# Asian American Studies (History)

Mrs. K was 19 years old picture-bride from Kyong Sang in Korea, and she moved to Hawaii to marry another Korean immigrant. Their family was impoverished, and the Japanese denied them freedom from talking to even walking 10 miles outside, and the only place they would go to was Sunday School. She, therefore, sent her picture so that she could find a husband, move to the United States, get married and be allowed to live there. She then made arrangements and finally managed to get to the US. Her journey in the US was not very easy since she had very many setbacks or challenges.

Based on a literature review of an extensive open-minded interview, the paper provides a comprehensive overview of her life in the US contextualizing it with broader themes of the Asian American History. It is evident being an immigrant in the US is not easy, and therefore the Asian American immigrants have different experiences in the country. For some, it is difficult to blend in while for others it is easy. Some of the factors that led to migration from Asia include capitalism which increased the demand for cheap labor, imperialism in their countries which forced them out of their countries and the desire for better opportunities or living conditions. After immigration to the US Mrs. K and other Asian immigrants were faced with yet other issues like racialization, gender stratification and the overall effects of the world systems theory.

## Immigration

Mrs. K moved across an international border which is a fair definition of immigration which is otherwise the movement of people who lack citizenship to a destination country. The immigrants usually want to secure permanent residence in the counties they move to. Mrs. K wanted to move to the US, and when she did, she had to get married to a forty-five-year-old who was young in the photo he had sent. Most people immigrate to give themselves better lives. There are also some other reasons for Asians immigrating to the US and they include education, employment and the many chances and opportunities for people from all walks of life. Imperialism is also a reason for migration, and it implies a country or nation extending its control on another.

Even though she was disappointed and failed to talk or eat for eight days, she had to get married to avoid being deported back to Korea. The laws were still very rigid since it is only in 1965 that the number of Asian immigrants to the US rose dramatically due to the passage of the 1965 Immigration and National Act (Zong and Batalove). This removed the laws that barred immigration from Asian and Arab countries while limiting those from Africa and Europe. When Mrs. K was moving, their only way out of Korea was being pictured brides, but things have changed over the years. The Asian American community has since grown, and as of 2014, most immigrants were from Philippines, India, China, Korea and Vietnam. The Asian immigrants also increased from 491 000 in 1960 to 12.8 million in 2014 (Zong and Batalove). Mrs. K wanted to move to Hawaii because there was freedom of speech and even work therefore she was in search of freedom and economic prosperity. Mrs. K said, “Hawaii is a free place, everybody living well” (Chai 11) . She, therefore, sent her picture and became one of the Korean picture brides. Imperialism also drove her to the US since in Kyong Sang’ the Japanese had taken control making life unbearable for them.

## Capitalism and Imperialism

Capitalism is the economic system in which resources are privately owned, and it is the present system in the US. The main driving force in capitalism is profit making by the owners, and therefore it doesn’t provide for those who lack competitive skills. Owners also compete against each other for profit, and they ignore external costs like labor, pollution and climate change (Amadeo). During the Second World War, there was labor shortage, and women filled the shortage in military industries because men entered the armed forces (Sefla and Scott 7). It was there in the 1800s and therefore affected Asian migrants to the US.

Mrs. K, her husband, and other Koreans endured long working hours, and they were given very little compensation. The work conditions were also very poor since when she managed to get a job, they both worked for sixteen hours a day, and there was no rest given for special days like Christmas, New Year or even Sunday. They worked like animals (Chai 11) and lived in tents into which rainwater leaked through. But they still needed to work so that they could earn money. Mrs. K and her husband had to move to Schofield where they could find jobs and coincidentally they worked in an army soldiers’ laundry. This was as a result of capitalism. They were also paid poorly since immigrant workers were most likely to be unionized and they were therefore controllable. Mrs. K said two women cooked for fifty people. The compensation was as low as 70$ for washing and 30$ for ironing. It was therefore half pay for women. Employers therefore exploited them for cheap labor. Other studies also show Chinese migration across Asia and United States and majority of the immigrants dug gold and built railroads. They were therefore regarded as just a pool of laborers who most capitalists would have loved to control since they were regarded as powerless.

