

THIRD CREATER Springfield, OH

Max Black is a rising senior at the University of Texas at Austin. Max is an International Relations honors student with minors in Korean and American Sign Language. Their current research focuses on queer media coming out of East Asia and regional variation of ASL in Texas. Max is half Korean and spent the summer of 2023 in Seoul.

Max's piece, '감홍시' translates to red persimmons. As a child, they would enjoy these ripe persimmons with their father. Max also paid homage to their Korean heritage by digitally recreating 민화. Minhwa is a traditional painting practice from the Choson era (1392-1910)

# Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal

The purpose of the *Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal* is to encourage undergraduates to pursue scholarly inquiry into East Asian topics, ranging from political analyses to calligraphy samples. One of only a few journals in the United States devoted to undergraduates which accepts national and international submissions, the *Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal* seeks to recognize works of high academic quality. The Journal seeks not only to draw attention to the Wittenberg University East Asian Studies program, but also to maintain an integral role in the program itself, seeking to broaden scholarly and popular perspectives on East Asia. It is read by the local and international community.

The Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal was initiated by a group of students in 1975 and is issued annually. From its beginning, students have directed all creative and managerial processes related to publication. Funded by the Wittenberg University Student Senate, the Journal is an entirely student-initiated and student-directed endeavor, the major goal of which is to afford students the opportunity to participate in the rich scholarly dialogue of those interested in East Asia. As such, all decisions regarding the Journal, including the use of its name, will be made by the student editors in conjunction with the support provided by Student Senate and current advisor.

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# Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal

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#### In Dedication

Every year, the *East Asian Studies Journal* is dedicated to a Wittenberg University faculty or staff member who is actively involved in the East Asian Studies Program, promotes academic achievement and encourages students to stretch beyond their limits in their chosen fields of study. The student staff would like to dedicate this year's issue to Dr. Lauren Shapiro Crane, Associate Professor of Psychology.

Dr. Crane teaches cross-cultural psychology and served as the former Director of Wittenberg's interdisciplinary East Asian Studies Program. As a cultural psychologist, her work focuses on the question of how crosscultural differences emerge and are maintained over time. She and her research students investigate the socializing effects of language use and religious engagement in the United States, Japan, and India, where she was a Fulbright-Nehru Senior Research Scholar. Her courses address how culture and language reflect and support human psychological functioning, including Psychology & Culture, Psychology of Language, and Cultural Research in Psychology. Off-campus, she provides cross-cultural training seminars to U.S. Air Force personnel and their spouses, as well as international business professionals. Dr. Crane has taught courses at Stanford University, Williams College, Kenyon College, and Nagasaki Junior College in Japan and has lectured at Banaras Hindu University in India. Additionally, she has carried out social science research & development work in a corporate setting at Sociometrics Corporation. She earned her B.A. from Yale University and her Ph.D. from Stanford University.

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#### 四季の俳句 Four Seasons' Haiku

#### Ryan Trostle

Ryan Trostle is a junior at Boston University double-majoring in English Literature and Japanese. He has recently studied abroad in Japan where he had the beautiful opportunity to practice the language. On campus, Ryan is a BU Upward Bound high school tutor and will be an RA his senior year. He has been published by Boston University's student publication "The Beacon", and literary journals such as "The Allegheny Review" and "Runestone".

雪の朝 消えた塩鮭 猫の鈴	Morning of snow Disappearing salmon A cat's bell	
ハシドイの 再生と香り 年をとる	The lilac's rebirth With aroma anew yet Only I grow old	
空の下 風鈴の歌と 心臓音	Beneath the blue sky Between the songs of wind chimes The sound of your heart	
空の跡 消える夕色 星出るか	Traces of sky The fading color of daylight Will the stars move on, too?	

## **Evolution of Womenomics: Comparing and Contrasting Abe and Kishida's Policies**

Jiani Tian

Jiani Tian is a recent graduate from the University of Pennsylvania, where she earned dual degrees in Public Policy from the Wharton School of Business and East Asian Languages & Civilizations from the College of Arts and Sciences. As a first-generation immigrant from Chongqing, China, Jiani has always been passionate about studying languages and bridging Western and Eastern cultures. Her interest in Japanese economic policy began in her freshman year when she started working as a research assistant for Professor Ayako Kano. During her college years, Jiani presented her research at the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Association for Asian Studies, published an article in the Intercollegiate U.S.-China Journal, and completed an honors thesis on fertility rates and Japan's economic structure.

#### Introduction

Japan has consistently been ranked low in the Global Gender Gap Index rankings—in 2020 Japan was placed at 121st, out of 153 countries. Compared to other developed nations, for instance countries in the G7, Japan is the last in terms of gender equality. This phenomenon naturally brings up questions regarding the state of women in Japan, and how the 121st placing came to be. Historically, Japan has upheld a typical patriarchal family model, with women serving primarily in the domestic realm. However, during the interwar period and post–WWII, Japanese women gradually began to hold spots in academic and professional realms. Despite these new opportunities, clearly inequality is still persistent, and undoubtedly the gender issue in Japan is complex involving economic, political, and social factors. This paper will aim to analyze the government policies that have contributed to the gender inequality in Japan, specifically focusing on the heavily debated "Womenomics" policies proposed by Abe Shinzo.

Within the past twenty years, Japan has experienced ten changes in the Prime Minister position. Subsequently, with the leadership changes comes inevitable changes in the administering of gender equality and women empowerment policies. Fumio Kishida was elected to office on October 4, 2021, serving as the 100th Prime Minister of Japan. In comparing the policies surrounding gender equality under Abe Shinzo and Fumio Kishida, fruitful observations can be made regarding the magnitude of the shift away from the patriarchal Japanese society that has

been achieved in the last couple of decades. This paper will focus on the Womenomics plan that was proposed under Abe Shinzo's time as Prime Minister, and the continuation and changes as it extended into Fumio Kishida's term.

#### **Background on Womenomics and Kishida**

Abe Shinzo is the longest-serving Prime Minister in Japan's history, known for his aggressive economic revival plan coined "Abenomics". The program featured three pillars, known as the three arrows, which involved fiscal consolidation, aggressive monetary easing, and structural reforms in boosting economic growth. An interesting part of the plan is embedded in the third arrow of economic growth, highlighting greater female participation in the economy as a critical point for achieving said economic growth. 1 Furthermore, in 2015, Abe introduced the new slogan "Society in which all 100 Million People Can be Active", which focuses on addressing the issue of Japan's declining population as part of "Abenomics 2.0". Abenomics 2.0 focused more heavily on the declining and aging population issue, which meant the government hoped to convince more Japanese people, specifically women, about the benefits of childrearing.<sup>2</sup> With all these moving parts combined, Shinzo Abe's "Womenomics" came into view, which can be described in general as Abe's plan of increasing women's involvement in the workforce while simultaneously motivating them to give birth to and raise children.

Both Abe and Kishida have acknowledged the necessity of economically empowering women as a component of Japan's overall growth and development. Abe has expressed on multiple occasions that unleashing the full potential of Womenomics is integral to the overall growth of Japan.3 Similarly, in Kishida's message on International Women's Day in 2022, he declared that economic empowerment is vital in

Yoshino, N., and F.Taghizadeh-Hesary. 2014. Three Arrows of "Abenomics" and the Structural Reform of Japan: Inflation Targeting Policy of the Central Bank, Fiscal Consolidation, and Growth Strategy. ADBI Working Paper 492. Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute. http://www.adbi.org/ workingpaper/2014/08/01/6370.three.arrows.abenomics.reform.japan/

Kiyoshi Takenaka, "New Japan Cabinet Minister Seeks to Stem Shrinking Population," Reuters, October 8, 2015, sec. APAC, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-politics-population-idUSKCN0S214E20151008.

Abe, Shinzo. "Shinzo Abe: Unleashing the Power of 'Womenomics'; our Goal in Japan is to Boost Women in the Workforce significantly by 2020 and Reduce Pay Disparity." Wall Street Journal (Online), Sep 25, 2013. https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/ shinzo-abe-unleashing-power-womenomics-our-goal/docview/1436265566/se-2?accountid=14707.

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responding to Japanese women's challenges and structural issues. Kishida's website outlines his platform of four key policies. Under the "New Form of Capitalism" policy, the initiative coined "Realization of a Society Where Everyone Can Feel a Sense of Purpose" listed gender equality and women's success as primary points.

#### Similarities between Abe and Kishida's Plan On Daycare Centers

With the woman out of the house, who will be taking care of the children and doing the housework? This seems to be a primary question in both Abe and Kishida's women's empowerment policies, as both Prime Ministers addressed the domestic sphere with great attention. Namely, Abe and Kishida took similar approaches involving the opening of more childcare centers and encouraging paternity leave.

