

BEYOND A SINGLE STORY: COMPLICATING HISTORIES OF PICTURE
BRIDES IN ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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Soojin Jeong

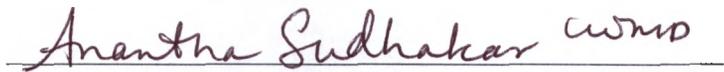
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Beyond a Single Story: Complicating Histories of Picture Brides in Asian American Literature* by Soojin Jeong, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: Master of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University.



Anantha Sudhakar, PhD

Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies



Eric Pido, PhD

Associate Professor of Asian American Studies

BEYOND A SINGLE STORY: COMPLICATING HISTORIES OF PICTURE
BRIDES IN ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Soojin Jeong
San Francisco, California
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From the late 19th to early 20th centuries, young women from East Asian countries such as Korea, Japan, and Okinawa came to Hawaii and the Pacific Coast of the United States as picture brides. Though they dreamed of better lives in a new country, most of them faced extreme hardships due to racial discrimination, poverty, domestic violence, and patriarchal oppression following their immigration. Their distinctive historical narrative has been explored in different art forms such as poetry, historical fiction, and film. In my research, I will explore how fiction and poetry by Julie Otsuka and Cathy Song encourage an understanding of picture brides' stories that challenges a single story of survival. I will show how their works differ from other writers who only portray picture brides as an object of sacrifice and who focus on these women's roles as mother and wife, or as a victim of patriarchy who is saved by white men. I demonstrate how Otsuka's novel *The Buddha in the Attic*, and Song's poetry collection *Picture Bride*, helps audiences to understand a more complex narrative of picture brides in regard to their ethnic identity and sexuality. As a scholar at the nation's only College of Ethnic Studies, I have an interest in advocating for the voice of Asian American foremothers who existed not just as a sacrificing wife and mother, but also as resilient, contradictory and vulnerable subjects

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

Anantha Sudhakar wro

Chair, Thesis Committee

8/8/18

Date

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CHAPTER 1 : ORIGINS

INTRODUCTION

Did she simply close
 the door of her father's house
 and walk away. And
 was it a long way
 through the tailor shops of Pusan
 to the wharf where the boat
 waited to take her to an island
 whose name she had
 only recently learned

Picture Bride,
 Cathy Song

그녀는 아버지의 집 대문을
 그저 닫곤
 떠나 버렸다. 그리고
 그녀가 이제 겨우 이름을 익힌 섬으로
 그녀를 데려가려
 기다리고 있는 배가 정박한
 선착장으로 가는 부산의 양복점을 지나는 길은
 긴 길이었을까

사진 신부,
 캐시 송

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PICTURE BRIDES

During late 19th century and early 20th century, a group of Asian immigrant women came as picture brides and settled in Hawaii and the West Coast of North

America. Between 1907 to 1923, more than 20,000 Japanese and 951 Korean picture brides came to Hawaii, while between 1908 to 1920 over 10,000 picture brides came to the West Coast (Lee, 113). As with any migration that happened throughout history, evident push and pull factors in picture brides' immigration played a vital role in creating unique culture and experience of connecting Asia to North America. As the narrator of the epigraph from Cathy Song's *Picture Bride* above tries to imagine, locating the image of picture brides' journey evokes a question of what pushed them out of the security of home.

First, as a push factor, the feminist ideologies from inside and outside of East Asian nations included the desire for women's empowerment, self-realization thorough education, and better economic attainment. These values affected the population of young women in their homelands. The active Christian missionary workers that urged women to gain literacy fueled the desire for formal education among the young women. Particularly relevant to Korean picture brides' experience, the people of Korea during this time were suffering immensely from the harsh oppression and exploitation of Japanese colonization in Korean peninsula. Whether it was from Confucianist patriarchal oppression or colonial exploitation, the Korean women who left their homes as picture brides desired a better future for themselves away from the reality in their homelands (Lee and Yung, 199). Despite the fact that their entry to the U.S. was solely dependent on their marital status, choosing to become 'picture brides' was a conscious strategy to escape the pressure of patriarchal and colonial oppression.

On the other hand, what pulled these young brides across the Pacific ocean was the bachelor societies largely made of contract laborers who worked for plantation farms, trans-continental railroad work, and a few other industries that required cheap labor during the process of nation building in the U.S. during the 19th and 20th centuries. Because of discriminatory immigration policies and laws, such as the Gentleman's agreement, Chinese exclusion law, as well as a ban on interracial marriage, the Asian laborers of bachelor societies had very few choices left in creating families except to utilize their homelands' customized courtship: arranged marriage (Lee, 113). By asking matchmakers and family members back in their homelands to find young brides who were willing to travel across the ocean, they could start a family in the United States.

RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The search for a way to truly remember the stories of picture brides pushes me to create this thesis. Specifically, I compare the literary works, *The Buddha in the Attic* by Julie Otsuka, and *Picture Bride* by Cathy Song, to find the narratives of picture brides almost a century after their arrival to their new homeland. *The Buddha in the Attic* was a finalist for 2011's National book awards with its distinctive first person plural voice that unveils the stories of picture brides who were largely from Kagoshima, Japan. Otsuka wrote this novel as a prequel to her another award-winning work, *When the Emperor was divine*, that evokes questions on identity, family, and loyalty of Japanese American community. On the other hand, the poetry collection, *Picture Bride*, is written by Cathy Song, a third generation Asian American who was born and raised in Hawaii. She created a collection of poems that are sensual,

colorful, and delicate that centers around her gender, sexuality, and her connections to her family and her home island. The particular piece of poetry from her collection that I read alongside Otsuka's work, *Picture Bride*, traces the origin of her picture bride grandmother, her journey, and finally, the image of her grandmother in Honolulu, Hawaii, when she unites with her husband.

Indeed, the space that picture brides' existence holds in our every day life is seldom visible. Their story is rarely told and taught, neither inside, nor outside of history classrooms. In other words, under colonialism, imperialism, and hegemonic power, picture brides' narrative is a little known history that exists outside of mainstream narrative. The invisibility of picture brides' narratives is why I am utilizing literature to bring a true understanding of the early Asian immigrant women's stories. Tracing the picture brides' collective voice requires an act of telling the history from below, where picture brides fought for their space in the system of power. As a matter of fact, the history of picture brides exists as a collective narrative of subaltern voices as Gayatri Spivak coins the term, "Subaltern women". The narratives of this group cannot be heard because of their position within the patriarchal, white, and heteronormative system in their reality (Spivak, 73).

Therefore, what we know of them actually is the mere images of picture brides that only exist in our own making of stereotypes. To move away from such images that do not grasp their full stories, I suggest tracing their voices in literature to include not only what happened but also how the events of life before departure, immigration, settlement, and assimilation. Literature has such power that allows us to live beyond our own experience. It helps us to not only put ourselves in others' experiences, but also empathize with sentiments and intuitions beyond experiences of others. As

mentioned above, my intention in writing this thesis is not just about seeking an attention to the historical narrative of picture brides. Rather, I aspire to research the delicate, melancholic, and complicated literary voices of picture brides to demonstrate that their narrative matters, even though they are not heard in our daily life.

Indeed, the literary works that I read in this thesis, *Picture Bride*, and *The Buddha in the Attic*, share the common ground of imaginations. In their works, the authors demonstrate imagining the emotions of picture brides. Here, I propose a research objective: investigating the voices of picture brides by listening to them without imposing label and evaluation on the significance of their immigration and settlement in the U.S. This investigation is an effort to move away from merely seeking a factual information. I ask that we, Asian American scholars, to shift our gaze on researching the stories of picture brides. I propose to move away from interpreting picture brides' stories as forgotten narrative, and really listen to their individual and communal voices that share their resentment, confusion, and longing. By using such shift, I will demonstrate how the literary works by Otsuka and Song promote understanding the wholesome narrative of early Asian immigrant women's lives through using the emotional cost of survival as well as the hardships they faced. In other words, I aim to prove that the works by these two authors reveal how picture brides held complicated emotions such as resentment, anxiety, regrets, rage, ironic comforts in their particular reality as immigrant women in 20th century. I aspire to bring a perspective that picture brides wanted to attain their own agency outside the image of a tokenized figure of sacrifice in a hierarchy of hegemonic power.

OVERVIEWS OF CHAPTERS

This thesis consists of five chapters. In addition to this introduction chapter that shared the historical background of picture brides and my main argument, three more body chapters and a conclusion chapter will follow. From chapter two to five, I will analyze how picture bride narratives memorialize picture brides.

In Chapter Two, which is a literature review chapter, I will demonstrate the contributions of different scholars' work in the oral history of early Asian immigrant women in 20th century in the United States. By comparing different approaches from previous scholars on interpreting picture brides' lives, I will bring in a debate on what identities picture brides were given by the scholars. Through this debate, I will address the danger of tokenizing picture brides as 'pioneer women'. In other words, I will show how the earlier publication of Sonia Sunoo on Korean picture brides in the Pacific Northwest dangerously romanticizes picture brides' hardships by assigning an identity, 'ethnic pioneer', to the brides. To contrast the idea of remembering picture brides only as a historical figure who sacrificed their lives for their husbands and children as ethnic pioneer, I will also introduce a feminist approach from other scholars, such as Chai, to reframe picture brides' realities and agency. Then, I will provide a brief comparison between historical fictions on picture brides written by male authors, and the main literary works by Otsuka and Song. Through this comparison, I will argue that we need a paradigm that does not limit the picture brides experiences in heteronormative ideas that tokenize their lives only in context of sacrifice.

In Chapter Three, I will analyze the distinctive first person plural narrative voice from *The Buddha in the Attic* I will argue how picture brides' narratives include their fluid sexuality, which they cultivated even going through the back-breaking labors and hardships in a new environment. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Otsuka portrays the interactions among nameless Japanese picture brides to allow her audience to infer the emotions of the characters. In addition, I will quote one of the Korean picture bride interviews from the oral history book, *Korean Picture Brides: 1903-1920L A Collection of Oral Histories*, to prove that Otsuka displays the sentiments of picture brides in their direct words. The main argument of this chapter will show that Otsuka's work allows us to understand the life stories of picture brides as they were, instead of measuring them to the standards of hegemonic power.