Mrs. K’s condition however improved with time even after the death of her husband. She bought a laundry even her own operated a boarding house and later managed to own businesses.

## Gender

Today Asian America has stirred debates about their gender, and their activists frame social injustices regarding race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality (Juan). There was the absence of gender activism in the 1970s, but this should not be perceived as an absence of gender inequality or disengagement of Asian American women from issues of social justice (Juan). Empress Tsu-his who ruled China was referred to as ‘The Wicked Witch of the East,’ and she killed those who challenged her rule. This made it difficult for Asian female Immigrants. The women who came in the mid-1800s were kidnaped or even struggled. Also in the 1920s and 1930s, Asian immigrants who were women suffered a fair deal of gender injustices. These range from job stratification to little salaries and wages for compensation of labor offered. Even the immigration department made them suffer by insisting on marriage for residence. Also for a fact, Asian women who did emigrate before the 1960s were employed for cheap labor and almost half of all Japanese women were either laundresses or servants in San Francisco (Juan).

Mrs. K had to be married for her to stay in the US without deportation. She says, “If I don’t marry immigration law sends me back to Korea for free” (Chai 11). This shows how the females were discriminated against. Out of shame she could not go back home. Even after their marriage she did not manage to find a job in Honolulu despite the fact that her husband was working. When moved to Schofield, Mrs. S got an ironing job at a military base. The wages were poor for both males and females but the females were paid half what men were paid. Also, females were only given ironing jobs which shows gender stratification in the employment sector in the US at that time. Mrs. K was worked very hard and managed to be a successful businesswoman. She bought a laundry in which she worked until 3 am. She washed a shirt and pant 15 cents an ironed both at 5 cents. It is also important to note that even when Mrs. K was expecting her first child, she worked until when a day or so to her due date. After delivery she would leave her baby alone and care for her during coffee breaks. She took a loan from a friend to open up a boarding house. Other Asian women have also flourished over the years by concentrating on education and meaningful service projects. Mrs. K is among those who chose education since she took an initiative to learn and even small boy ask her why she has to learn even though she can write letters.

On a positive note, Korean women were somehow regarded as necessary since the men drank so much. They were lonely, and most single men stayed in boarding houses in Honolulu where they ate and slept. Mrs. S says even her husband was drinking excessively. However, this was just a perception since in reality they were thought of as being inferior sex or gender in the society.

## Racialization

With the 1965 reforms, very many Asians and Latin Americans moved to the US. It is also evident that America is not only about black and white but even Asian Americans and Mexicans. Racialization is, therefore, the construction of meaning to races, and it is not biological but created by the society. The Racial formation of Asian Americans was a pivotal moment of defining the color line between immigrants, extending whiteness to European immigrants and targeting non-white immigrants for racial oppression (Wing). This, therefore, led to a polarized racial category system. The Chinese were part of the 1847-1874 coolie trade which was a new form of slavery. Some few years back, a phenomenon of racial caricatures as “satire” emerged with Asian Americans being the object of a joke (Lee). This came up even though Asian American students are excellent students who go to schools with very high rates. The fact that they are also regarded as great academic performers means that the concept of racialization is changing.

From the interview, most of Mrs. K’s acquaintances lived in Hawaii. This shows that due to racialization, they felt inclined to live together as a closely knit community that would be there to assist each other. They even had credit societies called Tanomoshi which was for the Japanese. She managed to draw 1600$ from it which she used to pay back her debt and buy herself other things. It is from there that business went well for her. Another impact or racialization was the fact that they were only able to get specific kind of jobs which they were identified with. Mrs. K took ironing while the husband washed at the laundry. They therefore encountered social problems which include racial discrimination, inequality and structural barriers. When working at the laundry, they lived in tents and also after she delivered her first baby she stayed in the hospital for three days despite the fact that they did not have money. Even if they had not moved back and forth into and out of the country, this group was marginalized and discriminated against. Mrs. K is therefore among the Asian Americans who have gone above and beyond to be successful business owners. She even owns a car which was clearly a luxury in their earlier days and she proudly says “I feel good about it” (Chai 13). In 2013, Nina Davuluri, who is an Asian American won the Miss America Pageant but people still considered her as a Non-American with others calling her an Arab.