Japan has been plagued with infamously long waiting lists for daycares. Stories exist with women having to travel and visit more than 40 centers to find vacant spots for their children. The issue of being unable to find a vacant childcare center has become such a prevalent issue that a term has been coined: hokatsu, which translates to kindergarten hunting. Abe had pledged under his "Womenomics" plan to increase the percentage of women who return to the workforce after their first child to 55% by 2020. A core part of this plan was decreasing the number of children on the childcare waiting lists down to zero; it had reached a shocking number of 23,167 children in 2015. Aside from the waiting lists, another issue surrounding the childcare center is the disparate differences between private and public sector centers. The heavily subsidized publicsector nurseries have trouble hiring workers due to long working hours and low wages, and the privately-owned nurseries have costs as high as \$20,000 a year, an amount which is unaffordable for many Japanese families. Regarding this issue, Abe and Kishida have taken a similar approach to increasing the wages for childcare workers. In November

<sup>4</sup> Kishida, Fumio. 2022. "Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's Message on International Women's Day 2022." May 8, 2022 https://www.gender.go.jp/english\_contents/pr\_act/pub/status\_challenges/pdf/202205.pdf

<sup>5 &</sup>quot;未来を切り拓く「新しい資本主義」,"首相官邸ホームページ, accessed July 4, 2022, https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/headline/seisaku\_kishida/newcapitalism.html.

<sup>6</sup> Anna Fifield, "You Thought the U.S. Had a Day-Care Shortage? In Japan, the Government Is Looking for Baby-Sitters.," *Washington Post*, August 1, 2014, sec. Asia & Pacific, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\_pacific/japanese-leader-abe-wants-more-women-to-work-so-hes-got-big-plans-for-day-care/2014/08/01/8dcd84f5-c4b2-4e39-a1e0-125eaa57309b\_story.html.

of 2021, Kishida declared childcare worker wages as his top priority and was looking to raise the monthly wage by \$44 to \$88, equivalent of 5000 yen to 10,000 yen, by February 2022. Furthermore, during Abe's term, Abe pledged to increase daycare teachers' salaries by \$70 a month. Very recently, on June 15, 2022, the Diet enacted a bill to set up an agency for children and families. Declared as a "signature policy" of Kishida's term, the agency aims to eliminate bureaucratic walls and assemble sections across multiple agencies to carry out children-related initiatives—childcare centers will undoubtedly be the main focus.

#### On Childcare and Family Leave

Another similarity between Abe and Kishida's approach to women's empowerment is the encouragement of men to become more involved in their roles as fathers. During Abe's term, his cabinet pushed the idea of "work-life balance" and made initiatives such as "Society in Which Work-Life Balance Has Been Achieved". Under this plan, the goals for the government involved increasing the hours spent by men with children under six years old for childrearing and household tasks from one hour to two and a half hours per day. Additionally, the "work-life balance" plan also sought to encourage more men to take paternity leave, increasing the percentage of men taking childcare leave from 2.63% to 13% by 2020.10 In June of 2014, under Abe, male leaders across multiple industries in Japan came together to create the "Declaration on Action by A Group of Male Leaders Who Will Create a Society in which Women Shine" which involved three pillars of "Taking actions and sending messages ourselves," "Disrupting the status quo," and "Developing networking". Relating to paternity leave, under this Declaration, companies such as Nippon Life Insurance Company, Sompo Japan Nipponkoa Insurance Inc, Stride Inc, and Cross Company Inc worked together to introduce policies that made

<sup>7 &</sup>quot;Japanese Gov't Plans to Raise Monthly Wages for Nursing, Child Care Workers by up to \$88," *Mainichi Daily News*, November 10, 2021, https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20211110/p2a/00m/0na/009000c.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Fifield, "You Thought the U.S. Had a Day-Care Shortage? In Japan, the Government Is Looking for Baby-Sitters.," *Washington Post*, August 1, 2014, sec. Asia & Pacific, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\_pacific/japanese-leader-abe-wants-more-women-to-work-so-hes-got-big-plans-for-day-care/2014/08/01/8dcd84f5-c4b2-4e39-a1e0-125eaa57309b\_story.html.

<sup>9 &</sup>quot;Japan Enacts Bill to Create Agency for Children, Families," nippon.com, June 15, 2022, https://www.nippon.com/en/news/yjj2022061500135/.

<sup>10</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, "Society in Which a Work-Life Balance Has Been Achieved" (Government of Japan, 2016), https://www.gender.go.jp/english\_contents/mge/wlb/society.html.

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it easier for new fathers to take off from work. For example, Sompo Japan sent emails and leaflets to male employees whose spouses recently gave birth with a congratulatory message and an encouragement to take childcare leave. STRIDE decided to "lead by example" and issued a policy where the company executives periodically took time off to tend to childrearing and household chores.<sup>11</sup>

Kishida, on multiple occasions, has also expressed the importance of men becoming more involved in the household. In the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality, the government aims to increase the male childcare leave-taking rate to 30% by 2025. More specifically, the government under Kishida is calling for more action towards making it mandatory for companies to inform their employees about the opportunity to take paternity leave. The Fifth Basic Plan also calls for the percentage of male workers taking childcare leave in companies to be publicly revealed. 12 In June 2021, the government under Kishida passed legislation amending the Child and Family Care Act which went into effect in April 2022. Several notable amendments make childcare more feasible and appealing for men and women. Firstly, beginning in December of 2022, employees taking paternity or maternity leave will be compensated with paid leave of up to four weeks on top of the childcare leave they were initially entitled to. Furthermore, fixed-term employees can now take childcare and family leaves more flexibly. 13 In contrast, before the amendment, the employees were permitted to take leave only after working for a year—this aids women greatly, as a vast portion of the fixed-term population are women.

#### Differences in Abe and Kishida's Policies

A subtle but essential difference between Abe's and Kishida's policies surrounding women's empowerment is the *rhetoric* employed when discussing women's societal roles. Under Abe Shinzo's various initiatives and policies, a woman seems to hold the most significant value when employed and actively working. While this notion isn't

<sup>11</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, "Male Leaders Efforts to Promote Women's Active Role in Japan" (Tokyo: Government of Japan, August 2015), https://www.gender.go.jp/english\_contents/mge/declaration/pdf/women\_active\_role.pdf.

<sup>12 &</sup>quot;The Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality 'Toward a Reiwa Society Where All Women and Girls Can Thrive and Achieve Their Full Potential,'" *Japan Labor Issues* 5, no. 33 (August 2021): 6–12.

<sup>13</sup> Lockton Global Compliance, "Japan to Increase Child Care Leave," *Lockton Global Benefits* (blog), December 30, 2021, https://globalnews.lockton.com/japan-to-increase-child-care-leave/.

explicitly stated, the way in which house chores and childrearing are often considered as "leisure" or time away from work implies the lower status Abe's government assigned household tasks. For instance, in the initiative "Society in which a Work-life Balance has been Achieved", the description of the plan is "a society in which an individual citizen can work with motivation and a sense of fulfillment and discharge his/her responsibilities at work". The rhetoric in this government document indicates that participation in the household realm, through activities such as childrearing and chores, is dispelling someone from their "responsibilities". It seems to imply that childrearing and household tasks are a break or period of rest away from the obligations at work. While the sentiment of this initiative is to encourage men and women to become more involved in the community outside of their job, it can be argued Abe's government does not consider household chores and childrearing to exert the same level of stress or difficulty as a company job does.

During Abe's term, the end goal was to encourage more female participation in the workforce; however his goal disregarded the many nuances that accompany increased female workers. For instance, while the percentage of women's participation rose to 66% in 2016, 55.9% of those women that year were relegated to non-regular workers status. 15 Up until now, most of the women in the workforce hold non-regular worker roles. Still, Abe's administration did not seem to cater to this nuanced issue that applies to women in the workforce. Under Abe's terms, the courts have consistently ruled that public sector, non-regular workers have no right to job protection. 16 Additionally, the government and policymakers approached the "obstacles" of childcare in a profit-focused manner. They attempted to inexpensively increase childcare by deregulating the childcare industry and encouraging private operators to establish more childcare facilities. On paper, while more childcare facilities did indeed appear, the quality of childcare depreciated drastically. Privately owned centers did not want to hire childcare veterans since they were more expensive, and the rapid expansion of profit-focused corporations for childcare

<sup>14</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, "Society in Which a Work-Life Balance Has Been Achieved" (Government of Japan, 2016), https://www.gender.go.jp/english\_contents/mge/wlb/society.html.

<sup>15</sup> Weathers, Charles. "The Contradictions of the Womenomics Campaign: Abe Shinzō's Employment Reforms and Japan's Public Service Workers." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 53 (2018): 47–71. doi:10.1353/jwj.2018.0002

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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continuously forced down the quality of care and wages for childcare workers.<sup>17</sup> Abe's encouragement for women to join the workforce, while not addressing the issues of unequal pay and lack of job security for the female-dominated field of non-regular workers, and the rushed efforts of opening-up inadequate childcare facilities, display what was truly important for Abe's plan—economic growth, and not necessarily women's empowerment.

On the other hand, Kishida seems to be shifting away from the underlying profit-driven spirit of Abe's Womenomics and is willing to sacrifice economic efficiency for equality. First of all, in the White Paper on Gender Equality from 2020, the Gender Equality Bureau clearly stated that "it is necessary to consider not just overwork from "work," but also the effects of overwork from 'housework/childcare/caregiving'". 18 This statement highlights a key difference from Womenomics, which is that childcare and housework are essential responsibilities and are not necessarily an escape from workplace obligations. This change in rhetoric while discussing care work and house chores highlights a possible shift away from the lower status to which workers in such fields were prescribed and recognizes the value that women also hold in the home. Kishida has also publicly recognized the importance of improving the treatment of workers in the medical and welfare sectors, which is a female-dominated field. 19 While the Prime Minister and his cabinet have admitted that there is no precedent for what Kishida is attempting to do, they have repeatedly reiterated Kishida's goals of supporting families with young children and providing social security for non-regular workers.<sup>20</sup> The overview of the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality, published in March 2021, not only does it explicitly acknowledge the mistreatment that non-regular workers face but also makes it a key initiative to take measures necessary to convert non-regular workers into regular workers.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office. White Paper of Gender Equality 2020. Tokyo: Government of Japan, July 2020.