In Chapter Four, I will read Cathy Song's poem, *Picture Bride*. By paying close attention to the structure and content of this poem, I will also share how Song uses what poetry offers particularly to enhance the understanding of narratives. In detail, I will share that Song uses metaphor, different punctuation, and cinematic approach to write her poem to draw an imagination of her grandmother's journey as a picture bride. Lastly, I will discuss how Song's writing exemplifies the intergenerational connection of picture brides to their descendants. Finally, I will conclude this thesis by synthesizing what picture brides narratives in literature contributes to Asian American studies, and suggests future directions for research on picture bride literature and narrative.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Known for his best-selling historical fiction, *Moloka'i*, Alan Brennert uses multiple historical recordings of Hawaii, such as immigration files, newspaper articles, and transcription of court trials to create a novel, *Honolulu*. A fictional character, Jin, comes to the island of Oahu as a picture bride from her homeland, Korea. Only to find out that her husband who she expects to build a better life with is nobody than a drunken gambler. Soon after her arrival, she realizes that her husband could not care less about her adapting to a new environment; consequently, she struggles to make ends meet with a job at a factory. Eventually, she falls in love with another Korean man whom she finds the typical 'happily ever after' with, after winning a divorce from her formal abusive husband.

Another picture bride literature, *The Paradise of Sun*¹, written in Korean by Dulhee Lee, shares a similar plot to the previous novel, *Honolulu*. Based in Hawaii, the novel attempts to depict the lives of Korean picture brides in a foreign island. Yet again, the main character, Jehyun, suffers because of the debt that her husband left to her. Working at a brothel, she tries to find a better life outside her marriage. In the end, she falls in love with a rich and influential White man, Carl, in the city she now calls home, Honolulu. She finds a meaning of her suffered life through building a community and a loving relationship with Carl.

What these two historical fictions, *Honolulu* and *The Paradise of Sun* have in common is how one-dimensional their main characters are. Though both story lines are drawn from a historical narrative of picture brides, they severely lack originality

¹ directly translated by Korean book title, 태양의 낙원

as well as genuine understanding of the immigrant women. Yet, both characters encounter the obstacles that many picture brides actually went through, such as oppression from patriarchal exploitation from her family and troublesome marriage with an abusive husband. They are brave enough to embark on a journey to foreign space and endure the unexpected hardship; however, their bravery and resilience are limited. The picture bride characters in the novels, who are beautiful yet strong, find a meaning of life which they could not gain in their homeland, through simply falling in love. Their sufferings are saved by heteronormative romance. In the fictional spaces that Lee and Brennert create, such romance gives a new hope to sad and beaten-up Korean picture brides. In other words, since the sufferings of the picture brides characters, Jin and Jehyun, are measured and molded in a token of sacrifice, their lives are easily 'saved'.

Consequently, in Lee's and Brennert's one-dimensional stories, there is no room for discussing the true pains that picture brides paid. Complicated emotions such as melancholia, agony, homesickness, and even an ephemeral state of happiness that helped picture brides to sustain the harsh reality are missing in these fictional narratives. Romanticized of their pains and sufferings in the single story, there is no challenge of addressing picture brides' sexuality, gender, and cost of survival in these literary works.

Indeed, recreating a historical narrative of picture brides' voice, is a formidable work of literature that requires more than an exciting plot, dramatic romance, and cliché-like happy ending. It is a work that calls channeling the complicated emotional costs that Asian American foremothers offered in an exchange of lives in their own decisions. Here, I ask how we can truly remember picture brides'

trans-pacific womanhood without romanticizing their pains. How do we move away from the narratives told by the writers who write about what they do not really know? How do we capture the coexistence of resentment and sorrow as well as empowerment and agency? How do we patiently listen to the delicate yet radical voices of picture brides? How do we fathom that their lives are meaningful despite many of them still could not achieve their life-long goal of getting a formal education? In this chapter, I will explore the academic dialogue on the history of picture brides to answer this set of questions.

.THE DANGER OF 'ETHNIC PIONEERISM'

Sonia S. Sunoo's article on Korean picture brides of the Pacific Northwest is one of the few early academic interpretations of Asian women immigrants who came to Hawaii and the West coast as picture brides. Published in 1978, the article includes the stories of Korean picture brides who spent a large sum of their lives on farms in Oregon and Montana. While Sunoo's desire in bringing attention to this rarely-told stories of early Asian immigrants is evident, her approach in commemorating the Asian immigrant foremothers in this article is rather problematic.

Her approach deems Korean picture brides as 'ethnic pioneers' who sacrificed their lives as immigrant forerunners, rather than as whole human beings who desired and dreamed of personal agency. While it is important to shed light on the works that Korean picture put in raising their families and securing financial stability under the harsh reality of poverty and racial discrimination, such approaches dangerously define picture brides' role only within the system of patriarchy--as a mother or wife whose individuality is wiped out, rather than exploring more complex personal narratives.

In all six cases of the different Korean women that Sunoo investigates in this article, the writer assigns an identity, 'pioneer women' to describe them. She starts her article by asking what were 'pioneer women' from Korea like:

The usual thought of pioneer women in the Pacific Northwest brings to mind women in long dresses and sunbonnets who crossed the Plains in covered wagons, or perhaps native American Indian women. But there were others at later times, like the first Korean women in the region. What were these later pioneers, and why did they leave the security of their families and homes?

(51)

She adds that the Korean picture brides settled in Pacific Northwest with their courageous, determined, yet also precocious characteristics.

However, besides describing the attire that 'pioneer women of the Pacific northwest' would wear and their transportation to evoke an image of colonial White settlers in 20th century, the author does not mention picture brides' life-long journey of seeking their agency. Sunoo does not discuss how the picture brides' life in Pacific northwest was an effort in moving away from the second class citizenships. In other words, there is no mention that women who came to Pacific northwest as Korean picture brides wanted to change their reality that denied their self-determination and educational rights. Instead, Sunoo asserts that the significance of their contribution on immigrant narratives can be measured in their supporting roles as wife and mother. In summing up her article the scholar writes:

An outstanding and admirable feature of the early Korean pioneer women in their deep loyalty as picture brides; they were true to the men they got to know only after meeting them for the first time in America. Their love of family and devotion to children is a heritage to be cherished. The Myong-Soons, Soon-His, In-Sooks and other Korean pioneer women courageously

continued the farm life along in order to rear and educate their children after the death of their husbands, teaching their children Korean-ness as well as good citizenship. No known major crimes have ever been committed by their offspring. (63)

The quote evidently displays how the author measure the success of picture brides' lives in a limited role as a docile wife and care-giving mother. Sunoo specifically mentions how 'admirable feature' of the picture brides lie in their 'deep loyalty to their husbands'. Obviously, she portrays the meaning of picture brides' life and immigration only in relation to their roles as wife and mother.

Additionally, she mentions, because there was no major crimes committed by their offsprings, the picture brides' experience as immigrants is meaningful. Here, I notice a lens on interpreting Korean picture brides' experience from a patriarchal perspective; the problem in this approach is its romanticization of the sacrifices and sufferings of women under the harsh reality of gender and racial oppression. In other words, Sunoo's measurement of picture brides' stories does not pay deserved attention to the cost of survival they paid and individuality they held.

Therefore, the author's analysis of women's narratives according to their marital status and the education and the low crime rates of their children, demonstrates the limitations of Sunoo's approach to picture bride history. To elaborate, this claim depicts the lives of picture brides only as an honorary-white's stories that are complicit in 'settler colonialism'. To depict picture brides as 'Korean pioneers' who successfully settled in America, like the white settlers, is overlooking the danger of the system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of indigenous people and cultures (Veracini, 3). This is because the ideology abstracts the labors of non-white racial and ethnic groups as well as denies the existence of

indigenous populations in North America. It normalizes the settler occupation that involves exploiting lands and resources to which indigenous peoples have genealogical relationship. In other words, the depiction of picture brides as pioneers dangerously romanticizes these Asian immigrant women's stories by perpetuating them as oppressors who are complicit in 'settler colonialism'. The identity given to picture brides in this article does not take account of picture brides' stories that were filled with emotional and physical cost of survival under the harsh reality of homesickness, racism, white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy.

In addition, Sunoo states, "The early Korean women who settled in the Pacific Northwest all came as picture brides, and all had romantic dreams of a life of luxury in a golden world of opportunities" (63). This quote shows how the author concludes that the main motive of Korean picture brides' immigration to Pacific Northwest was to obtain a better economic attainment. Nonetheless, I raise a question if this is true. I suggest re-evaluating Sonia Sunoo's conclusion that the biggest motive of picture brides' immigration was solely in seeking a better economic attainment. Reevaluating such conclusion requires a critical approach to the past publications on picture brides. In fact, to take such approach to the life stories of picture brides, we may start by investigating their lives even before the departure to the U.S. Since the approach requires researching their stories from their motherlands, I will start by looking at what pushed them to cross the Pacific Ocean from their motherland.

First, investigating the social influence, that the early Asian immigrant women were under in their homeland, is a key element in understanding the picture brides' social setting before their departure. To reiterate, I seek to find what contributed to their decision to become picture bride. An article on investigating the journal, "*In*

Quest of Modern Womanhood: Sinyoja, A Feminist Journal in Colonial Korea.” gives an example on what social influences affected the young women who become picture brides. This article was published by group of women following the independence movement in Korea on March 1st 1919. It is written by Young-Hee Kim, and serves as an portrait of the social influence in the quest of new womanhood that swept colonial Korea during Japanese annexation that happened in early 1900’s. Kim elaborates in her publication how the journal, *Sinyoja*, effectively shows why the birth of radical approach to new womanhood was inevitable in colonial Korea.