## The World Systems Theory

It was developed by Emanuel Wallerstein and his main aim was to help understand historical circumstances that led to the modern day world. According to him, the establishment of capitalism led to the development of different forms of labor control. The new capitalist system is based on the division of labor that demands different relationship between regions as well as the kinds of labor conditions within each region (Halsall). He also draws his arguments from Marxism by trying to understand how capitalism develops, spreads and its effects on different countries especially those of color. The theory further illustrates how human beings’ evolvement is dynamic and brought about by social, economic and even political factors. According to the theory, there is a connection between migration of people and capitalism alongside imperialism. Capitalism however brought about skewed development in which economic and social disparities between sections of the world have increased rather than providing prosperity for all (Halsall). There is therefore a reason a leaving and a sort of arrival immigrants get. The capitalism system therefore increases the demand for labor which in turn becomes cheap and the migrants are a perfect source of cheap labor. Economic classes develop for those who own factors of production and those who possess nothing except their labor. There are more jobs produced and therefore foreigners immigrate there in search of jobs. On arrival, immigrants including the Asian American find employment opportunities but with very little compensation being offered.

Because Mrs. K thought or new that everybody lived so well in Hawaii, she sent her picture. She thought there were many employment opportunities in the US. She, therefore, left home despite her parents not being happy about it. On her arrival, she learned she had to marry a much older man for her to be allowed to stay in the US. There weren’t jobs in Honolulu where they stayed, and they had to change towns so that she could also start working. The only readily available jobs were laundry jobs which they had no choice but to do even with the very little compensation they got. The awful employment conditions were due to the division of labor depending on regions. The coolie trade also developed as it was a new form of slavery and the Chinese laborers who were coolies even got kidnapped. They were taken from the Philippines, Macau, and India. Other laborers were also moving in search for places they could offer cheap labor. The process was just a stratification system which discriminated against Asian Americans with regards to their race, gender and countries of origin.

Wallerstein’s 1998 Global Formation was an effort to make a single model of constants, cycles, and trends of the modern world system and to work out major conceptual issues and arguments regarding the “necessity of imperialism” (Dunn). It was due to acts of imperialism that Mrs. K left Kyong Sang to move to Hawaii as a picture bride

## Conclusion

Being an Asian American in the United States was not easy in the past, and it took the immigrants a while to be used to being Asian Americans since they had to go through many hardships. There was some hardships in the immigration process. The journey was also very long for some immigrants while for others it was short. Mrs. K reported fifteen days of traveling on a boat. Many years back, a segregated Chinese school was once set up for both immigrant and Chinese children born in America. Most of them confronted a long legacy of inequity and exclusion about school policies and practices, particularly during periods of changing demographics, economic recession or war (Society). Most of them who came as laborers played an essential role in developing the US. They worked as fishermen, railroad builders, farmers, miners and even factory employees. Today their children can go to good schools where they are great performers. Most of the immigrants own property and are treated better by the society at large.

Mrs. K, just like other Asian Americans had great dreams and she believed the US was a land of freedom with many good opportunities for many people. She worked very hard there even with the extreme conditions she found herself in. she sent home 50$ each month to assist with family experiences. She experiences discrimination on many different grounds but still managed to achieve her goals. She became a successful businesswoman. Despite the death of her husband she never felt lonely since she was very busy learning with younger children at the library. She was able to pursue education which was her greatest passion. She is a good representation of an Asian woman who overcame all challenges of gender issues. She says she is happy she has learnt many things. Mrs. K and her friends managed to set up businesses by assisting one another and their lives changed for the better. From the interview responses her life story is an American dream-come-true. The American government and society also has also been thereby putting in place friendlier policies. The society has somehow changed its perception about them and that is why Mrs. K who was once a picture bride has her story encouraging other Asian Americans.

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