goes against the traditional values and practices of Korean society that especially contradicts the example that noble families are supposed to set. The conservative feudalistic society promoted the traditional gender roles that the women had to revert back to when living in the United States in order to survive. The women's role in sustaining the family was restricted to the home as a resourceful wife and hardworking mother. They had to sacrifice their goal of pursuing an education because it was considered a luxury. However, when men pursued an education regardless of a family's financial situation, this endeavor was considered as a means to overcome poverty. For example, even though Kang Won-shin wanted to study,

²⁰ Ibid., 271.

she had to sacrifice her education to make money to fund her husband's education (he eventually earned a PhD in law).²¹ Her husband questioned the rationale of both attending school when one should and could be making money and taking care of their children. Surrendering to traditional gender roles, as a woman, she was expected to forfeit her education to provide for the family and her husband's education.

Christianity explains the liberal and progressive values of the wealthy upper class families that sent their daughters to the United States. The emergence of American missionaries in Korea not only changed the people's religious beliefs but also their understanding of gender and education. Many of the picture brides benefitted from Christian values of equal opportunity and education for all. Shinn Sun-hee's father worked for their local church and was influenced by the church's teachings and as such wanted to send her to the United States to study.²² Likewise, Woo Myong-Won's, a picture bride from Seoul, father was a businessman who also taught at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Woo Myong-won was not free to study Korean history under the Japanese colonial rule that controlled education.²³ Her parents arranged the marriage to her husband, Har Sang-ok so that she could receive an education. Yoon Yun-doy, another picture bride, was inspired by a female American missionary nurse who

²¹ Ibid., 174.

²² Ibid., 60.

²³ Ibid., 64.

served the poor in her rural village to study abroad and become a nurse. American missionaries became role models for young Korean women. They inspired the young women to become more than the average housewives and mothers. Christianity became a belief system that legitimized their defiance of traditional gender roles through the pursuit of an education. Therefore, they expected that America, as a prominent Christian nation would allow them to pursue an education without any gender discrimination.

The entire family of Mary Kwang-paik Lee, another bride from Pyongyang, converted to Christianity and the women of the household became pioneers for girls' education in the region. In the late 1800s, the first missionaries to Korea, Dr. Horace Grant Underwood (founder of Yonsei University) and Dr. Samuel Austin Moffett, baptized her grandparents. Her grandfather, a scholar, taught her grandmother how to read and write so that she could understand the Bible. Lee's mother became a Presbyterian minister and school teacher. She travelled throughout the village to not only teach women how to read and write by using the Bible, but also to preach and convert them. She told locals that "it's not fair that only boys can be educated," and earned their consent to start a girls' school.²⁴ Christianity broke traditional gender roles and introduced education to girls that in turn nurtured female community leaders, who otherwise would not have been able to take public roles outside the home. Picture brides used this same

²⁴ Ibid., 229.

Christian mentality to overcome their inability to study in the States and find ways to step outside of their roles as wives and mothers to take on public positions as teachers and independence fighters.

One of Protestant Christianity's greatest contributions to Korean society was starting 293 schools and 40 universities, which created a higher education system for all citizens regardless of class, wealth, and gender.²⁵ Christianity set the cultural and social foundation for women to receive an education. Most of the picture brides who came to America for an education attended school in Korea. And it was this experience with education that encouraged them to pursue higher education. Shinn Sun-hee attended and graduated from a boarding high school near her hometown.²⁶ Likewise, Kim Suk-eun graduated from a private boarding school. Her family wanted her to continue her education abroad because they knew that opportunities would be slim in Korea. The previous educational experience allowed the women to recognize the value of an education and inspired them to continue their studies. For example, Park Kyung-shin attended Yokohama Seminary in Japan before being arrested in Japan for participating in the Korean independence movement.²⁷ She escaped to Korea to "enlighten our friends about the evils of the Japanese government and work for the Korean independence".²⁸

²⁵ James H. Gayson, *Korea - A Religious History* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 169.

²⁶ Sunoo, *Korean Picture Brides*, 57.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Christian education became the backbone of Korean nationalism. Christianity was popular because many leaders of the Korean independence movement were Christians. People responded enthusiastically to the ideals and values (freedom, justice, and deliverance) of Christianity taught in the missionary schools. Like Park and Yoon, many women came to the United States because they knew that knowledge was the key to not only the survival of their country, but also the chance for a better life.