Indeed, under harsh colonial government surveillance and exploitation, the suffering that the general public in Korea went through was beyond explanation. Basic human rights of Korean people were absolutely denied during this time by the colonial oppression. Schools and universities forbade speaking Korean language and emphasized manual labor and unconditional loyalty to the Emperor of Japan. Public places were forced to adopt Japanese culture and customs to fulfill the colonial government’s agenda to extinguish Korean history, language, and customs. Additionally, the influence of Confucianism, that was first introduced to Korean peninsula in 16th century, was dominating everyday value of its people in 20th century. In Confucianist society, the agency of Korean women were strictly controlled according to the systematic operation in patriarchy. To reiterate, the Korean women from this period were denied not only self-determination, specifically in terms of their desire for education and agency in marriage, but also their ethnic identity under colonial rule (Shin, 37).

Accordingly, the article by Young-Hee Kim, highlights the contribution of the journal, *Sinyoja*, noting especially how the writers of this journal adopt a feminist framework in their writings:

Sinyoja's radical revision and call for change amid existing gender ideologies and practices exploded on the cultural scene. In fact, the journal ignited the spark for Korean intellectual's debates on pressing social issues, including their scrutiny of colonialism and in imaging the future of Korea. Such discussion heated up as the tension and confusion generated by the competing claims of colonialism and nationalism, Western feminism and patriarchal Confucianism, individualism and familism, and modernity and tradition intensified in the 1920s. (Kim, 46)

This quote implies that the journal, *Sinyoja*, was an outburst of efforts that fights back the systemic gender oppression that female subjects of colonial Korea were under. Hence, the feminist ideas from this scholarly article points out the aspiration of writers from the journal, *Sinyoja*, in liberating themselves from Confucian-patriarchal familial and marital institutions.

According to Kim, despite the journal's short life due to the colonial censorship in 1920, *Sinyoja* contains a valuable evidence of effort in bringing women's awakening, empowerment, and self-realization through education in colonial Korea. The journal specifically mentions, "Soon, any serious interrogation of Korea's destiny under Japanese rule was incomplete without invoking the problem of women. Thus Sinyoja played catalytic role in initiating and fueling the discourse on Korea's 'woman question'. The journal is rightly credited with having given popular currency to the term Sinyoja (new woman) itself at the time." Unmistakably, by reading Kim's article, one can realize that investigating the importance of the journal, *Sinyoja*, is vital in interpreting the womanhood of Korea in early 1900s. To

reiterate, the interpretation of new womanhood under patriarchal and colonial oppression offers a key in tracing the origin of Korean picture brides' immigrant narrative.

Through looking at the social influence in questing a new womanhood, I notice that the picture brides' motive of immigration was not only an act of seeking a better economic opportunity. Rather, picture brides were putting their desperate attempt in redefining their symbolic statement of identity. Thus, we can locate the origin of push factor for picture brides' emigration to the U.S. here: they were seeking a space far away from their home that pressured women to conform to the societal standards of what it means to be a woman.

Furthermore, the scholar, Theodore Jun Yoo, points out in colonial Korea, women lived their lives within the context of colonialism and its mechanisms of power. Here in Yoo's argument from his book, "*The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea*", we may trace another push factor that inspired young women who dared to exchange their familiar surroundings to a foreign land that they had never even seen. Using V.N. Voloshinov, Yoo mandates that women's lives should be examined in a particular context in literary such as novels, and nonliterary forms: newspapers, government statistics. His book seeks to reveal the contradictions and tensions of how the state, industrialists, doctors, teachers, journalists, and contemporary writers in colonial Korea built representations of women.

Instead of offering a conclusion that only involves a limited binary analysis on whether Korean women in the early 1900s held the agency of new womanhood or not, what Yoo urges his readers to understand is the tension and contradictions that Korean women carried under dual oppressions from colonial government and deeply-

embedded patriarchy within their society. Hence, his demonstration of Korean womanhood of colonial Korea reveals the fragile positionality that may have worked as a push factor for Korean picture brides' immigration to the United States.

Indeed, he argues in the context of modernity in colonial Korea: "Korean women discovered new opportunities to articulate their sense of spatial location" (195). To reiterate, the self-conscious trials of Korean women to reclaim themselves and redefine gender roles and norms of femininity in colonial Korea suffered greatly. Again, this is because they were under the dual confrontation with modernity and colonial power. By examining these two scholars, Kim and Yoo, we can further contextualize why these women chose to carve their lives in an unfamiliar land. While Kim's investigation on feminist ideas in the journal published in early 1900s shows the social influence and school of thoughts that influenced women in Korea, Yoo invites us to see beyond the measurement of those women's attainment of social recognition as a new woman.

FEMINIST SCHOLARS: MOVING AWAY FROM ROMANTICIZATION OF PICTURE BRIDES' COST OF SURVIVAL

On the contrary, a feminist approach to look at the lives of picture brides brings in an approach to truly understand the wholesome picture bride narrative. In her review of oral history regarding feminist theory and personal narrative, Julie Cruikshank states that the symbolic statements of identity, such as life stories, must be interpreted in the context of social conditions in which they are rooted. These conditions include the particular reference to class, race, and gender (133). She adds that a framework of using oral histories to our understanding of complex society is a

recurring theme of investigating buried history. Therefore, according to Cruikshank's assertion, understanding picture brides' narratives should take a particular framework that contextualizes the reality of early immigrant women in relation to the complex social influence that formed their class, labor, sexuality, gender, and race.

Alice Yun Chai, adopts a feminist school of thoughts in her article on the research of picture brides' history. Chai's publication reflects the findings that Kim and Yoo demonstrated in their research, on how picture brides' life stories can be interpreted through understanding history from women's perspective. Drawing on feminist scholars, such as Nancy Dye, Chai stresses the importance of a separate sphere approach: that women's own accounts of their experience should be an essential historical material. Therefore, in her article, she considers the picture brides' entire life cycle stages to investigate their narratives: childhood, adolescence, marriage, motherhood, to grandmother-hood and old age. Chai's feminist approach to unwind the life stories of picture brides, then puts these women as actors and agents of change rather than passive victims. In this process, Chai finds various elements that painted picture brides' lives: creation of women's culture with separate forms of creativity and spirituality, as well as different tradition, institutions, responsibilities and values, and their struggles to gain agency and freedom from patriarchal and cultural assumptions.

For example, through the interviews Chai conducted during her research, she reveals that many women came to Hawaii as picture brides to see the world, to learn English, to receive a formal education, and to get away from in-laws or to become successful women. One of Japanese picture brides she interviewed shared:

When the principal and my homeroom teacher came to our home to persuade my brother to let me continue on to the seventh grade, my brother, who was the household head after my father's retirement, said, 'If a girl had too much education, no man would marry her'. Then, I was sent out to learn sewing instead. So, I decided to come to Hawaii. (5)

Through this short yet powerful anecdote, we may see why Chai proposed the idea that the picture brides were actually the actors of change than just passive victims. Indeed, many picture brides had intentions of using marriage as a means to attain the individual agenda of exploring life outside the norm of their social status in their homeland. In fact, what Chai reveals truly expands Sunoo's conclusion that picture brides' main motive for their immigration was seeking a better economic opportunity. To reiterate, according to Chai, marrying a stranger who is already out of their home country was one of very limited options of gaining independence from social norms for early Asian immigrant women. Therefore, the findings from Chai's article unfold the harsh reality that the picture brides experienced after their marriage was part of their journey in self-determination and survival strategy.

Additionally, later in her article, Chai concludes that the life histories of Hawaii's picture brides from Japan, Okinawa, and Korea demonstrate a story of bravery, patience, resourcefulness, dignity, and ingenious strength of character. She illustrates how the picture brides in Hawaii demonstrated significant survival strategies:

These women demonstrated their ingenuity in creating survival strategies, first in their homelands by making the decision to come to Hawaii in order to free themselves from economic, political, and cultural oppression. In Hawaii, they developed survival strategies involving economic control, female networks and solidarity groups, designed to overcome the harsh conditions of their lives

and to enable them to become politically active in the national independence movement and labor struggles. They had an adventurous spirit and the courage to make a better life for themselves, and later for their children. Through their unceasing religious faith and hard work, the majority were eventually successful, to varying degree, in achieving three major goals: economic betterment, the education of the next generation, and political and personal empowerment. (19)

Chai's argument deserves close attention as she underlines the very struggle of picture brides as well as how they made the best of their situation. Not only did these immigrant women suffer to overcome economic betterment and provide the education of the next generation, but they also fulfilled their political and personal empowerment. Here, Chai fills the gap in Sunoo's argument from the article, *Korean Women Pioneers of Pacific Northwest*; Chai shows how the ordinary women taught themselves the strength to survive with empowerment that also became a foundation for building a community for following generation.

In Chai's additional publication on Hawaiian picture brides, *Women's History in Public: "Picture Brides" of Hawaii*, she uses the historical approach of viewing women as active political agents of culture and history by looking at women as whole human beings. Similar to her previous publication, Chai successfully demonstrates a feminist historical approach in her investigation of Hawaiian picture brides. Chai's second article shows how only individual women can speak for themselves in their own accounts. While Chai's former publication exemplifies how to truly understand the picture bride experience, her latter work reveals how female descendants of picture brides commemorate their foremothers and their resilience. She shares her

research findings after a series of public presentations of the slide/ tape project and the dialogue between panel members and audience:

Female descendants of picture brides remembered their foremothers and their own sufferings, and even male descendants of picture brides were deeply moved and grateful. Young adult women of varied racial and ethnic groups in Hawaii and on the mainland frequently commented that knowing the circumstances of the picture brides and hearing their voices bridged cultural, ethnic, and racial gaps, locating common ground among women's experiences. The audience became more aware both of women's common experience and varying degrees and kinds of multiple oppressions. (60)

This quote reflects how Chai uses the narratives of Hawaiian picture brides to contribute on raising a feminist consciousness. By demonstrating the importance of the Asian immigrant women's history, she brings a multicultural and intergenerational understanding of women's history. Since their stories are accessible and relatable to all age groups, Chai could draw the related themes of acknowledging picture brides' history from their descendants. Indeed, this article offers a space where women from different ethnic, class, generational, and religious backgrounds could connect on their shared sufferings in the system of power by looking at the lives of picture brides. Therefore, the quote gives an example on how revisiting the historical narratives widens the understanding of picture bride experiences across cultures and generations. Yet again, the important component in bringing the understanding of picture brides experience lies in using their own words. Chai's feminist approach allows her readers to observe the history as 'insiders' into the reality of multiple oppressions of culture, class, race, and gender from the perspective of picture brides.