<sup>19 &</sup>quot;Japanese Gov't Plans to Raise Monthly Wages for Nursing, Child Care Workers by up to \$88," *Mainichi Daily News*, November 10, 2021, https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20211110/p2a/00m/0na/009000c.

<sup>20 &</sup>quot;Kishida's Lofty Economic Plans Lacking One Thing: Details | The Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis," The Asahi Shimbun, accessed July 4, 2022, https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14454514.

<sup>21</sup> Cabinet Office, "The Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality" (Government of Japan, March 2021), https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100236491.pdf.

As mentioned previously, the amendments to the Child and Family Care Act which introduced more flexibility in allowing non-regular workers, a female-dominated population, to take childcare leave is demonstrative of the more detailed attention placed on women in the workforce. Compared to Abe's profit-focused, growth-driven Womenomics plan that prioritized getting women into the workforce no matter the cost, Kishida's plans seem to better recognize the tradeoff and nuances of women's involvement in the workplace. While Kishida's plan might come with increased taxes for additional funds, it does paint a positive picture of more recognition and awareness of a woman's responsibilities and importance in society.

#### Conclusion

Under both Abe Shinzo and Fumio Kishida's policies, an effort to involve women in the professional sphere can be observed. Both Prime Ministers have taken ambitious steps towards encouraging women to leave the domestic space, primarily through efforts such as providing more childcare support and allocating more of the housework and childrearing responsibilities to men as well. The subtle but prominent difference between Abe and Kishida is, however, that Abe was arguably more focused on economic expansion rather than gender equality. Encouraging higher female participation in the workforce was an instrument of economic development for Abe.

Even though Kishida is shifting away from Abe's economic-driven motives, the gender issue in Japan still seems to be largely social in nature. In spite of the encouragement for increased paternity leave, Japanese men are still reluctant to abide and help their wives at home. Yet, this issue stems from the workplace and corporate structure in Japan, which values longevity and consistency at work. Therefore, in order to address the gender inequality issue in Japan, it is necessary to address the broader social and economic factors which contribute to the current state of Japanese women—a process which will certainly require time and large-scale social mobilization.

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## Myopia in Korea: The U.S.-South Korea Alliance and the Relationship Between Lyndon Johnson and Park Chung-hee, 1963-1969

Samuel Mills

A native of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, Samuel Mills earned his B.A. in Asian Studies and International Relations and Global Studies from the University of Texas at Austin's College of Liberal Arts in May 2024. He graduated with highest honors and was named a Dean's Distinguished Graduate by the College of Liberal Arts, the highest honor the College awards to students. His senior honors thesis, entitled "U.S. Military Retrenchment, the Vietnam War, and the Yushin Regime: South Korea and the Nixon Doctrine, 1969-74," was the winner of the Liberal Arts Honors Outstanding Thesis Award in the Humanities. Mills will be attending the University of California, Berkeley as an M.A. candidate in Asian Studies starting in the fall of 2024 and ultimately hopes to earn a Ph.D. in history.

#### Introduction

The United States' relationship with the Republic of Korea (hereafter referred to as South Korea) since the latter's founding in 1948 has generally been characterized by amity and cooperation. Common action on prerogatives related to economic development, military security, diplomacy, and mutual cultural affinity has underpinned the perception that the two countries and their leaders have tended to move in lockstep with each other. However, the history of the U.S.-South Korea alliance has encountered periods of significant tension and even hostility, as the two countries and their leaders have oscillated between sharing overwhelming mutual interests and bickering over dramatically different concerns at many points over the past several decades. Perhaps no time in the alliance's history saw more volatility than the period between 1963 and 1969, which corresponded with the presidency of Lyndon Johnson in the U.S. and the majority of the first decade of Park Chung-hee's leadership of South Korea. Major developments on the Korean peninsula and elsewhere, including ongoing tensions between North and South Korea, Park's zealous economic development initiatives, Seoul's normalization of diplomatic relations with Tokyo, the Vietnam War, and the security crisis of 1968 served as major inflection points defining the nature of the relationship between the U.S. and South Korea as well as that between Johnson and Park. This paper seeks to analyze how the relationship between Lyndon Johnson and Park Chung-hee

was influenced by the state of the U.S.-South Korea alliance, with key developments such as the normalization of relations between South Korea and Japan, the deployment of South Korean troops to Vietnam, and the fallout from the Blue House raid and capture of the U.S.S. *Pueblo* examined as inflection points impacting the correspondence between the two men and, in turn, the two nations.

#### **Two Towering Enigmas**

Before assessing the context of the alliance between the U.S. and South Korea in the 1960s and the events that so profoundly affected it, it is critical to understand the characteristics of the two men whose leadership had significant effects on the political, economic, and social evolution of both countries. Reflections on the Johnson administration tend to understate the seminal role played by the thirty-sixth U.S. President's distinctive personal characteristics in shaping his policy decisions and relationships with politicians both at home in the U.S. and abroad, in part because, as acknowledged by many biographers, Johnson's personality was so idiosyncratic that it is nigh impossible to assess succinctly. Similarly, many analyses of South Korea under Park's rule tend to focus on the economic phenomena that underpinned the so-called "Miracle on the Han River" during the 1960s through a lens of developmental state theory, downplaying or altogether ignoring the historical factors at play in the country as well as the influence of Park's personality, leadership style, and individual motivations on the Third Republic of Korea and its politics.2

In Johnson's case, his upbringing and path to assuming the presidency at the age of fifty-five after more than three decades' experience in Washington had an enormous bearing on his personal and political disposition. Lyndon Johnson was born in 1908 in the small Texas Hill Country town of Stonewall, located roughly fifty miles west of the state capital of Austin, and primarily raised in nearby Johnson City. His life was atypical from the start: his father, Sam Johnson, was an experienced state legislator who championed the interests of impoverished farmers but spurned many of the racist stances taken by his colleagues and refused

<sup>1</sup> Mark K. Updegrove, Indomitable Will: LBJ in the Presidency (New York: Skyhorse, 2014), 9–13.

<sup>2</sup> Byung-Kook Kim, "Introduction: The Case for Political History," in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F.Vogel (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 26.

to be bought by lobbyists and powerful businessmen. Lyndon, though intrigued by his father's profession and profoundly influenced by the elder Johnson's faith in government as an altruistic representative of the common man, nonetheless grew resentful of his father and the life the Johnson family lived as his ambitions grew. Rather than attending college as his parents had desired, Lyndon fled the poverty and ennui that had afflicted him in his hometown for California, but a lack of opportunity saw him return to Texas and enroll in college within a year.<sup>3</sup> Although Lyndon Johnson worked tirelessly from a young age to escape the Hill Country and the harsh lifestyle it imposed on its inhabitants, the material conditions of his birthplace and relationship with his family left an imprint on his personality and political philosophy that remained with him for his entire life. The hardscrabble poverty that afflicted the small communities of Stonewall and Johnson City, the lack of opportunity brought about by the region's poor soil and lacking infrastructure, and the ceaseless confidence Sam Johnson had in government to address the struggles of ordinary people in underserved locales like those of the Hill Country undoubtedly influenced Lyndon Johnson's hard-nosed, gritty sense of determination, fierce aversion to failure, and view of government as a force for good.

In addition to solidifying his persistent character and staunchly liberal ideals, Lyndon Johnson's journey to the Oval Office shaped his pragmatism and refined his skills as a legislator and negotiator. Johnson first began working on Capitol Hill in 1931 as an assistant to Representative Richard M. Kleberg, a nonchalant politician who delegated most of his responsibilities to his staffers. Johnson, a man enchanted by Washington and enthralled by the opportunity he saw to escape from the austere existence of life in Texas, was a relentless force on the Hill and beyond, especially after fellow liberal Franklin Delano Roosevelt became President in 1933. Johnson worked tiringly long shifts, built an enormous network of bureaucrats and elected officials, and developed a close relationship with many of the most influential men in Washington; he worked his way up political ladders, endearing himself to figures like Representative Sam Rayburn before gaining the attention and respect of Roosevelt. After earning himself a stint as the Texas state

<sup>3</sup> Bruce J. Schulman, Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 6-8.

<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Caro, The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 156-157.

director of the National Youth Administration, Johnson was elected a congressman in his own right in 1937 in Texas's 10th House district, home to much of his native Hill Country.<sup>5</sup> Eleven years later, he won a fiercely contested Senate election against then-Texas Governor Coke Stevenson under controversial circumstances, setting the stage for his ascension to one of the most powerful positions in the Democratic Party.

Johnson's steady rise to the upper echelons of Congress and ultimately the vice presidency saw him become a master of the legislative process, most notably vote-counting and securing widespread support from his colleagues. 6 Johnson additionally walked a political tightrope between representing Texas and its interests and seeking a position as a national leader within the Democratic caucus and the Senate as a whole, which ingrained in him a shrewd pragmatism that stuck with him for the remainder of his political career. He remained a Southerner in many ways even as he became the Democrats' vice presidential nominee in the 1960 presidential election, retaining a sense of enmity toward coastal elites and clashing with Robert F. Kennedy as he courted support from his home state and other parts of the South to help the Democratic ticket to victory in a close contest. As Vice President, Johnson remained true to his primordial characteristics, many of which would go on to define his presidency: he acted on his concerns for the least fortunate Americans, particularly on civil rights issues, and he remained partial to addressing domestic policy issues that most tangibly affected the slice of the country he most resonated with and wished to serve.