No factor (class and wealth, Christianity, and education) is the single determining factor that motivated women to become picture brides. Rather it is a combination of all three factors that inspired the women to take the leap of faith and immigrate to the US. Before Christianity was introduced, only the wealthy and upper class families had access to education. The feudalistic society deemed education proper for only men of noble birth and unnecessary for women and commoners. Therefore, even if affluent families had the means, traditional values would discourage families from educating their daughters. Christianity liberated Korean society from its conservative values and instead instilled ideals of equality and freedom that allowed anyone, including women to aspire for a life outside the traditional gender and class roles. Mission schools taught women to take public positions as ministers, teachers, and independence fighters. Without the previous educational experience, picture brides would not have recognized the significance of continuing their education

and the potential it provided them which motivated women to come to America.

Devastating Realities

The picture brides, full of expectations, started their voyage toward a new life that was supposed to give them an education. However, an unfortunate reality of marrying a poor immigrant laborer and the consequences of motherhood destroyed their chances of an education. The only reason picture brides married was to enter the country. Mary Lee clearly outlines the brides' goal: "I wanted to go to America for an education, rather than become a picture bride. That was my main objective. I even hid my 'husband's' picture and documents. I was not attracted to his picture nor the idea of marriage".²⁹ Marriage was a means to an unfulfilled end. As Yoon Yun-doy says, "an engaged woman had to get married and take care of the home and her own children. Study? That was out!"³⁰ Picture brides had high expectations for their lives in America, but the reality of being an immigrant laborer's wife and foreign born mother, prevented them from achieving this purpose.

Also, their privileged childhood did not prepare them for the hardships of trying to make a living as a destitute laborer's wife. For example, Kang Won-shin married into an aristocratic family. Her mother-in-law decided to uproot the family, a daughter and two sons (including Kang's husband),

²⁹ Ibid., 197.

³⁰ Ibid., 103.

and move to the US because she could no longer tolerate her husband living with several concubines, even though this was normal for wealthy men with high government positions.³¹ Kang remembers her telling him, "I am going to take our children to America and in the future, shame you. These children shall become educated and I shall become a wonderful person. You can remain as you are."³² Educating the children and making them successful was the only way to validate her disobedience against the patriarchal and feudal society. With high hopes, they packed their best silks and gold and silver treasures, not knowing what lied ahead. They arrived in Hawaii and were immediately sent to work in a sugar plantation by overseers who paid for their voyage. According to Kang, "Their soft, smooth hands were subjected to harsh and painful work of laborers from sun-up to sundown. They worked in the long silken clothes that they had been accustomed to and brought no other clothing. It was bewildering and humiliating for them."³³ The blisters on their hands and lack of practical work clothes show that not only were they then unprepared for the hard manual labor, but also they did not expect to live in the US as laborers. Kang was not the only one who was blindsided by the poor living conditions. Woo Myong-won, recalls learning how to cook from her husband once she arrived to the States because she never needed to learn back home and

³¹ Ibid., 172.

³² Ibid., 155.

³³ Ibid., 173.

was also busy with school.³⁴ Wealthy picture brides did not have the skills to execute household chores, let alone improvise because of the lack of resources. The picture brides were too preoccupied with household duties to spare time to study. Under the difficult circumstances, education was no longer a priority, but a luxury for women.

With marriage also came children, which further diminished the chances of the women pursuing their studies. Yoon Yun-doy's struggle to raise five children while running a restaurant was not an exceptional case, but rather a typical life of all of the picture brides. Yoon and her husband operated a small restaurant in Oakland, California. Yoon would leave her children at dawn and work until midnight as a waitress. Her children would walk six blocks in the morning to eat breakfast and go to school. She would bring her youngest baby to work at 4:30 a.m. in the morning and fix him a bed in the basement while she worked.³⁵ Many times the children not old enough for school would come and play at their mother's work places. However, this business venture would fail and like many other families, the Yoons travelled throughout California to find a stable income, from opening a fruit stand to later working on a farm. Taking care of the children while simultaneously running a business left little energy or time for picture brides to study. Many women were frustrated with this outcome.

³⁴ Ibid., 67.

³⁵ Ibid., 95.