Interestingly, Sunoo also released more research on picture bride experience after publishing her article, *Korean women Pioneer of the Pacific Northwest*. The

book Sunoo wrote is a collection of recorded interviews with multiple Korean picture brides, who settled in Hawaii and the San Francisco bay area. The significant additional information Sunoo provides in her later publication, *Korean Picture Brides, 1903-1920 A Collection of Oral histories*, is the evidence that Korean picture brides came to the U.S. intending to pursue formal education. Transcribed and translated from Korean to English for its audience, this collection is invaluable historical material that shares picture brides own words in telling the tales of their history. Sunoo notes that their agenda in embarking on a journey across the Pacific ocean was beyond becoming just spouses of laborers. In doing so, she asks questions:

Who were these women who expressed such tremendous *han*² ? How did they come to be American pioneers? In contrast to the American pioneer women who travel across the continent in covered wagons, these young adventurous Korean picture brides arrived by themselves in 1910. They fully expected to step into a golden paradise where their dreams of a life of luxury and ease would be realized. They had grown increasingly more resentful of the patriarchal society in which men initiated moral codes to subdue them. (18)

Though Sunoo still depicts the picture brides as pioneers, she definitely deepens the meaning behind such identity in this quote. For instance, in her previous article, she simply describes Korean picture brides as pioneers without challenging the conceptualization of such figure. On the contrary, in this quote, she depicts the Korean immigrant women as a group who came to the U.S. as they had grown 'resentful of the patriarchal society'. Additionally, she distances these Asian immigrants from their white counterparts by addressing how Korean women

²(deep) resentment [sorrow, regret] in Korean

embarked on a journey to embody the pioneer identity 'alone' unlike the rest of women during that time.

Furthermore, she develops how she interprets the interviews from the Korean picture brides. According to the quote, she unmistakably aligns her idea to the feminist approach Chai proposes. This feminist idea Sunoo asserts, once again, displays the immigrant women of early 20th century as vigorous actor who transformed the pressure to conform to the societal standards into a motivating force to redefine their womanhood. Indeed, the in-depth interviews of twenty Korean picture brides from Sunoo's book touch upon the process of transnational match-making in their homeland as well as later chapter of their lives after their husbands' death in which they had to perform a role, not only as a care-giver, but also a bread winner. Sunoo concludes: though the majority of Korean picture brides did not achieve their life-long goal of pursuing a formal education in the U.S, the credibility of their courage and agency exist in their survival despite the economic hardship and racial discrimination.

In a nut shell, the scholars who conducted research on the history of picture brides' fragile, yet radical womanhood of Asian women in early 1900's emphasize the feminist approach to their stories. This feminist approach stresses the importance of using women's own words to describe and commemorate the history of people who lived their lives fully beyond the measurement of others. Kim and Yoo show in their research that Asian women from early 20th constantly challenged and mediated what it meant to survive as a second-class citizen under colonial and patriarchal oppression. Then Chai and Sunoo encapsulate in their studies how the picture brides were more than pitiful victims of arranged marriages, but agents of history who redefined self-

determination and agency. Consequently, such compelling stories of picture brides invite us to listen to the wholesome experience of early Asian immigrant women beyond their single story of survival.

READING PICTURE BRIDES LITERATURE: BEYOND THE SINGLE STORY OF SURVIVAL

Yet again, recreating a historical narrative of picture brides' voice, is a formidable work of literature that requires more than an exciting plot, dramatic romance, and cliché-like happy ending. It is a work that calls channeling the sufferings and complicated emotional costs that Asian American foremothers offered in an exchange of paving the paths of lives in their own decisions.

This thesis intends to offer answers to the set of questions proposed in the introduction of this chapter. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate how the decolonized literary voice delivers the method to truly commemorate Asian immigrant women in our society. To start with, I reference a statement made by the Nigerian feminist writer, Chimamanda Adichie. She explains why we need story telling to broaden the scope of understanding others' lives during her TED talk. "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." In this quote, she warns us how we are often exposed to a danger of the single story. She notes that a single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are lies, but that they blind us as if one story as the only story.

Therefore, in this thesis, I call for a framework that interprets the effort of understanding the shared sufferings and the desire of resistance of women in early

1900s that helps us to get way from the danger of the single story. My goal is to move away from the stereotypes of looking at women as just victims who only sacrifice their lives for their family without demanding their own account of fluid identity. To reiterate, this thesis is joining the academic conversation on how we memorialize our immigrant foremothers.

I will utilize an interdisciplinary approach that includes theoretical frameworks from history, literature, and women and gender studies. Moreover, I will demonstrate how picture bride literature by Asian American women leaves a stamp of feminist approach to Asian American literature. While I do not intend to minimize or ignore the narratives of suffering in picture brides' lives, what I propose is moving deeper into their experience with a holistic approach in interpreting their life stories. Therefore, this approach will look into how the Asian American women writers depict not only their pain and suffering, but also how picture brides express and mediate their sexuality, gender, and self-agency in their trans-pacific womanhood.

The first work I analyze, *The Buddha In The Attic* by Julie Otsuka, represents the Japanese picture brides' trans-local and collective womanhood of early Asian immigrants in the United States. Otsuka's recent work shares the story of group of women who departed Japan, predominantly from Kagoshima, to reach the West Coast of North America in early 20th century. In eight striking chapters, the author invites her readers into the storied lives of a group of Japanese picture brides: their boat journey away from secrets that they buried in their hometowns from Japan, the rituals of first nights with their new husbands after their arrival to San Francisco, their agony and joy in bearing and raising children, the invisibility inside their household by their patriarchal husbands, and outside their households by the presence of white

dominancy despite their back-breaking physical labors and soul-crushing emotional labors, and finally, the unbearable anxiety and violence the war and their adopted nation state brings them.

A feminist scholar, Eva Leonte, asserts that Julie Otsuka's book demonstrates decoding of the silence that mediates between silence and speech. In other words, according to Leonte, the work of Otsuka exposes how white male supremacy operates through a mechanism of silence. Therefore, Leonte asserts that the book demands a recognition for the Japanese picture brides' reclaiming their agency as well as for today's subaltern populations whose voice is silenced(7). According to Leonte, the scholars, such as Sandy Petrey, Jonathan Culler, and Judith Butler, apply the speech-act criticism to literature and society in order to understand its complex reality. By adding feminist analogy and subaltern theory, Leonte maps her critical approach to the novel, *the Buddha in the attic*, by paying a special attention to Otsuka's mode of narration in relation to the conceptualization of picture brides' communal voice. Consequently, Leonte suggests that investigating the concise yet powerful literary voice of picture bride in first person plural narrative demands a recognition of not only the forgotten history of picture brides, but also other collective voices of silenced female migrants.

While Otsuka uses first person plural literary voice to convey the collective womanhood of Japanese picture bride, Cathy Song centers her poem around the imagination of her grandmother who came to Hawaii as a picture bride from Korea. She connects trans-local spaces to trace the journey that her grandmother took to bring herself to a foreign island: her great-grand father's house in Korea, a tailor shop of Pusan, the wharf where the boat waited to take her grandmother, an island with a

foreign name, a strange shore where her husband waited, and, the camp outside Waialua sugar mill where Song creates the image of her grandmother. Song uses her grandmother as a medium of embodiment. This embodiment is Song's attempt to recreate picture brides' narrative in which she can put herself alongside her grandmother, who, at the time of journey, was similar to Song in age.

Gayle K. Fujita-Sato interprets Song's poem saying, "Not only this strategy of construction through inquiry but the subject itself of picture brides is common in Asian-American literature that concerns the recovery of familial and communal histories". (50) Fujita-Sato also argues that the poem, *Picture Bride*, represents the interaction between the ancestors and descendants of literal picture brides. This is a very powerful statement that critically points out what picture brides narrative offers to the genre of Asian American literature.

According to this analysis, such inclusion of different generations of people that prospered from the trans-pacific immigration of Asian women is a kind of enlargement, and reshaping of phenomenon. It is an act of connecting a grandmother to her granddaughter through multicultural and intergenerational understanding of women's history. The scholar concludes that based on its title and imagination of picture bride figure, Song's poem is a process of synthesis that creates Asian American culture. Here in Fujita-Sato's analysis of Song's poetry on the imagination of grandmother from a granddaughter, I depict a connection between Fujita-Sato's analysis and Chai's finding. The connection lies on how the current generations with different ethnic and racial backgrounds displayed admiration, empathy, and appreciation to the picture brides' stories through story telling. This is an example of shared suffering in solidarity for immigrant women from picture bride literature.

What Song's and Otsuka's literary works share is the accurate demonstration of the immigrant women who crossed the Pacific ocean with anxiety and anticipation. The narratives in their stories are told beyond a single story of pain and survival, because the story-tellers of such narratives stage different range of emotions as they explore the path of lives they chose for themselves.

Thus, both *The Buddha in the Attic* and *Picture Bride* use a crucial tool of broadening the scope of stories by connecting us, the descendants of picture brides, to them, the picture brides. Consequently, the power of literature lies in such storytelling that guides us to see the wholesome life of immigrant women that represent not only their own voices, but also the rest of the population whose pain and sufferings are romanticized and silenced. In conclusion, Otsuka and Song succeed in centering picture brides' identity, not just their sacrifice for the next generation.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated research from the previous scholars on picture bride history. I have also introduced two historical fictions that use Korean picture brides as main characters. These two literary works, *Honolulu* and *Paradise of Sun*, written by white American and Korean men authors, show sufferings of picture brides only on the surface. This is because their story lines and interactions among different characters do not develop any ingenuity of strength and survival of pictures brides stories. The evident limitation in the picture brides literary works written by these writers evokes a question on how we can move away from the colonized lens of depicting the picture brides only as passive victims. Once again, after introducing these historical fictions, I have revealed my intention and goal in this thesis. By using an interdisciplinary approach from different academic fields, such as, history, literature, women and gender studies, and Asian American studies, I aim to answer the

question on how we can truly commemorate Asian American foremothers who experienced their lives fully in complex setting. Such complex setting put them to live their lives with complicated emotions such as melancholia, grieve, resentment, homesickness, agony, and sometimes content that sustained their harsh realities. In fact, my intention in writing this thesis is to offer a lens that interprets this set of intricate emotions by reading two pieces of Asian American literature written by Asian American women writers.