Meanwhile, Park Chung-hee was born in 1917 in Kumi, a rural town north of Taegu in a southeastern region of the Korean peninsula known as Kyŏngsang. At the time, Korea was a Japanese colony; Tokyo's rule of the country was characterized by draconian repression of the Korean language and culture as well as the forceful exploitation of land and labor, galvanizing pro-independence, anti-colonial, and nationalist sentiment, but Korea also experienced industrialization and considerable economic growth, leading to considerable collaboration between some pro-Japanese Koreans and colonial authorities. Park, who was raised in an impoverished farming family, was a taciturn but ingenious, ambitious, and vain individual who detested growing up in an impoverished, backwater part of Korea; much like Johnson, he was desperate to escape

<sup>5</sup> Schulman, Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism, 16-19.

<sup>6</sup> Caro, The Years of Lyndon Johnson, 150-153.

his hometown for greener pastures.<sup>7</sup> While Johnson's path to power began in legislative work, Park found a place in the military, joining the Manchukuo Imperial Army in 1940. His talents were quickly recognized by his Japanese superiors, and he was admitted to the Japanese Military Academy in Tokyo, where he graduated in 1944. After Korea was liberated from Japanese rule the following year, he entered what later became the Korea Military Academy, graduating in 1946.<sup>8</sup>

In 1948, Park was arrested for having connections to the South Korean Workers' Party amidst a crackdown on leftist insurgent groups and uprisings in South Cholla and Cheju. Though he was initially sentenced to death, he was released after providing valuable intelligence on the party's activities, and while he was thereafter assigned to a civilian intelligence position, the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 allowed to restart his military career with his reputation essentially untarnished. The war established the military as one of the most important institutions in South Korea, and with Park continuing to ascend in rank alongside many fellow Manchukuo Army veterans and Korea Military Academy veterans, he began to dream of leading a coup, first considering such a measure as early as 1956 amidst a fraudulent presidential election won by an increasingly unpopular Syngman Rhee.<sup>9</sup> After Rhee was ousted from power in 1960 by the student-led April 19 Revolution, South Korea was governed by a democratic parliamentary government led by Prime Minister Chang Myŏn. However, the Chang government was ineffective and unpopular among the electorate, leading to growing discontent within the military. Seizing the opportunity, Park led a coup alongside other army officers on May 16, 1961, setting the stage for him to take full power a year later.

Park and his comrades saw themselves as revolutionaries acting to save the South Korean state and its people from the corruption and ineffective governance of the Rhee and Chang governments. <sup>10</sup> In 1961, South Korea was still yet to recover from the chaos and destruction engendered by the Korean War, and with a per-capita GDP of roughly 100 USD, it ranked among the world's poorest countries. Meanwhile, its

<sup>7</sup> Kyung Moon Hwang, A History of Korea: An Episodic Narrative, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave, Macmillan Education, 2017), 229.

<sup>8</sup> Yong-Sup Han, "The May Sixteenth Military Coup," in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F.Vogel (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 36–37.

<sup>9</sup> Han, "The May Sixteenth Military Coup," 38-41.

<sup>10</sup> Han, "The May Sixteenth Military Coup," 45-47.

northern neighbor had managed to largely rebuild itself with Soviet and East German assistance, and Kim Il-sung had successfully purged most of his political opponents; at this point, the North appeared to be noticeably stronger and stabler than the South. Park saw North Korea's economic superiority as an existential threat; his junta therefore publicly placed heavy emphasis on their plans to focus on economic policy, naming their interim government the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction to underscore their economic commitments and rolling out ambitious proposals for reform.<sup>11</sup>

Park, like Lyndon Johnson, was a puzzling figure with a complex personality. He was particularly invested in South Korea's development; he had long been an admirer of Japan's successful industrialization during the Meiji period, and although he had Japanophilic tendencies, he was above all a staunch Korean nationalist who had a desire to build a "rich nation [and] strong army" by pursuing an economic growth strategy that would allow him to outcompete his adversaries in Pyongyang and, in time, lift South Korea into the same echelon of prosperity as Japan and the West. 12 Park was defined by his many contradictory characteristics: his admiration for Japanese bushido culture and his patriotic devotion to South Korea, his delight at the destruction of the centuries-old Korean caste system and his uncompromising commitment to an orderly and militaristic rule, and his flirtation with leftist groups before suddenly rebranding himself as a stalwart anti-communist all bewilder any biographer or historian. But there was something undoubtable about the Park Chung-hee that Lyndon Johnson came to know: this was a man who would go to extraordinary lengths to defend his government's interests – so much so that South Korea's relationship with the U.S. came to be nearly synonymous with Park's relationship with whoever occupied the Oval Office.

#### Contextualizing the U.S.-South Korea Relationship

By the time Lyndon Johnson took office in November 1963, the United States and South Korea had shared a close military and political alliance for more than fifteen years. When South Korea officially became an independent state as the Republic of Korea in August 1948, it retained strong ties with the United States, who had previously occupied the

<sup>11</sup> Han, "The May Sixteenth Military Coup," 54-55.

<sup>12</sup> Han, "The May Sixteenth Military Coup," 31.

southern half of the Korean peninsula under a military government. Though the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 ostensibly brought Seoul and Washington ever closer, especially regarding security matters, the lack of immediate defense of the South and near-unification of the peninsula under the North sparked lasting fears and a subtle mistrust of the U.S. among South Korean officials. Disagreements between Syngman Rhee and American military and political leaders further signaled the limitations to the U.S.-South Korea alliance. For example, Rhee was adamant in his desire to fully reunify the peninsula under his government, and when an armistice was finally agreed to and signed in July 1953, the Rhee regime refused to ratify the document. When later that year the U.S. and South Korea signed the Mutual Defense Treaty, which solidified the U.S.'s role as the primary guarantor of South Korea's military security, South Korean officials were concerned by the document's omission of a provision mandating American military intervention in the event of an attack on South Korea. This vulnerability in particular would go on to play a major role in influencing Park's security policy vis-a-vis the United States.

Syngman Rhee, though a familiar figure to the American security community, began to have a falling out of sorts with the U.S. in the final few years of his presidency. Rhee frustrated officials in Washington by failing to provide South Korea with a sense of direction in the aftermath of the war; when Rhee left office, the country was hardly any less poor or weak than it was when the armistice was signed. Rhee's decision to revise the constitution to permit himself to run for an unlimited number of presidential terms in 1956 and stubborn refusal to consider normalizing diplomatic relations with Japan further hampered his relationship with the U.S. When student protests culminating in the April 19 Movement threatened to oust Rhee from power in 1960, Washington refused to intervene on his behalf and save his regime.

When Park and other officers overthrew the Chang Myŏn government in May 1961, they faced the challenge of convincing the U.S. to acquiesce to, if not endorse, their rule over South Korea. Though some of the circumstances of the political situation in South Korea at the time worked to the junta's advantage, notably the lack of a strong civil society, the relative loyalty of the military to the coup leaders, <sup>13</sup> and the lack of viable alternatives to support in place of Park's entourage, the U.S. held

<sup>13</sup> Han, "The May Sixteenth Military Coup," 52-53.

significant leverage over the junta in that they were able to withhold its rights to legitimacy and overt support. American officials were willing to accept the new regime, but they were wary of its authoritarian inclinations, namely its persecution of dissident groups and its risky economic policy decisions. Ultimately, the U.S. government's apparent "wait-and-see" strategy was not representative of genuine indecisiveness but rather a calculated move designed to minimize Washington's qualms with a government that was otherwise worthy of U.S. support.

The U.S. ultimately pushed Park and his colleagues the hardest with respect to returning to civilian rule and economic management practices. U.S. policymakers wary of restraining the junta should they move policy decisions forward without consulting with them first hoped that holding elections and dissolving the military-led Supreme Council for National Reconstruction would grant them more sway over South Korean politics and maximize domestic political stability. In a similar vein, the U.S. refused to provide Park's regime with much of the capital it desired to pursue its proposed five-year economic development plan, which entailed a number of heavy and chemical industry projects alongside an aggressive expansionary monetary policy.<sup>16</sup> In effect, Washington had veto power over any decisions made by Seoul, greatly stifling Park's ability to set his ambitious agenda in motion. Though the U.S. undoubtedly caused Park much frustration, Park was nonetheless able to capitalize on some American weaknesses, notably the dissociation between the interests of the Pentagon, the Department of State, and the CIA and other intelligence agencies. Moreover, Park recognized that the best possible conduit for much-needed aid and capital ran through institutions in Washington, and with that, he recognized that illustrating his government's loyalty to the U.S. and alignment with American foreign policy would enable him to secure support for elements of his agenda in return. This firmly established a U.S.-South Korea relationship that was largely transactional rather than genuinely congenial, as Seoul and Washington came to ground their alliance not on the basis of mutual goodwill but rather on a careful avoidance of discord due to mutual security and political interests that facilitated a quid pro quo style of diplomacy. Though this partnership

<sup>14</sup> Taehyun Kim and Chang Jae Baik, "Taming and Tamed by the United States," in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F.Vogel (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 63–64.