Yoon regretted coming to the States every day because she was reminded of unfulfilling her dream.³⁶

Motherhood prevented women from pursuing their goal and restricted their activities to traditional female roles. During the research process, none of the sources mentioned birth control or reproductive choice. Picture brides and their husbands did not discuss having children let alone had any idea of what kind of family they wanted. Having children was considered an expected duty of a married woman. Consequently, childbearing and rearing disrupted the picture brides' pursuit of their ambitions and goals. Many women as demonstrated in this paper lamented over the untimely pregnancies, usually starting from their early married life, which forced them to stop or give up their education in the United States. Even after having several children, none of the women mentioned intentionally stop having children. The idea or possibility of having control over when and how many children to have was a foreign concept. Therefore, many of the Korean families had numerous children. However, the children did not remain a burden or obstacle to the family. Several states where a high density of Koreans lived barred Asians, albeit non-US citizens, from owning or renting property. Spurred by anti-Asian sentiments, California passed the California Alien Land Law of 1913 which prohibited "aliens ineligible for citizenship" from owning agricultural land or acquiring

³⁶ Ibid., 103.

long-term leases.³⁷ This law severely limited opportunities for Korean immigrant families to consider employment other than being a paid farmhand. However, Koreans manipulated the loophole in the law to own property by registering and buying it under their children's names, who were American citizens. Having children played a critical role in diversifying employment options because of their legal status, not to mention their contribution to the maintenance of the home by helping the mother with household chores. Regardless of the benefits of having children, the expenses outweighed the advantages and childbearing became the most detrimental obstacle that hindered the picture brides' ability to achieve their goal and prevented them from continuing an education.

The women also felt betrayed because many of their husbands lied to them in the picture and letters they sent. Park Soon-ha became a picture bride at 16 to her husband who claimed he was 40 when he was 75 years old. Many times the husbands would take an old photo of themselves or another picture of a younger male for better marriage prospects. After bearing three children Park became a *de facto* nurse to her older, paralyzed husband.³⁸ She cared for him for five years, personally bathing and feeding him, until he died at 81 from a leg infection. Mary Lee also suffered the similar fate of marrying an older man. She arrived in Hawaii to meet a husband who had no "resemblance to the

³⁷ Edwin E. Ferguson, "The California Alien Land Law and the Fourteenth Amendment," *California Law Review* vol.35, no. 1 (1947), 61.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

photograph” and still remembers the “immigration officer shaking his head in disbelief.”³⁹ The women sacrificed marrying for love in order to gain an education. Kim Suk-eun, who also married a much older man, adequately describes the betrayal she felt as bitterness towards her husband for his deception.⁴⁰ This frustration paired with the despair and disappointment of knowing they could not receive an education made them feel like failures. However, many women tried to fulfill a part of their dreams vicariously by sacrificing their lives to make sure their children received an education.⁴¹ The women were not at fault for taking on the traditional female role of caretaker. They were only complying with the circumstances created by men and socially constructed norms.

Ignoring the Gap

Picture brides are not responsible for their inaccurate, or rather lack of, portrayal in the history of Korean Americans. When researching Korean immigrant history, few prolific studies on picture brides and their contribution to the formation of Korean American society exist. Even leading scholars in Korean American studies either do not elaborate on the significance of their lives or outright ignore them in their scholarship. For example, the main purpose of Bong-Youn Choy’s book, *Koreans in America*, is to produce a detailed scholarly body of work that presents the historical

³⁹ Ibid., 197.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁴¹ Ibid., 104.

and structural contexts behind the immigration of the earliest Koreans.⁴² The book organized chronologically, addresses the various structural conditions (social, political, and economic factors) in Korea that motivated Koreans to come to America. However, Choy does not elaborate on the lives of picture brides even though it was a systemic form of immigration. Likewise, Wayne Patterson's book, *The Ilse: First-Generation Korean Immigrants in Hawaii, 1903-1973*, which documents the first generation of Korean immigrants only briefly describes the practices of picture brides.⁴³ Instead, Patterson should have further expounded on the basic knowledge of the picture bride system and made correlations between the women and other aspects of the Korea immigrant life such as local political and social organizations and anti-colonial nationalist movement that he covers in his book. Scholars of Korean American history do not invest in learning about picture brides because they assume that the women were typical Korean housewives and mothers adhering to traditional gender roles. They do not recognize the gap in the expectations and the reality of the women's lives that forced them to sacrifice their goal and conform to traditional gender roles. Refusing to study this gap ignores a much larger and complex question of sexism and gender binaries in Korean history. The upbringings of

⁴² Won Moo Hurh, review of *Koreans in America*, by Bong-Youn Choy, *The International Migration Review* vol.14, no. 4 (Winter 1980), 583-585.