In addition, I have demonstrated the findings and limitations of previous scholars who conducted in-depth research on understanding the womanhood of Asian and Asian American immigrants in 20th century. Their findings tell us that even under the turmoil of domestic and international affairs, and colonial and patriarchal oppression, women from this time did not settle for the second class citizenship that denied of their dignity. Rather, they acted as active performers of change in which they constantly confronted and mediated. In the process of painting their collective womanhood, some of them chose to leave their countries as picture brides. They intended to get an opportunity to acquire a formal education and move away from the colonial and patriarchal oppression that restricted their personhood. Though such desire was not completely fulfilled in many cases and their lives after the immigration were still filled with challenges, the scholars interpret the originality of picture brides by looking at different stages of their lives that existed beyond the narrative of sacrifice. Thus, according to these scholars, the feminist approach that requires understanding of history around women's lives in their particular context, allows us to look into the complicated and inspiring stories of Asian American foremothers.

To perceive the picture brides experience beyond the measurement of what they left behind for their descendants, I will demonstrate how both Otsuka and Song imagine, create, redefine, and contest the picture brides figures in their writing. Therefore, in the following chapter, I will discuss picture brides' form of agency with or without formal education, their sexuality and family dynamics, and affects of their emotions.

CHAPTER THREE

INTIMACY

The first major wave of Asian immigration to North America happened in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, and is a seldom visible historical narrative in mainstream English literature and history. Because its visibility is so rare, the adaptation of picture brides' stories in films, historical fiction, poetry, and other artistic platforms often features only one side of the story. Indeed, these adaptations often limit their gaze on what happened to the early Asian immigrants, attempting to signify only their survival and sacrifice, instead of investigating the emotional cost of such survival and sacrifice. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, reenacting the lives of picture brides requires a thorough understanding of the effect of historical changes on picture brides. The discriminatory laws and policies that the U.S. nation state adopted in the beginning of 20th century such as Chinese Exclusion law, Gentleman's agreement, and bans on interracial marriage, placed individual picture brides in politicized bodies under racial hierarchy as well as patriarchal oppression. Though they determined to immigrate to a new country bravely on their own, their lives after the departure from their homelands shared a common suffering under racism and patriarchal oppression. In this chapter, I will use different quotes from Julie Otsuka's 2011 novel, *The Buddha in the Attic*, to investigate how the author uses story telling in literature to humanize figures and experiences. The purpose of this investigation is to use literature to commemorate Asian immigrant women from the early 20th century who came to the U.S. as picture brides, beyond a tokenizing gaze .

FIRST NIGHT RITUAL WITH THEM

Born and raised in California, Julie Otsuka was a recipient of several literary awards. *The Buddha in the Attic* is the prequel to Otsuka's best-selling novel, *When the Emperor Was Divine*. Otsuka is known for her concise writing style that minimizes dialogue, while focusing on interiority and plot. Her simple yet original writing gives effects to readers that the stories are being told without bias. Indeed, she draws from her own family's experience as Japanese American to tell a narrative of picture brides in *The Buddha in the Attic*. Otsuka presents the story of a set of young women, departed from Japan to San Francisco as picture brides more than a century ago. To portray the complicated emotions that picture brides held in their lives, Otsuka uses the collective literary voice, 'we' in this novel. The first person plural literary voice reflects the shared fates of Japanese picture brides under the system of patriarchy in their marriages. Throughout her book, Otsuka uses both the individual voice, as well as the collective voice, of *we* and *some of us*. The chapter 'First night' reveals the scene where the picture brides encounter the first sexual intimacy with their husbands upon their arrival to a new country. The various details of this scene contain the vivid and private emotions of picture brides in their trans-local womanhood, while the use of first person plural literary voice uncovers the strongly-bound group identity of picture brides. In describing the first night ritual of their marriages, Otsuka shares:

They took us greedily, hungrily, as though they had been waiting to take us for a thousand and one years... They took us politely, by our wrists, and asked us not to scream. They took us shyly, and with great difficulty, as they tried to figure out what to do. "Excuse me," they said. And "Is this you?" They said,

“Help me out here,” and so we did... They took us while thinking of some other woman - we could tell by the faraway look in their eye - and then cursed us afterward when they could find no blood on the sheets... They took us with more skill than we had ever been taken before and we knew we would always want them. They took us as we cried out with pleasure and then covered our mouths in shame. (Otsuka, 21)

By exemplifying various scenes of sexual encounter on their first night of marriage, the author allows readers to imagine the range of emotions the women in this paragraph. Though not directly explained in the quote, it is inevitable to notice that the brides experience drastically different set of emotions. For example, the notion of fear is engraved when the nameless picture brides portray their husbands' approach to them were “hungry” and “greedy”. On the contrary, very opposite emotion, satisfaction, is displayed when other picture brides say “we knew we would always want them” because they felt pleasure during their first sexual encounter with their husbands. Therefore, this quote from *Buddha in the Attic* is a great example that shows how the picture brides held range of different experiences even going through the same ritual in their marriage.

In the conclusion of this chapter, the nameless Japanese picture brides speak, “They took us swiftly, repeatedly, and all throughout the night, and in the morning when we woke we were theirs.” (Otsuka 22) By announcing that *we* become *theirs*, Otsuka conveys how women's bodily subjectivity becomes commodified in their first night of marriage. Despite the differences, involving range of emotions and details in their first night ritual, Otsuka ends this passage by stating that the ritual of intercourse transforms all the brides into the property of their husbands. To reiterate, the author elaborately demonstrates how the sense of women's bodies, become one communal

body that is taken as a possession by their husbands. Spoken in a first person plural literary voice, this is a very strong statement that demonstrate patriarchal oppression that picture brides when through. In other words, this quote shows that whether their first sexual encounters with their husbands bring pleasure or pain, the picture brides undergo the same patriarchal oppression that commodifies their bodies and sexualities. Hence, Otsuka's literary work signifies the strongly bound group identity of picture brides in their trans-local womanhood by describing the sexual intimacy with their husbands in first person plural literary voice.

Therefore, Otsuka's approach successfully presents the individuality of picture brides' voices in the first person plural narrative to express the fluidity of historical narrative. Reading the individual experiences of picture bride in her novel allows readers to humanize the brides as whole human beings because we notice that they are not restricted to only one emotion and experience. In the process of humanizing the group of picture brides in the book, we see their lives beyond the single story of figure who only sacrificed one's life for her family. To reiterate, we see the complexity of their reality, along their common suffering of being a woman in system of power.

Yet again, Otsuka's approach to reenact the voices of picture brides is different from other authors, such as Brennert and Lee in their heteronormative setting.

Otsuka's approach holds the coexistence of communal and private narratives. Her approach in the first nights of the brides' marriage is not limited to the individuality of the experience. She exemplifies different emotions and details of the sexual encounter; however, the author uses the first person plural voice, "we". Hence, the readers can conclude that though the examples of encounter differ, individual experiences of picture brides still bind them in the group of shared oppression. This

coexistence unmistakably demonstrates the complexity of the narrative that picture brides hold. As displayed in the previous paragraph, the experiences of sexual consummation resides beyond the single story. Their experiences are not bound by a simple statement. Rather, in Otsuka's world, the women undergo this ritualistic night in uncommon spaces through various sensations such as touch, force, pain, and pleasure. The different range of experiences provides a space for readers to understand that even under the same setting, that each bride experienced different emotions.

LONGING AND ANXIETY DURING BOAT JOURNEY

Otsuka's work further develops the historical description of trans-local womanhood of Japanese picture brides in the intimacy with their husbands as well as among themselves who accompany each other during the boat ride to a new home. In her first chapter, '*Come, Japanese!*', the readers observe how the group of young brides find much-needed comforts and supports in a weary boat journey through the intimacy in each other's company:

On the boat we sometimes crept into each other's berths late at night and lay quietly side by side, talking about all the things we remembered from home: the smell of roasted potatoes in early autumn, picnics in the bamboo grove, playing shadows and demons in the crumbling temple courtyard, the day our father went out to fetch a bucket of water from the well and did not return, and how our mother never mentioned him even once after that. (Otsuka 17)

This scene depicts how the women start building a rapport through their shared homesickness as they reminisce about their homes. As the journey proceeds, so does their dialogue: the topic of their conversation ranges from the home-cooked seasonal

dishes they desperately crave to a shadow of death in their family that is never openly discussed, even with their mothers. As they appease their anxious minds on a boat through each others' presence, the connection among the picture brides grows deeper. The passage continues,

Sometimes we found ourselves saying things we had never said to anyone, and once we got started it was impossible to stop, and sometimes we grew suddenly silent and lay tangled in each other's arms until dawn when one of us would pull away, from the other and ask, "But will it last?" and that was another choice we had to make. If we say yes, it would last, and went back to her – if not that night, then the next, or the night after that. (Otsuka, 18).

Some picture brides even encounter true comfort in the touch of each other that makes them question the sexual meaning of their physical intimacy. One of them asks, "But will it last?". Here, we as readers may peek into a very personal sentiment of picture brides, who were young women with emotions before they met their contracted husbands in the United States. This scene depicts the anxiety over uncertain future and longing for their family and familiar surroundings that may have appeared to these young immigrant women.

What is interesting in this scene is that Otsuka deliberately portrays such personal sentiments of anxiety and longing through the interactions among the picture brides. For instance, the author mentions that some brides would tell each other the deepest secret that they have never shared with anyone else, "Sometimes we found ourselves saying things we had never said to anyone, and once we got started it was impossible to stop." In this section, the author adds that it is impossible for brides to stop sharing a deep connection. Otsuka's fictional depiction of the secret conversations among picture brides allows us to imagine the depth of their

connection. In fact, we notice their bond is deep because they share such unique experience of embarking on a journey as young women.