<sup>15</sup> Kim and Baik, "Taming and Tamed by the United States," 66.

<sup>16</sup> Kim and Baik, "Taming and Tamed by the United States," 75-76.

provided mutual benefits for both parties for much of the first several years of Park's presidency, it was inevitable that disagreement between the U.S. and South Korea would have grave consequences for the two countries' alliance and the relationship between their leaders.

#### **Normalizing Relations With Japan**

When Park came to power in 1961, he was presented with a risky but promising opportunity in normalizing diplomatic relations with Japan, a move long desired by the U.S. to enhance the strength of its security partnerships in Northeast Asia. Syngman Rhee, who had lobbied American policymakers to support Korea's independence from Japan for decades before coming to power, refused to open meaningful dialogue with Tokyo during his tenure; he demanded that the Japanese government take full responsibility for transgressions committed during the colonial period and only acquiesced to small-scale talks after 1951 that achieved little progress. Chang Myŏn was interested in improving bilateral relations in the hope of boosting South Korea's stagnant economy and providing his government with much-needed political legitimacy, <sup>17</sup> but his ouster by Park and other military officers prevented serious progression in negotiations from occurring.

Park's interest in promoting collaboration with Japan was rooted in his longstanding admiration for the country's advancement during the Meiji era, a process which he hoped to emulate in South Korea for both economic and security reasons. He further recognized his ability to endear himself to U.S. officials by delivering a desirable diplomatic milestone and securing their approval of his domestic political agenda by circumventing market forces to pursue economic growth amidst shrinking U.S. aid packages. Though Japanese leaders initially demurred on the issue of opening substantive dialogue with Park's regime, especially given their distaste at the overthrow of a democratic government by military officers, Park's overtures quickly shifted the mood in Tokyo, signaling that he was a leader who would work to prevent the emergence of another anti-Japanese government across the East Sea and the augmentation of the North Korean security threat while concomitantly reversing the course of previously anemic bilateral negotiations and embracing closer relations

<sup>17</sup> Jung-Hoon Lee, "Normalization of Relations with Japan: Toward a New Partnership," in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F.Vogel (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 433-434.

between South Korea and Japan.<sup>18</sup> The U.S. came to encourage an agreement between the two governments, with Dean Rusk, who served as Secretary of State under both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, assuming the role of mediator between Seoul and Tokyo in July 1961.<sup>19</sup> Rusk, who would later become a trusted advisor to Johnson, ultimately played a major role in influencing Johnson's attitude toward Park.

By the time Johnson became President in November 1963 following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, a character with whom Park had a largely amicable relationship, significant progress toward a settlement between South Korea and Japan had been made. The U.S.'s role as a mediator in negotiations deepened shortly after Johnson entered office, as increasingly overt public discontent in South Korea with Park's overtures and the growing security crisis in Indochina engendered by Johnson's escalation of American involvement in Vietnam saw Washington double down on its commitments to present an image of unified anti-communism among its Asian allies. Moreover, South Korea's willingness to dispatch troops to Vietnam saw U.S. officials become more understanding of Park's perspective, leading them to encourage Japan to make concessions to South Korea and taking a more active role in aiding Park as he navigated the political ramifications of approving a normalization agreement.<sup>20</sup>

Meetings between high-ranking officials, including trusted advisors to both Park and Johnson, occurred frequently between the time of Johnson's ascendance to the presidency and the eventual ratification of the Treaty of Basic Relations in June 1965. In April 1964, senior State Department officials including Secretary Rusk met with some of Park's top colleagues, including Prime Minister Ch'oe Tu-sŏn, Ambassador Kim Chŏng-ryŏl, and members of Park's Democratic Republican Party in the National Assembly. The men were cordial in their conversations, and the American officials present showed consideration to the concerns of their South Korean counterparts, with Rusk deferring to Prime Minister Ch'oe to give an explanation of the domestic political situation and his accompanying concerns. Ch'oe was candid in his remarks, noting his government was hoping to finalize an agreement with Japan but was wary of the unpopularity of such a move; he asked the Secretary of State to

<sup>18</sup> Lee, "Normalization of Relations with Japan," 434-436.

<sup>19</sup> Lee, "Normalization of Relations with Japan," 440.

<sup>20</sup> Lee, "Normalization of Relations with Japan," 446-448.

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recall the concerns Park had voiced during previous meetings Rusk had had with the South Korean President.<sup>21</sup> Ch'oe later met with Johnson alongside Ambassador Kim, where the U.S. President tersely expressed his wish that negotiations soon reach a successful conclusion and his trust in South Korean officials to close out an agreement; Ch'oe echoed his sentiments and thanked Johnson for his hospitality.<sup>22</sup> Though Johnson was less concerned with the fundamentals of foreign policy than his zealous domestic policy agenda, internal communication within the U.S. foreign policy establishment suggests U.S.-South Korea relations were rather friendly and characterized by relative patience on the part of the Americans toward Park's convoluted domestic political considerations. Johnson was also readily made aware of senior foreign policy officials' view that Park's ambition was a major reason for the successful direction of South Korea-Japan negotiations.<sup>23</sup>

When Johnson and Park met together in May 1965, marking their first time together since Park's attendance at the funeral of John F. Kennedy, the two men were very friendly with each other, as would be expected during a relative high point in U.S.-South Korea relations. Park and Johnson, who appeared to find genuine accord in part due to their common past as former schoolteachers, in turn discussed bilateral educational and scientific collaboration and exchange. They then issued a joint communique in which they exchanged praise for their respective commitments to their alliance. Johnson expressed his delight with Park's leadership in brokering the diplomatic normalization agreements, which by this point were nearing ratification, and praised the economic growth Park's government had engineered;<sup>24</sup> Park had responded in kind with gratitude for South Korea's partnership with the U.S. at his arrival ceremony the day prior.<sup>25</sup> The process of drafting, finalizing, and signing the Treaty on Basic Relations, specifically the role exercised by the U.S. as an arbitrator between South Korea and Japan, had successfully

<sup>21</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 9 April 1964, Box 254, Volume 1, National Security File, Country File, Korea, Johnson Library.

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 9 April 1964, Box 254, Volume 1, National Security File, Country File, Korea, Johnson Library.

<sup>23</sup> Memorandum for the President, 17 May 1965, Box 256, Park Visit Briefing Book, National Security File, Country File, Korea, Johnson Library.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum for the President, Joint Statement of the President Following Discussion With the President of Korea, 18 May 1965, Box 147, Statements Files, Johnson Library.

<sup>25</sup> Remarks of the President at the Arrival Ceremony of His Excellency Chung Hee Park, President of the Republic of Korea, 17 May 1965, Box 146, Statements Files, Johnson Library.

strengthened the U.S.-South Korea alliance, bolstered South Korea's importance in U.S. foreign policy toward Asia, and fostered amicable correspondence between Park Chung-hee and Lyndon Johnson.

Nonetheless, the ratification of the Treaty on Basic Relations sowed the initial seeds of strife in the U.S.-South Korea alliance in some respects. As agreed to by South Korean and Japanese negotiators after extensive haggling, Park's government was the beneficiary of 300 million USD in grants, 200 million USD in Official Development Assistance loans, and 100 million USD in commercial loans.<sup>26</sup> This large sum, which the Japanese government was content to label as reparations for their thirty-five-year occupation of Korea, was then used by Park as seed money for ambitious industrial development projects and large-scale investments in infrastructure that accelerated South Korea's already high economic growth rate. With U.S. aid already on the decline, the settlement enabled Park to assume greater agency after securing greater deference from Washington, and his power was reinforced by a significantly more formidable economy that continued to grow at a rapid pace. Though the U.S.-South Korea relationship had benefited greatly from the course of Seoul-Tokyo negotiations, Park's willingness to interact with the U.S. was regardless motivated by necessity, and given his fiercely nationalistic tendencies, it stands to reason that his decision to rely on stalwart American support was a calculated but begrudging one. With Park spared from much of the heavy U.S. pressure that afflicted him and his colleagues during the early days of his leadership, he likely felt emboldened by his successes and newfound independence – and with that, the stage for future tension was set. It was only a matter of time after 1965 that the friendly facade of the relationship between Park and Lyndon Johnson – and that between Seoul and Washington – would unravel completely.

#### **Entering the Vietnam War**

When South Korean troops first arrived in Vietnam in 1964, South Korea was not an ally of South Vietnam nor a party to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, and Park had long considered his primary concern to be the pressing security situation on the Korean peninsula. Nonetheless, South Korea had the highest per-capita participation rate in the Vietnam War and was second to only the U.S. in

terms of total deployment numbers, with some 320,000 troops dispatched in total. Park also displayed his commitment to supporting American interests by sending the Tiger and White Horse Divisions, among the army's most elite combat units, in 1965 and 1966, respectively.<sup>27</sup> Park assigned Ch'ae Myŏng-sin, a longtime confidant and fellow graduate of the Korea Military Academy with whom he had overthrown the Chang Myŏn government, to serve as the commander of South Korea's forces in Vietnam. Though striking on the surface, Park's choice to deploy troops to Vietnam was a shrewd one primarily aimed at optimizing South Korea's security situation.