⁴³ Kyeyoung Park, review of *The Ilse: First-Generation Korean Immigrants in Hawaii, 1903-1973*, by Wayne Patterson, *Journal of American Ethnic History* vol. 20, no. 3, *Migration and the Making of North America* (Spring 2001), 174-175.

these women show that they were ambitious and unlike other women of their time. The reality of marrying a poor laborer created unfortunate circumstances that forced them to become housewives and mothers. If scholars could have identified the gap which explains that these women were not willingly complying with traditional gender roles, picture brides would have been included in the master narrative as an important factor in the Korean American society instead of being ignored.

Overcoming the Odds

The failure to receive education does not mean that the lives of Korean picture brides were in vain. Even without an education from the States, these women became crucial members of the Korean American community. As teachers, community leaders, and independence fighters, they channeled their frustration into fulfilling roles in the society. Many of the women worked or volunteered as Korean language teachers for the American born children. Park Kyung-shin started a Korean language school in Los Angeles for \$5 a month that later expanded into a summer camp to allow student from rural areas to participate.⁴⁴ The parents were enthusiastic for their children to not only learn Korean so that they could communicate with their children, but also for them to learn about their heritage, especially with the colonization. The immigrants' identity as Koreans was integral to the dignity and existence of the community. The

⁴⁴ Sunoo, *Korean Picture Brides*, 140.

women played a vital role in making sure the legacy continued to the next generation. Likewise, the women created numerous clubs to aid the Korean independence movement. In Hawaii alone, the *Buin-hoi* (Women's Club) and the *Buin Koo-ji Hoe* (Women's Relief Organization) existed apart from other national and coed groups. Kim Hei-won founded the Women's Patriotic Association in Dinuba, CA in 1919 and was its first president. She later expanded the club with branches in San Francisco, CA, Willows, CA, and places in Mexico.⁴⁵ Women started fundraisers to collect relief materials such as clothes to send back home.⁴⁶ They also sold US war bonds like Park Kyung-shin who sold a half million dollars' worth of US bonds for the Korean National Association during the Hollywood Bowl and Pasadena Bowl from 1944 to 1946.⁴⁷ Through their patriotic activities, the picture brides were able to step out of their roles as wives and mothers and actively engage in public duties. Their lack of education did not hinder their ability to participate in politics and educating the youth to become productive members of society.

Conclusion

The gap in the expectations picture brides had for their new lives in America and the harsh realities of poverty did not prevent these women from leading fulfilling and remarkable lives. The majority of women came from affluent

⁴⁵ Ibid., 166.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 198.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 141.

and upper class families. Their privileged lifestyle did not prepare them for the difficult life as poor working class women. Although Christianity and their previous educational experience introduced them to the possibilities of a better life, the reality of poverty and an incompetent husband could not accommodate their dream of continuing their education. Yet, the picture brides found ways to overcome their failure by finding other outlets to contribute to the community. However, the master narrative of Korean American history ignores this gap and assumes that women willingly accepted the traditional gender roles. This incorrect assumption devalues the purpose of their lives just because they did not achieve their goal. Consequently, picture brides are not only incorrectly represented in history, but also forgotten. They did not need formal education to teach Korean language and history and create organizations to lead local independence movements. These public positions show the women's determination and success in defying the traditional gender roles that were supposed to depreciate their contribution to the community and the value of their lives. The master narrative ignores how the women overcame the obstacles of poverty, survival, motherhood, and traditional gender roles to contribute to the community as teachers and patriots. Marriage was not the ultimate goal but a means to receiving an education. Understanding the irreconcilable gap between their expectations and reality explains this misconception that women were content with their lives as housewives and mothers. Rather, the picture

brides made the best of their circumstances and are not at fault for the unfortunate reality that ended their dreams of pursuing an education. Rather it was the picture brides' resilience and determination which enabled them to bridge the gap and allow them to live fulfilling lives.