Yet, Otsuka never uses words such as ‘lonely’, ‘scared’, or ‘worried’ to describe the emotions the picture brides held during the boat journey in each other’s company. Instead, she utilizes description of dialogue and interaction among the characters to illustrate the anxious and lonely minds of picture brides. Naturally, the portrayal of such interactions among the brides provides room for readers’ own imaginations. In other words, the room for imagination that the author provides allows readers to understand the complex and personal experience of picture brides. Through such imagination, readers can use their own creativity to draw the set of emotions from picture brides; hence, the picture brides in *The Buddha in the Attic* are no longer voiceless victims. Though nameless, they are full human beings who held the set of complex emotions during a journey without a guarantee of happiness and security.

Assuredly, Otsuka creates the world of picture brides in her novel that uses the nature of literature. Again, she patiently invites readers to to empathize with the emotions that the characters carry by demonstrating the interactions among the characters. Indeed, the author’s approach of story telling aligns with what feminist writer and scholar, Chimamanda Adichie, asserts in promoting the importance of literature; “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispose and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and humanize.” This quote from Adichie asks us to understand the power of literature that helps us to humanize and empower other human beings and realities that may seem too foreign to fathom.

Through the room for imagination in *The Buddha in the Attic*, we see early Asian immigrants' life stories beyond our own experience as Adichie explains. To reiterate, the literary work by Otsuka helps us to see the historical figures in their particular context without romanticizing their experience and sacrifice in a single statement.

INTIMACY BETWEEN US

The chapter, '*Come, Japanese!*' continues as the author creates a narrative on picture brides' fluid sexuality. Following the scene in which the characters quickly build a rapport by sharing their longing and anxiety, Otsuka adds a section where the nameless Japanese immigrant women share physical intimacy among them. In Otsuka's world of picture brides, through the physical intimacy with each other, their sexualities reside outside a limited heteronormative setting. Otsuka continues,

...-then we told ourselves that whatever we did would be forgotten the minute we got off the boat. And it was all good practice for our husbands anyway. A few of us on the boat never did get used to being with a man, and if there had been a way of going to America without marrying one, we would have figured it out. (Otsuka, 18)

Otsuka's depiction of physical attachment among young female immigrants in this passage truly expands the trans-local womanhood of picture brides further as some nameless picture brides say "A few of us on the boat never did get used to being with a man", implying that their sexuality did not fall under the heterosexuality. The concise depiction of physical intimacy among women shows the fluid sexuality of trans-local womanhood because it is implied some of them desire physical intimacy

with fellow picture brides, not with their husbands when they say “if there had been a way of going to America without marrying one, we would have figured it out.”

Nonetheless, Otsuka does not develop a detailed explanation of queer intimacy among brides in this quote. In fact, she never states what sexual intimacy these brides share. Alternately, she only implies that certain picture brides shared intimacy that they would choose to forget because it was just practice for their husbands; however, some of them still never get used to sharing that intimacy with another gender. In other words, what Otsuka suggests here is not specifics of erotic connection that the picture brides create in queer intimacy. The suggestion is understanding the possibility of such queer intimacy. By guiding her readers to conceptualize the possibility of picture brides' fluid sexuality, Otsuka characterizes the picture brides as young women whose sexuality is not static in a heteronormative setting.

Indeed, Otsuka's approach to demonstrate the possibility of physical intimacy among women in the quote is what differentiates *the Buddha in the Attic* from the heteronormative historical fictions, *Honolulu* and *The Paradise of Sun*. Unlike the literary works that only center the heteronormative romance between picture brides and their male counterparts, the world Otsuka creates in her book suggests the intimacy and sexuality of picture brides that are not fixed, but transformative. In her world, picture brides are not saved by men in a fantasy romance that takes away the anxiety and longing they suffered. Yet again, through this quote, the characterization of nameless picture brides, who assure oneself that the erotic connection among women is only a practice for their husbands, shows the possibility of queer intimacy among historical figures. Therefore, the novel, *the Buddha in the Attic*, portrays

immigrant women as whole human beings with emotions, and provides a space where their sexuality and intimacy can be freely imagined.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

As demonstrated in Chapter two, many picture brides who participated in the interviews conducted by the scholars, such as Chai and Sunoo, clearly stated their motivation in becoming a picture bride was not in just finding a spouse. Rather, it was to fulfill their personal agenda in pursuing a formal education, acquiring a better economic attainment, and moving away from second-class citizenship in which their rights to education and freedom were denied. In the chapter, '*Whites*', the author of *The Buddha in the Attic* demonstrates an inner dialogue of picture brides to portray the reality in their new country despite the unfulfilled personal agenda. Otsuka depicts the process of learning English as the brides start to adjust to their new environment. In this scene, Otsuka spends time explaining how the brides interact with their new surroundings in relation to the back-breaking labor at farms.

And so we learned our first words of horse English. "Giddyap" was what you said to make the horse go forward, and "Back" was what you said to make it back up. "Easy" was what you said to make it slow down, and "Whoa" was what you said to make it stop. And after fifty years in America these would be the only words of English some of us could still remember by heart. (Otsuka 26)

In this scene, we notice that learning English for picture brides happen as they get familiar with horse English words, which are the language of labor, not regular English words that would have helped them to freely express themselves. The author

shares that even after fifty years of living in America, the only words of English that some of them could remember by heart are “Giddyap” and “Whoa”. Through this passage, we learn that the picture brides’ life in the United States operate within the terms of labor they had to provide to make a living, not through their own desire of achieving their dreams. As a matter of fact, this quote accurately reflects the words from Sonia’s interviews with Korean picture brides. Sun Hee Shinn, the picture bride who settled in San Francisco shares her account on her assimilation process by sharing her frustration.

“Since we came to San Francisco, I have don’t nothing but works in the restaurant. In the beginning, I didn’t understand the language or know the names of the foods. I asked others to write down a list of the foods so I could memorize and learn about them. My heart saddened because I wanted to study. I got married instead and worked in the restaurant without even knowing the langue or the names for foods. I suffered a great deal. Sometimes I cried. Many of the early immigrant women cried a lot because of the language barrier.” (Sunoo, 61)

This interview delivers vital information of early Asian immigrant women in their own words. During her interview, Sun Hee Shinn declared what she desired was getting an education, instead of marriage. Similar to the picture brides characters in the novel, Sun Hee’s life as a picture bride operated around the labor she had to provide to support her family as she shared, “I got married instead and worked in the restaurant without even knowing the language” She indicates her frustration by saying she suffered a great deal because she could not achieve her personal agenda in getting an education, but had to conform to the marital norm and making a living. This Korean picture bride states that she was one of many immigrant women who felt

frustrated because of the difficulty in expressing oneself fully as they lacked language proficiency.

Sun Hee Shinn's statement from this interview is also evident in another quote from the chapter, '*Whites*'. In addition to the scene where the Japanese picture brides' characters narrate that the only words they remembered by heart even after fifty years of living in America are words that they learned to command horses as the language they used during labor. The writer further develops actual picture brides' experience yet again in regards to their lack of fluency.

- and (we) could recite their ABCs, but in America this knowledge was useless. We could not read their magazines or newspapers. We stared at their signs in despair. All I remember is it began with the letter e. (Otsuka, 26)

Again, the frustration from Sun Hee Shinn's own words, "Many of early immigrant women cried a lot because of the language barrier." is directly transmitted in Otsuka's words, "We stared at their signs in despair." By using actual words from the picture bride, this scene depicts how the immigrant women had to conform to the fact that they could not understand the language that dominates their reality. The only words in English they learned were not used to fulfill their personal agenda, but used in providing labor.

In fact, Otsuka's method in channeling picture brides' own words in the novel shows what the scholar from chapter two, Julie Cruikshank, voices in her work. She states that the symbolic statements of identity, such as life stories, must be interpreted in the context of social conditions in which they are rooted in her review of oral history regarding feminist theory and personal narrative (133). To reiterate her words,

a framework of using oral histories to our understanding of multi-layered reality is a reemerging theme of investigating buried history.

We can connect the scene of picture brides' internal frustration in lack of fluency from the novel to the actual picture bride, Sun Hye Shinn's words from the interview by Sonia Sunoo. Cruikshank's assertion in understanding buried history through oral history is in the literary work, *The Buddha in the Attic*. In fact, in her *Acknowledgments*, Otsuka mentions "This novel was inspired by the life stories of Japanese immigrants who came to America in the early 1900s. I would like to list those that were most important to me in my research... important books include: ... Sonia Shinn Sunoo's *Korean Picture Brides*." Since Otsuka states in her *Acknowledgments* that Sonia Sunoo's book has a direct impact on her recreation of picture brides' reality, we notice that the author intentionally includes the scene of internal pain of not being able to fully express oneself in English.