That said, there were significant economic benefits obtained from the series of troop dispatches Park authorized. Though they were paid noticeably less than their American counterparts, South Korean soldiers earned significantly higher monthly wages than the average South Korean citizen, enabling Park's regime to secure much-needed hard currency by collecting portions of servicemen's paychecks and boosting the economy with the injection of more cash into the nascent South Korean market. Moreover, troops sent to Vietnam were accompanied by civilian workers, many of whom were employed in construction or other services that proved to be reliable money-makers for the Park regime. The U.S. also provided significant financial compensation to Seoul for the trouble of its participation in Vietnam, providing further funding for Park's industrialization efforts.

National security concerns trumped economic ones for Park, however, and his decision to assist the U.S. not only fit into a broader strategy to bolster his regime's interests vis-a-vis American support but also came with notable precedent. Syngman Rhee had offered to send troops to Vietnam in 1954 in the hopes of preventing the U.S. from withdrawing some of its forces in the aftermath of the Korean War, but then-President Dwight Eisenhower declined Rhee's proposal, as he knew the American public would not support the U.S.'s military presence in Korea should South Korean forces be active elsewhere. After taking power, Park had personally told John F. Kennedy while on a visit to Washington in 1961 that he would be willing to dispatch troops to Vietnam, but Kennedy, ever-cautious in his approach to foreign policy and hoping to

<sup>27</sup> Min Yong Lee, "The Vietnam War: South Korea's Search for National Security," in *The Park Chung Hee Era:The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung–Kook Kim and Ezra F.Vogel (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 403–404.

avoid a deterioration in the situation in Vietnam, similarly turned Park down. <sup>28</sup> Park had also extended significant support to the U.S. military in exchange for security benefits prior to South Korean involvement in Vietnam, going so far as to authorize the careful regulation of prostitution in military camptowns with U.S. support in the hope that U.S. military officials and servicemen would maintain high morale and continue to safeguard South Korea from the looming threat of the North. <sup>29</sup>

When Lyndon Johnson signaled his desire to brand the Vietnam War as an international struggle against communism and made his first formal request to South Korea for troops in May 1964, it stands to reason that Park was likely delighted with Johnson's departure from his predecessor's more restrained attitude. Park swiftly began planning for a troop dispatch, and after successfully steering a proposal to send 140 noncombat troops through the National Assembly, South Korean forces began their participation in Vietnam in September 1964. A second request from Washington came three months later, to which Park obliged by dispatching an additional 2,000 non-combatant medics and military engineers. Combat troops began arriving in the tens of thousands with a major dispatch in the middle of 1965, with a second dispatch following in the spring of 1966 as American escalation of the conflict continued.<sup>30</sup>

In some respects, the provision of large numbers of soldiers by South Korea deepened the sense of cooperation between Park's government and the U.S., helping to endear Park and the country he led to Johnson and other high-ranking American officials. Imitating many of their measures from the process of arbitrating the Treaty on Basic Relations, the U.S. security community took special care to reassure Park and avoid consequences that would damage his regime in the domestic political arena,<sup>31</sup> and Johnson himself acknowledged the obstacles that Park faced in dispatching troops to Vietnam and his willingness to provide further American assistance in his letters to the South Korean leader.<sup>32</sup> Reflecting the deepening relationship between the two countries, Johnson

<sup>28</sup> Lee, "The Vietnam War," 408-409.

<sup>29</sup> David Vine, "My Body Was Not Mine, but the US Military's," POLITICO (POLITICO, November 3, 2015), https://www.politico.eu/article/my-body-was-not-mine-but-the-u-s-militarys/.

<sup>30</sup> Lee, "The Vietnam War," 408-409.

<sup>31</sup> Winthrop G. Brown to William Bundy, 10 July 1965, Box 254, Volume 2, National Security File, Country File, Korea, Johnson Library.

<sup>32</sup> Lyndon Johnson to Chung Hee Park, 31 December 1967, Box 5, President Park, Vol. I, Head of State Correspondence File, Johnson Library.

visited South Korea in October and November of 1966; while there, he praised the work done by Park's government to modernize the country and combat communism across Asia, 33 signaling the extent to which Vietnam had made Park one of Johnson's most important partners. For his part, Johnson seemed to enjoy his trip, raving about the advances which the country had made, praising the people of South Korea as "great, proud, [intelligent, energetic, and hardworking],"34 and enjoying *pudae-tchigae* enough that the popular stew earned the moniker of "Johnsontang."35

In spite of the apparent agreement and cooperation generated by the mobilization of armed forces by both countries, Park's decision to dispatch troops to Vietnam can also be categorized as a part of his security strategy of strengthening ties with the U.S. in that it deepened the extent to which the U.S.-South Korea relationship was a transactional one. Though Park was eager to send forces to Vietnam even before Johnson's initial call for help, the use of pressure and leverage on both sides was pronounced from the very beginning of the venture; for instance, even as Park worked to set the earliest troop deployments in motion, U.S. Ambassador Winthrop G. Brown suggested that should South Korea refuse to dispatch troops, the U.S. would withdraw some of its personnel in Korea in response.<sup>36</sup> Park's statecraft followed a similar scheme to extract desirable concessions from the U.S., namely the modernization of his military, economic assistance, continued American military presence to provide deterrence, and Washington's acquiescence to his domestic political agenda; for this, Park was willing to support the interests of the Johnson administration by providing troops, supplies, and additional personnel and satisfying U.S. military personnel serving in South Korea as much as possible.

When both Seoul and Washington were amenable to barter for their respective needs, as was generally the case during the escalation of the Vietnam War up until early 1968, the two governments were able to maintain a stable relationship and seemingly strengthen their alliance, even when their correspondences were on the aloof side as a result of

<sup>33</sup> Seoul Speech, 29 October 1966, Box 8, Asian Trip, National Security File, Files of Walt W. Rostow, Johnson Library.

<sup>34</sup> Seoul Speech, 29 October 1966, Box 8, Asian Trip, National Security File, Files of Walt W. Rostow, Johnson Library.

<sup>35</sup> Hahna Yoon, "How a South Korean Comfort Food Went Global," BBC (BBC, June 10, 2020), https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20200609-how-a-south-korean-comfort-food-went-global.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, "The Vietnam War," 410.

underlying tensions and disagreements. Warning signs of a breakdown in relations were evident well before the Pueblo incident, however; after Park authorized the first dispatch of combat troops in 1965, quiet frustrations among Park and his colleagues simmered when U.S. officials balked at their request that the U.S. revise the Mutual Defense Treaty to require that the American military intervene in the event of an attack on South Korea.<sup>37</sup> When the Americans once again refused to consider the same request in return for Park's second dispatch of troops the following spring, South Korean officials, including Park, began to remonstrate with the U.S. more forcefully. Vice President Hubert Humphrey visited Seoul to offer additional economic concessions and reassure Park of the U.S.'s security commitment, but the gesture did little to mollify Park and other senior South Korean policymakers. 38 With the anti-war movement gaining ground in the U.S., Park increasingly feared that the U.S. might fail to deliver on its promises to defend South Korea in the event of an armed attack. Though the two countries continued to cooperate, there was an undeniable tension building between them, and in the event they could no longer see eye-to-eye with each other, there would be grave repercussions for the U.S.-South Korea alliance.

### A Partnership Imperiled: The Blue House Raid and the Pueblo Incident

One of the preeminent reasons that the *Pueblo* incident contributed to such a serious downturn in U.S.-South Korea relations was that it was immediately preceded by an assassination attempt on Park. On January 21, 1968, North Korean commandos attempted to raid the Blue House, South Korea's presidential residence, and kill Park. Though the effort was unsuccessful and Park survived physically unscathed, he was left horrified and infuriated by North Korea's provocation. The situation went from bad to worse just two days later when North Korean forces seized the U.S.S. *Pueblo*, an intelligence-gathering vessel, in the East Sea. Not only did Seoul and Washington propose different responses to the crises, with the former calling for immediate military retaliation and the latter emphasizing the need for restraint, but the U.S. became almost entirely fixated on freeing the crew of the *Pueblo*, negotiating with the North

<sup>37</sup> Lee, "The Vietnam War," 414.

<sup>38</sup> Lee, "The Vietnam War," 417-418.

Koreans at Panmunjom and turning a blind eye to the assault on the Blue House.<sup>39</sup> The U.S., seeking to avoid a military confrontation, also began notifying Soviet officials of their correspondence with North Korean negotiators within weeks of the *Pueblo*'s seizure.<sup>40</sup>

Park was incensed by the Americans' dialogue with North Korea and apparent nonchalance regarding the commando attack. Some of his colleagues proposed military sanctions against Pyongyang and the withdrawal of South Korean troops in Vietnam, and Park himself even considered launching a unilateral military attack on the North in response to the attempt on his life. However, American officials led by special envoy Cyrus R. Vance, a trusted Johnson advisor, strong-armed Park by threatening to withdraw U.S. forces in Korea in the event Park bucked their will. The series of events was a brutal wake-up call for Park: despite what he considered to be concerted efforts to prove his loyalty to and support for the U.S., he felt he and his country had been betrayed. With Johnson also beginning to reduce the extent of American involvement in Vietnam as popular support for the war waned in the U.S., Park prepared to similarly withdraw South Korean forces and address security concerns posed by North Korea, a process he began during the Nixon administration and carefully timed to maximize American compensation and concessions<sup>41</sup> – thereby maintaining much of the transactional essence of the U.S.-South Korea relationship.