Interestingly, the narrative of *The Buddha in the Attic* centers around Japanese picture brides, while Sonia Sunoo's work is on Korean picture brides. Yet, by connecting two ethnic groups in their shared experience of being immigrant women, Otsuka adopts pan-ethnic approach in incorporating the sufferings of picture brides. As the feminist scholar, Julie Cruikshank, promotes how understanding historical narratives should contextualizes the reality of such figures, Otsuka successfully brings the buried history of picture brides to the surface by reflecting their own words of frustration. In other words, Otsuka's literary work portrays the nameless picture brides in relation to the complex social influence that formed their labor, sexuality, gender, and race.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how fiction written by Julie Ostuka successfully illustrates the life of picture brides beyond a single narrative. Her novel sketches the collage of paradox that thousands of picture brides went through in details: the first person plural literary voice that not only conveys group identity as well as occasional individual voice, the depiction of interactions among the characters that brings room for imagination on complex emotions and fluid sexuality, and despair in picture brides own words that incorporates pan-ethnic identity as early Asian immigrant women in 20th century. In the next chapter, I will read the work of Cathy Song, to demonstrate how the poet also uses imagination to tell a story of picture bride.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM GRANDDAUGHTER TO GRANDMOTHER, READING CATHY SONG'S

PICTURE BRIDE

'Picture Bride' is a poem from Cathy Song's award-winning collection of poems. Cathy Song is a poet of Korean and Chinese descent who was raised in Hawaii. Her collection of poems are known for their colorful, sensual, and quiet references that transcend her own ethnic and regional background as an Asian American woman raised in Hawaii. The particular piece that I am reading in this chapter is from the section, 'Black Iris'. Different sections from this collection of poems are named for flowers. Similar to the imagery that a flower projects, her poems in this section are vivid, yet quiet. Particularly, the imagery of the poem, *'Picture Bride'*, calls up the nostalgia of an unknown space and time that Song, as a speaker, tries hard to imagine. Song walks her readers through the path of her grandmother's journey from Korea to Hawaii by raising questions about the process of immigration that brought a young Korean woman to settle in Hawaii as a picture bride. The narrator in this poem, Song herself, shares a longing for home, grieving over the loss of familiar surroundings, and the uncertainty of her future by embodying her grandmother's youth as a young woman who set on a journey as a picture bride. Interestingly, Song does not know many details of this journey, since the statements that she makes on the motive of her grandmother's immigration in this poetry are not conclusive. As a matter of fact, the questions that Song poses in her poem are not meant to be answered.

By using her own vision, she attempts to imagine the scene of her grandmother's hometown, the departure from the shore that sailed to another shore,

her grandfather's awaiting of his bride in Waiialua sugar plantation where Korean laborers worked, and finally, the newly-wed couple's settlement in Hawaii. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how this vision helps readers to understand the picture bride's life story in the words of a picture bride's own descendant, Cathy Song. I will also show that this literature is a recovery of intergenerational narrative. In addition, I will explain what the nature of poetry as a genre of literature distinctly offers to enhance the understanding of life stories of a population that is little known. Finally, my goal in this chapter is to demonstrate how reading Song's poem holds a decolonized platform of commemoration.

LINES BEYOND STRUCTURE

Poetry is different from other kinds of literature since it does not conform to a restriction of grammatical rules and structure. Unlike narrative forms of literature, in poetry, the form of writing is limitless just as its content. For instance, the length of poems can be as short as one sentence or as long as a book. Sometimes a poet can write just one word on a line, or even leave a few lines blank to create the shape that would bring certain effect in the poem. The components of each sentence, such as punctuation, capitalization, complete and incomplete sentences, serve different meaning with complex symbols. Such intentional imperfection and incomplete order of words brings particular effects that poet wants to give in writing. Because the effects bring important outcomes in this particular genre of literature, poems require unhurried and mindful study from its readers to grasp their full messages.

In “Picture Bride,” Song, demonstrates how to utilize the particular nature of poem as a genre of literature. The poem starts with Song stating that her grandmother was actually a year younger than she is at the time of writing the poem.

She was a year
younger
than I,
twenty-three when
she left Korea.

Through her imagination, Song speaks for her own grandmother. The imagination is possible because she compares herself to her grandmother in ages. The young version of Song’s grandmother at the age of twenty-three, appears as the narrator points out the closeness of their youth. Song does not put “She was a year younger” and “than I,” in a same sentence. The separation of her grandmother and Song, as in “She” and “I”, embedded in two lines, symbolizes the unrecoverable distance between them as they are two generations apart. Though similar in their ages, Song cannot fully see the young version of her grandmother before the marriage since it only exists in her imagination.

As well as the age that connects Song to her grandmother as two young women, space is another strong inspiration in the scene.

Did she simply close
the door of her
father’s house
and walk away.

The vague vision of her grandmother’s origin becomes more vivid than before as Song mentions the particular spaces that her grandmother once occupied. In other words, “Korea” and “her father’s house” are the spaces that solidify the vision of

grandmother's migration that were abstract before. In this scene, though Song is posing a question by starting the line "Did she simple close the door", she does not end it with a question mark. In fact, she uses a period to end this section. Though the sentence is not meant to be conclusive as it is put in a form of question, Song is not actually trying to find a definite answer. Rather, she is making a statement that she cannot validate for she did not witness the last time that her grandmother closed the door of her father's house to embark on a journey as a picture bride. In this sentence lies Song's attempt to remember her grandmother without actually knowing what exactly happened. Her attempt to find out what pushed her grandmother out of the comforts of familiar environment of home is not fulfilled. Instead, ending this sentence with a period, the poet illustrates her effort to remember her grandmother's past.

Song continues her attempt to create the image of her grandmother's departure to Hawaii, involving more spaces in her grandmother's hometown, Busan, Korea.

And
 was it a long way
 through the tailor
 shop of Pusan
 to the wharf where
 the boat
 waited to take her to
 an island
 whose name she had
 only recently
 learned,

In this scene, the spaces of grandmother's journey expand to 'the way through the tailor shop of Pusan', 'wharf', and 'an island'. Through following different spaces that Song's grandmother passed by, Song's gaze creates an association from one space to another that captures the geography of her grandmother's journey. Without a comma or period that stops the flow of association, Song naturally makes an imaginary map of her grandmother's journey by putting each space in each line. The path of journey that her grandmother took from her father's house to the wharf of Pusan until she finally boarded on a ship that sailed to Hawaii is what the narrator invites us to see through the map. In addition, by saying that her grandmother only recently learned the name of an island that was waiting to take her from the wharf in her hometown, she conveys how unknown Hawaii was to her direct ancestor.

WINGS OF GRANDMOTHER

Meanwhile, on the other side of the shore, Song's grandfather was awaiting his bride impatiently. To both her grandmother and grandfather, their union through marriage is a foreign experience they both have not yet explored.

on whose shore
 a man waited,
 turning her
 photograph
 to the light when the
 lanterns
 in the camp outside
 Waialua Sugar Mill
 were lit

and the inside of his
 room
 grew luminous
 from the wings of
 moths
 migrating out of the
 cane stalks?

According to Song's narration, Song's grandfather flips the only connection that he shares with the unknown woman, his bride-to-be, back and forth in his anticipation. The sentence is lengthy with seventeen lines. It is hard to recognize if the narrator is still asking a question since the description of scene involving the room of Song's grandfather is quickly followed by the imagery of wings of moths out of the cane stalk. However, the very last part of the sentence in this part of the poem ends with a question mark, signaling the structure of this sentence as a question.

Song keeps each line short to pull in the imaginary map that involve two shores, close to the one that her grandfather was. As the vision of the picture bride's journey shifts from her grandmother's departure from the wharf to her grandfather's anticipation in Wailaua sugar plantation, the trans-local narrative of the picture bride is evident in Song's poem. In this scene, Song selects 'the wings of moths' as a metaphoric point that makes her grandfather's room luminous as they are migrating out of the cane stalks in the plantation farm. Interestingly, his room already has a light as he uses the lanterns to look at his bride's photograph. What actually makes her grandfather's room that represents his life before her arrival, from being dim to luminous is in fact the thrill of waiting his bride.

In addition, ‘the wings of moths’ symbolizes her grandmother’s action to leave her homeland without a guarantee of future security, just like moths that are inadvertently drawn to light and fire even at the expense of their safety. Song chooses to convey this pull factor that encouraged picture brides immigration to Hawaii in an indirect method by using a metaphor. Such use of metaphor in this section provides a vivid way to imagine the narrative of immigration. By combining the idea of migrating wings of a moth to her grandmother’s departure in an unexpected way, Song successfully transfers her grandfather’s anxiety of waiting into poetry.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

In the following line, Song finally asks a direct question about her grandmother’s immigration.

What things did my
grandmother
take with her?

By asking a concise and straightforward question on what items did her grandmother bring when she boarded on a ship that sailed to take her to an unknown place, the tone of narration in the poem become even more blunt than before. It almost sounds as if Song is close to finding concrete details of her grandmother’s journey. However, her attempt to find the traces of her grandmother’s journey ultimately wither as the vision gets lost in the dry wind of burning cane in the field of plantation as the narrator finally envisions her grandmother’s settlement in Hawaii. While Otuska uses the first person plural narrative to convey the communal, yet private experiences of first sexual intimacy of Japanese picture brides shared with their husbands, Song uses

cinematographic effects to enhance the visual effects of her narration to imagine her grandmother's sexual intimacy her grandfather.

And when
 she arrived to look
 into the face of the
 stranger
 who was her
 husband,
 thirteen years older
 than she,
 did she politely
 untie
 the silk bow of her
 jacket,
 her tent-shaped
 dress
 filling with the dry
 wind
 that blew from the
 surrounding fields
 where the men were
 burning the cane?

The sentence that Song creates in this part is very cinematic. To portray the first encounter of her grandparents and their sexual intimacy into the ultimate settlement of their marriage, Song writes the details that stimulate readers' senses. The graphic effect, dramatic tension, interaction of characters without dialogue make us feel as if we are watching a silent film. For instance, the graphic effect is in the portrayal of the traditional Korean attire, *Hanbok*, that her grandmother wore as she arrived in Hawaii. Song describes the texture of the attire by mentioning the bow that is 'silk', and the

shape by saying the skirt was 'tent-shaped'. Developing the illustration of the traditional attire in details, gives waves of effect as if we are watching her grandmother in her traditional clothings on a screen.

In addition, by asking if her grandmother 'politely untie[d]' the silk bow on her jacket, she wonders how her grandmother reacted as she faced a stranger who was thirteen years older than her. Song only poses a question, but does not hypothesize her grandmother's reaction. The poet does not mention words such as 'disappointment' or 'surprise' that might have given a clue of her grandmother's response to discover that her groom is older than she is. Instead, the poet highlights the visual aspect of picture bride marriages to convey the cinematic effect of the narration. Just like her husband who was 'looking' at the picture of his bride, Song's grandmother also arrived to 'look into' the face of her groom. The tension arises because the affects that her grandmother holds in this scene are unpredictable. Without any dialogue between the characters in the poem, Song, her grandmother, and her grandfather, the image of her grandmother is lost as the narrator mentions the tent-shaped skirt. The dry wind blew from the fields of burning cane stalks fill inside of her skirt, signaling the disappearance of every image that Song attempted to imagine.