As a result of these events, Park's personal relationship with Johnson suffered mightily, especially as Johnson, a man whose interest in foreign policy was tepid at best, largely heeded the advice given to him by other officials and doubled down on his other ambitions, none of which had anything serious to do with Park's beloved South Korea. Though Park was forced to protest to State Department and military officials in the direct aftermath of the Blue House raid and the seizure of the *Pueblo*, he had an opportunity to speak directly with Johnson at a summit in Honolulu in April 1968. Though Johnson was preoccupied with the situation in Vietnam and hoping to push for a peace agreement to end the war after announcing he would not seek a second full term as President the month prior, Park arrived in Hawaii an irate and anxious man with

<sup>39</sup> Lee, "The Vietnam War," 420-421.

<sup>40</sup> Dean Rusk to William J. Porter, 19 February 1968, Box 10, The President's File for Korea, Vietnam (Briefings), National Security File, Files of Walt W. Rostow, Johnson Library.

<sup>41</sup> Lee, "The Vietnam War," 421-422.

genuine reservations about the survival of his country and outright pessimism regarding the reliability of the superpower that was meant to be his most dependable ally. Moreover, though Park was frustrated by the Johnson administration's inaction in response to the Blue House raid, he was annoyed by Johnson's decision not to seek reelection, as it essentially guaranteed the next U.S. president would roll back American involvement in Vietnam<sup>42</sup> – thereby damaging Park's ability to secure U.S. security assistance by reducing the need for South Korean troops by proxy and casting doubt on the extent that American efforts at containment would continue to entail a strong U.S. presence in Korea.

Though the two heads of state exchanged pleasantries when they first sat down for their morning conversation at the Honolulu summit, Park soon struggled to conceal his frustration. As the two discussed the course of the Vietnam War and the political considerations that had impacted it, Park angrily asked why the U.S. could not do more to bomb North Vietnamese targets and questioned the Americans' hesitance to fully sever the communists' supply lines coming through Haiphong. Park felt that there was no need whatsoever for bombing restrictions, <sup>43</sup> a view not shared by his American counterpart. For Johnson, Park's view was easily dismissible: not only would escalating Operation Rolling Thunder have been politically unpalatable, but it would have irreversibly set back Johnson's hopes at finalizing a peace agreement and run the risk of widening the war to include China and the Soviet Union if their ships or vehicles were destroyed.

Park and Johnson also spoke at length about the tense political situation in Korea. Park repeatedly emphasized that his country's defense capabilities were insufficient to counter the threat posed by the North; he noted that General Charles Bonesteel, the commander of United States Forces Korea, concurred with this view. Park said that Seoul had been "invaded" in January and that Pyongyang's aggression constituted the threat of Korea becoming a second Vietnam; he pleaded to Johnson that the additional 100 million USD in aid that Johnson and Cyrus Vance had submitted to the U.S. Congress was far from enough to address the situation. Johnson hardly budged, advising Park to speak with Vance and

<sup>42</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 17 April 1968, Box 256, Volume 6, National Security File, Country File, Korea, Johnson Library.

<sup>43</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 17 April 1968, Box 256, Volume 6, National Security File, Country File, Korea, Johnson Library.

General Earle Wheeler instead should he have concerns. <sup>44</sup>Vance, of course, had been the man to vex Park by preventing him from holding North Korea to account for the attack on the Blue House. Johnson's final words of the morning certainly didn't make the South Korean President feel any more at ease, as he gave a bland promise that he would "do his best" to handle the ongoing crisis. <sup>45</sup>

Park had another opportunity to make his case to the seemingly indifferent Johnson in a separate afternoon meeting. The two continued to struggle to find full consensus on the situations in Vietnam and Korea; after Johnson inquired about Park's reluctance to extend the terms of many of the South Korean troops stationed in Vietnam and promised he was doing his best to push compensation through Congress, Park exasperatedly wondered aloud in Korean to his interpreter, "Why can't [President Johnson] understand the true Korean situation?"46 As Park continued to attempt to relay his unease, speaking of Seoul as a city preparing for a fight to the last man and even how he kept a loaded carbine beside his bed in the Blue House, Johnson seemed unmoved, saying that security guarantees for South Korea were contingent upon Park agreeing to send an additional 6,000 men to Vietnam – a request Park bluntly stated he felt uncomfortable meeting until the political situation improved. Johnson, meanwhile, said he would struggle to justify more aid to Park's government to Congress if South Korea could not provide additional troops.<sup>47</sup> Park, an authoritarian strongman with an almost Nietzschean desire to capitalize on what power he had to further his aspirations and protect his country, was never going to see eye-to-eye with the leader of a liberal democracy who, equally ambitious as he was, had limited his days in office to save face and focus on delivering a muchneeded consolation to the American people.

Park and Johnson both made errors that led their correspondence and the relationship between their countries to become strained. Park made the costly mistake of overestimating the reliability of his primary

<sup>44</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 17 April 1968, Box 256, Volume 6, National Security File, Country File, Korea, Johnson Library.

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 17 April 1968, Box 256, Volume 6, National Security File, Country File, Korea, Johnson Library.

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 17 April 1968, Box 256, Volume 6, National Security File, Country File, Korea, Johnson Library.

<sup>47</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 17 April 1968, Box 256, Volume 6, National Security File, Country File, Korea, Johnson Library.

ally, failing to recognize the fact that the country he saw himself working to protect and strengthen was a minor concern in the eyes of U.S. policymakers and almost never preoccupied Lyndon Johnson. Johnson, meanwhile, steered his country into crises by failing to exercise stronger leadership on foreign policy issues and exhibiting a shortsighted willingness to damage American leadership credentials by ignoring the very real fears of an ally he and many other officials hoped would be a long-term partner in Asia. Both men, however, inevitably came to be victims of their own ambitiousness, the very trait that had carried them from rural poverty to the presidency of their respective countries against all odds. In his relentless pursuit of a more powerful and prosperous South Korea, Park saw an opportunity in enhancing his country's relationship with the U.S., and to a certain extent, he was successful - South Korea experienced one of the most extraordinary cases of economic growth the world has ever seen, with its national interests still supported by a close alliance with the U.S. But Park's clinging to power and inability to fully secure his country's interests on his own made a collision course with Lyndon Johnson, a man with his own lofty but divergent ambitions, an inescapable fate that would not only imperil the U.S.-South Korea alliance but culminate in Park's political and personal demise.

### Conclusion

Though the U.S.-South Korea relationship was bitter during the final months of Lyndon Johnson's tenure, it reached an ugly nadir during Richard Nixon's presidency. Park was enraged by many of Nixon's policy decisions, including Vietnamization methods, the Guam Doctrine (which saw U.S. troop numbers in South Korea reduced from 64,000 in 1969 to 40,000 in 1972),<sup>48</sup> and the normalization of relations with Mao Zedong's China. This shift from a more active containment policy to one of détente had grave consequences for Park, who saw South Korea as beleaguered by communism abroad with waning American support and feared domestic instability engendered by Washington's decreasing dependence on his leadership could open the door to pro-democracy activists or North Korean agitators ousting him from power. Perceiving himself to be under unprecedented pressure, Park staged a self-coup in October 1972 and replaced South Korea's constitution with the Yushin Constitution, a

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highly authoritarian document that granted him the right to run for an unlimited number of six-year terms, the ability to appoint one-third of the National Assembly's membership, and the power to rule by decree. The remaining years of Park's rule were characterized by growing public opposition to his regime and increasing concerns in the U.S. regarding the human rights situation in South Korea, especially during the Carter administration. After protests gripped the cities of Busan and Masan in October 1979, Park was shot and killed by Kim Chae-gyu, the head of the Korean CIA, whose motives remain the subject of controversy.

Though neither Park nor Johnson lived to witness the full scope of their legacies, there is little doubt about the impact the two men had on their respective countries' histories. Between an astounding period of economic growth and an almost universally reviled era of dictatorship, South Koreans have continued to reckon with what Park bequeathed to the country when he died, and even if his name is mentioned less and less often, Americans continue to debate amongst themselves whether the government should once again assume the roles that Johnson so passionately believed it should. Regardless of how their places in history are assessed, however, the relationship these men shared undeniably continues to shape one of the United States' most crucial alliances, both for better and for worse. As leaders in Seoul and Washington today work in tandem to combat Chinese and North Korean aggression, promote the spread of liberal democracy in Asia and beyond, and ensure cordial economic cooperation between two of the world's strongest and most advanced markets, there is plenty still to learn from the remarkable feats – and the regrettable failures – of the monumental statesmen that preceded them.

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## Repression, Punishment, and Genocide: An Examination of Human Rights Violations in North Korea

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### Introduction

As Robert Park once wrote, "never in the post-Holocaust era, in fact, has an on-going genocide been treated with such negligence and insouciance." <sup>1</sup>

Everyday hundreds of thousands of North Korean citizens suffer unrestrained violence and brutality at the hands of the Kim regime through the usage of Stalinist gulag systems. In these camps inmates are "forced to perform slave labor and are routinely subjected to systematic torture and rape, brutal forced abortions and infanticide, biological and chemical weapons experiments, and summary executions." Fewer than one in ten North Koreans who attempt to flee succeed, and the conditions they find themselves in outside of North Korea are not much better. Each year, tens of thousands of North Korean women become victims of human trafficking in China. In South Korea defectors face economic hardship and immense discrimination. This paper aims to explore the Korean political prison camp system, the hardships faced by defectors, and address the humanitarian situation in North Korean along with the violations of international law.