UNDER RECEPTIVITY

The questions that the narrator poses, perhaps more than any other component in this poetry, reflect a deep desire of the granddaughter of the picture bride: finding the exact imagery of her grandmother as she may have carried different affects of emotions as a young picture bride with uncertainty. Song is unfamiliar with the origin of her family in Korea and her grandmother. In truth, these questions are not meant to

be answered. Hence, the questions that she asks, such as ‘was it a long way?’, ‘what kind of things did my grandmother bring with her?’, and ‘did she politely untie the silk bow of her jacket?’ are rhetorical. Song is not raising these questions to her grandmother, but to herself, or perhaps to her readers. Nonetheless, the answers only lie in her attempt to recreate the imagery of her grandmother.

On that account, with the series of questions unanswered, the tone of her narrative in this poem may even sound passive. She is not actively engaging in a conversation with someone who went through or witnessed the event to provide the evidence that would help Song to learn the history of her own grandmother. In addition, unlike the implication from the publication, “*Korean Women Pioneers of Pacific Northwest*”, that assigns a specific identity as ‘pioneer women’ to picture brides, Song does not describe her grandmother as a brave or admirable woman. Simply, Song develops soundless dialogue that does not impose any evaluation on her grandmother’s life story as a Korean picture bride.

However, in her receptivity rests Song’s powerful intention in reenacting her grandmother’s journey as a picture bride. Disguised in passive tone, Song passionately reconstructs the history of a whole group of Asian immigrant women who came as picture brides, by imagining the individual immigrant experience of her grandmother. Without much explanation, Song demonstrates how an arranged marriage through photography built the particular historical narrative of picture brides.

The inner dialogue reflects how Song only attempts to investigate the emotional and spiritual impact of picture bride immigration. If we pay close attention to Cathy Song’s way of storytelling in metaphor, using visual imagery, and to the

cinematic approach in the form of poetry, we may depict the necessity of such receptive frame. She need not resent, nor assume. The poet acknowledges that, two generations apart, she can never fully relive what her grandmother experienced. Instead, she quietly observes the imagination that she, as a descendant of picture bride, creates to accept the nostalgia and longing of unknown family history without evaluating her grandmother's experience. She delivers the strength of silent resolve in retrieving intergenerational connection through her framing in this poem.

PICTURE BRIDE LITERATURE AS AN INTERGENERATIONAL BRIDGE

As discussed previously in chapter two, the scholar Gayle K. Fujita-Sato interprets Song's poem as an interaction between the ancestors and descendants. This compelling statement discusses what Cathy Song's poem critically offers to the genre of picture bride literature. The scholar shares in her article, "Not only this strategy of construction through inquiry but the subject itself of picture brides is common in Asian-American literature that concerns the recovery of familiar and communal histories" (50) To reiterate, Fujita-Sato asserts that Song's poem is a representation of different generations of people that prospered from the trans-pacific immigration of picture brides. Therefore, Song's recreation of her grandmother's narrative in literature is ultimately a reshaping of historical phenomena. In other words, the investigation of her grandmother's journey that centers around individual anecdotes ultimately enlarges the narrative into a communal history of all pan-ethnic narratives of Korean and Japanese picture brides.

In Fujita-Sato's analysis of Song's poetry that focuses on the intergenerational connection of Asian immigrant women, I also notice a link between Fujita-Sato's

analysis and the feminist scholar, Alice Yun Chai's work, "*Women's History in Public: 'Picture Brides' of Hawaii*". Chai shares,

Female descendants of picture brides remembered their foremothers and their own sufferings, and even male descendants of picture brides were deeply moved and grateful. Young adult women of varied racial and ethnic groups in Hawaii and on the mainland frequently commented that knowing the circumstances of the picture brides and hearing their voices bridged cultural, ethnic, and racial gaps, locating common ground among women's experiences. (50)

Chai demonstrates in her article that the female descendants of picture brides were able to locate the common ground among women's experience. Indeed, as female descendants who were able to remember their foremothers through the women's own experience in Chai's research, Song also shows how she commemorate her grandmother. She embodies the grandmother's younger version, close to Song's own age at the time of writing her poem. She watches closely what imagination the embodiment brings without measuring the significance of her grandmother's immigration. In other words, Song's poetry holds a decolonized platform of commemoration since it pays tribute to the narrative picture bride without evaluating their history.

The imagination and construction of picture bride experience are in the rhetorical questions that the speaker in her poem asks. The embodiment of the picture bride figure as her descendant is Song's attempt to recreate an immigrant woman's narrative. Yet, Song does not fall under the danger romanticizing her grandmother's sacrifice and hardship. Instead, Song uses the nature of poems as a genre of literature to construct her female ancestor's unfamiliar history in silent resolve. In this chapter, I

demonstrated how Cathy Song's poem, "*Picture Bride*" works as a recovery of history , in immigration, intergenerational narrative, and the shared suffering of women.

CONCLUSION

EMOTIONS LEAD US TO ACT

The previous chapters emphasized how the authors, Otsuka and Song, used literary strategy to reimagine picture brides' voice and capture the complex pan-ethnic womanhood of early Asian immigrants. The first chapter of this thesis highlighted the historical background of picture brides. Specifically, I discussed the push and pull factor that initiated their particular immigration strategy, involving the modification of the custom courtship in East Asia, arrange marriage, with exchanging pictures.

Chapter two focused on the literature review and framework that I use as the foundation of this research. This chapter demonstrated the dialogue on the depiction of picture brides in research and literacy fictions. I pay attention to how previous scholars trace picture brides' position in history, and male authors of picture bride fiction portray the picture brides as a token of sacrifice in patriarchy and heteronormative setting. To challenge these scholars and writers, I drew from feminist scholarship, that incorporates multiple layers of picture brides history in their fragile positions under the double oppressions of colonialism and patriarchy in their home countries. Through this feminist approach, I debunk the portrayal of picture brides as a token of sacrifice that dangerously romanticizes their hardships.

Chapter three demonstrates how the author Julie Otsuka uses empathetic depiction of nameless Japanese picture brides in her literary fiction *The Buddha in the Attic*. The particular first person plural narrative in the illustration of the sexual intimacy with picture brides' husbands showcases the communal and individual emotions that the group held. Chapter three shows that instead of using direct words to assign certain emotions, Otsuka utilizes the description of inner dialogue and

interaction among the characters. This invites the imagination of the affects of emotions from the readers. Chapter three also exemplifies how the dialogue and interaction among characters develop the conceptualization of queer intimacy. In the world that Otsuka creates in her novel, the picture brides exist with fluid sexuality and complex emotions that challenge the conventional depiction of picture brides as docile wife and care-giving mother. Lastly, this chapter pays attention to the incorporation of actual picture bride interviews by the author. Otsuka brings the pan-ethnic understanding of picture brides experience through reflecting the Korean picture bride's own words in an inner dialogue of nameless Japanese picture bride's character. This successfully demonstrates the complex emotions and fluid sexuality that the picture brides held in their trans-local womanhood beyond just a story of survival and sacrifice.

In the following chapter, I demonstrated how the poet Cathy Song utilizes the nature of poetry to create the imagination and construction of picture bride experience by commemorating her grandmother's journey to Hawaii from Korea as a picture bride. By using the elements such as space and time across generations and Pacific Ocean, Song creates a vision of her own grandmother to help her readers imagine the journey. In other words, my fourth chapter focused on the use of embodiment of picture bride figure by the narrator that retrieves the history of immigration, intergenerational narrative, and shared suffering of women. This is possible because the poet, Cathy Song, uses the metaphor, visual imagery, and cinematic approach in the form of poetry. The literary voice of Song that does not demand answers to the questions that she poses may sound receptive. Nevertheless, underneath such

receptivity, Song conveys her solid intention in reenacting her own ancestor's immigration narrative without projecting her own assumption.

At the beginning of chapter two, I asked questions such as, "How do we move away from the narratives told by the writers who write about what they do not really know? How do we capture the coexistence of resentment and sorrow as well as empowerment and agency? How do we patiently listen to the delicate yet radical voices of picture brides?" Indeed, the answers to these questions lie in the literature works that I read in this thesis. Through using the literary strategy of imagining picture brides' emotions, both Otsuka and Song achieve telling the stories of picture brides as they were. In their stories, picture brides are not voiceless victims, nor a token of sacrifice, but fully realized human beings.

The danger of romanticizing the picture brides' lives exists when their stories are told in a single story of survival or cast as heteronormative love stories. This is problematic because the romanticization of early Asian immigrant women's picture brides experience oversimplifies their complex narratives. Yet again, literary works by Julie Otsuka and Cathy Song, *The Buddha in the Attic* and *Picture Bride*, oppose such romanticization by using imagination and construction of affect of emotions that picture brides experienced in their womanhood.

More attention to the use of the imagination in picture bride literature will furnish Asian American Studies in multiple ways. This thesis provides an example on how reading picture bride literature helps audiences to "listen" to the silenced voices of important figures in Asian American history. The narrative strategy that Otsuka and Song demonstrate, as I argue in this thesis, works as a tool of activism. As the Nigerian feminist and writer Chimamanda Adichie shared during her Commonwealth

Lecture on *'To Instruct and Delight: A Case For Realist Literature'*, "Logic can convince but it is in fact emotion that leads us to act." This is because literature's ability to imagine emotions replaces the dominant narrative of tokenizing picture brides' experiences as victims and survivals with intimate literary voices that speak to the paradox of their trans-local womanhood. This research also points out the need to be aware of danger in looking at Asian American foremothers in relation to their white counterparts as ethnic pioneers. In other words, this study suggests debunking the gaze that describes early Asian immigrants as ethnic pioneers, since this approach does not take account the sufferings of immigrant women under the system of power within white supremacy, heteronormativity, capitalism, patriarchy, and racism. Therefore, it is necessary to research the imagination and the representation of emotions in Asian American literary texts, as well as to study how it influences other Asian American historical contexts. By achieving this, scholars will fully understand the interdependency of political activism and artistic expression, as they both advocate for social justice.

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