## The North Korean Caste System: Songbun (성분)

One of the essential elements of the Kim regime's ability to control their citizens is *songbun* (성분). This system was created during

<sup>1</sup> Park, Robert. "THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE: North Korea's Prison State." World Affairs 176, no. 2 (2013): 64–71. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43554782, 68.

<sup>2</sup> Park, Robert. "THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE: North Korea's Prison State." World Affairs 176, no. 2 (2013): 64–71. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43554782, 68.

the beginning of the North Korean regime, due to "a motivation to protect the Kim regime by isolating and controlling perceived internal political threats."3 North Korean citizens are categorized into three categories: haeksim (핵심), dongyo (동요), and choktae (적대), along with being sorted into 51 sub-categories. Each of these major categories corresponds to how loyal or politically risky a citizen may be to the regime. haeksim (핵심) is known as the "core" class. These are the citizens that the regime considers most loyal. This population mainly consists of descendants of "war heroes" who died fighting or working for North Korea in the war. dongyo (동요) is known as the "wavering" class. This group contains the citizens who are considered to have questionable loyalty to the regime. These citizens previously lived in South Korea or China, have relatives in South Korea, or are family members of intellectuals. Finally, choktae (적대) is known as the "hostile" class. These are citizens not loyal to the regime or considered the riskiest for uprisings or defection. This group consists of citizens who are descendants of landlords, capitalists, religious people, political prisoners, descendants of people who aided South Korea in the Korean War, and those who are otherwise anti-government or associated with foreign powers.

For each citizen, songbun (성분) is based on two factors: ancestral socio-economic background and ancestral socio-political affiliation. Based on this, songbun (성분) is assigned at birth and it is nearly impossible to move up into a higher "class". A citizen's songbun (성분) will determine their entire life, from the type of job they get, to their ability to gain an adequate education, and, most notably, their access to food or healthcare. Since North Korea is situated in a mountainous area where very few crops grow, food scarcity is very prominent, with most of their food coming from foreign aid, especially after the Great Famine in the 1990s. During these times of food insecurity, "the distribution of food and resources has been concentrated to the higher songbun levels... the regime stopped providing food to the politically undesirable northeast regions, so the famine hit those regions the hardest."<sup>4</sup>Those of inferior songbun (성분) were a lower priority for receiving food aid and, due to this, they were the main concentration of people who perished due to the famine. They were also the largest population to defect from North Korea and escape to other neighboring countries such as China and South Korea in order to survive.

<sup>3 &</sup>quot;SONGBUN | Social Class in a Socialist Paradise," Liberty in North Korea, accessed April 7, 2024, https://libertyinnorthkorea.org/blog/songbun.

 $<sup>4\,</sup>$  "SONGBUN  $\mid$  Social Class in a Socialist Paradise," Liberty in North Korea, accessed April 7, 2024, https://libertyinnorthkorea.org/blog/songbun.

## **Structure and Sentencing of North Korean Prison Camps**

There are two main types of North Korean prison camps: kwan-li-so (관리소) and kyo-hwa-so (교화소). They are often likened to concentration camps from World War II in Nazi Germany. These camps are generally located in "the valleys between high mountains, mostly, in the northern provinces of North Korea."

In 1972, Kim Il-sung stated, "Factionalists or enemies of class, whoever they are, their seed must be eliminated through three generations".6 Kwan-li-so (관리소) North Korean prison camps are known for implementing what is known as yeon-jwa-je (연좌제), an example of the "guilt by association" principle. This refers to the practice of threegeneration punishment, "whereby the mother and father, sisters and brothers, children and sometimes grandchildren of the offending political prisoner are imprisoned in a three-generation practice." Prisoners in these camps serve life sentences, including their family, without any sort of due process. kwan-li-so (관리소) are known as "political penal-labor colonies". There are four known kwan-li-so (관리소) North Korea, the most infamous being kwan-li-so (관리소) Number 14, also known as kaechon (개천) and kwan-li-so (관리소) Number 15, also known as also known as yodok (요덕). They are run by the North Korean National Security Agency (Bureau 7) and contain prisoners whose infractions include serious political and ideological crimes. kwan-li-so (관리소) are Nazi-esque: typically enclosed by barbed-wire fences, patrolled by heavily armed guards, and protected by guard towers. With the exception of kwanli-so (관리소) Number 18, prisoners have "no correspondence or contact with the world outside...except for news provided by newly arriving prisoners."8 The existence of these camps is continually denied by the North Korean government, despite an abundance of satellite imagery and witness testimonies to corroborate it.

Kyo-hwa-so (교화소)are known as "long-term prison labor

David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 24.

<sup>6</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 24.

<sup>7</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 24.

<sup>8</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 24.

facilities". These camps are run by the People's Security Agency and contain prisoners who have committed criminal felonies or committed crimes injurious to national defense, socialist economy, socialist culture, administration, or other crimes harmful to socialist collective life. These camps are acknowledged by the North Korean government and prisoners are subjected to trial and court sentencing, either receiving a "limited" sentence of 1–15 years or an "unlimited" sentence of more than 15 years. Some prisoners interviewed for a report admitted that "they had committed crimes for which they would be punished in a normal society."

Citizens of any songbun (성분) can be sent to these camps. Two notable former members of the elite class in North Korea, haeksim (핵심), were detained in these camps. Kim Young-soon, who was sent to a kyohwa-so (교화소), was a friend of Sung Hye-rim, primary mistress of Kim Jong-il and mother of Kim Jong-il's first born son, Kim Jong-nam. After Sung Hye-rim caught the eye of Kim Jong- il, and his father, Kim Il-sung, disapproved of their relationship, due to it being illegitimate. Kim Jong-il ended up marrying a woman arranged for him, causing Sung to fall into a depression. Sung Hye-rim ended up leaving for the Soviet Union in 1974, having her final contact with Kim Young-soon shortly beforehand. One report states, "Since the most important thing Kim Jong-il avoided was exposing his private life to the outside world, he sent a person who knew about his mistress to a political prison camp, a facility totally isolated from society."11 The report goes on to discuss the counter-intelligence agency using fear to keep Kim Young-soon quiet after her release. Kim Young-soon says the agent told her "Sung Hye-rim is not Kim Jong-il's wife and she didn't have his son. That is a groundless rumor. If you expose this anywhere ever again you will not be forgiven."12

Lee Young-kuk was a former bodyguard to Kim Jong-il. Due to his privileged military status he was allowed a radio that was capable of receiving broadcasts from South Korea, causing him to become "disillusioned with the political indoctrination he had been taught at the

<sup>9</sup> Haggard, Stephan, and Marcus Noland. "Repression and punishment in North Korea: survey evidence of prison camp experiences." Human Rights & Human Welfare 9, no. 1 (2009): 77, 33.

<sup>10</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 42.

<sup>11</sup> Lee, Jin Seo. North Korean Political Prison Camps. Washington: Radio Free Asia, 2016. url: https://www.rfa.org/english/bookshelf/9781632180230.pdf., 8.

<sup>12</sup> Lee, Jin Seo. North Korean Political Prison Camps. Washington: Radio Free Asia, 2016. url: https://www.rfa.org/english/bookshelf/9781632180230.pdf., 8.

Military College"<sup>13</sup> and "he came to believe that South Korea had become a real democracy with real freedom."<sup>14</sup> He eventually fled to China where he was caught by a taskforce of North Korean security agents sent by Kim Jong-il to find him, since his personal knowledge of the "Dear Leader" made him dangerous. He was bound, drugged, and put on a plane to Pyongyang where he was sent to a section of the *yodok* (요덕) *kwan-li-so* (관리소) camp to complete his sentence. He was released from *yodok* (요덕) in 1999 where he believes that his release was "on Kim Jong-il's personal intervention."<sup>15</sup> That same year he fled back to China and in 2000 successfully made it to South Korea.

Technology has been vital in exposing and keeping record of these camps; "satellite imagery, including images secured through providers such as DigitalGlobe and Google Earth, have permitted a precise mapping of the country's gulag." However, at the core of the international community's understanding of North Korea is testimonies and information provided by refugees (prisoners, guards, and citizens) who have managed to escape. It is wise to note that due to trauma, among other factors, testimonies from these defectors are not always accurate. Defectors will sometimes change their story to obscure the true nature of what happened as it may have been too difficult to recount or because they see the need to fit it into a certain narrative to pursue economic gains. Overall, by comparing the testimonies among different defectors and comparing them to satellite imagery, the international community is able to grasp a general idea of the camps and the atrocities that take place there.

## Forced Labor, Torture, Starvation, and Infanticide

The atrocities that take place at these prison camps are only comparable to that of the concentration camps in Nazi Germany. Numerous crimes against humanity, violations of international law and

<sup>13</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 33.

<sup>14</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 33.

<sup>15</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 33.

<sup>16</sup> Haggard, Stephan, and Marcus Noland. "Repression and punishment in North Korea: survey evidence of prison camp experiences." Human Rights & Human Welfare 9, no. 1 (2009): 77, 1.

conventions, and war crimes are present. These include: forced starvation, rampant diseases and the denial of medical attention, torture, summary executions, infanticide, and forced abortion.

Prisoners in these camps are "forced to do hard, often heavy, and often dangerous labor while being provided food rations insufficient to sustain even sedentary life." According to reports, prisoners are "provided only enough food to be kept perpetually on the verge of starvation." There is no meat or other important nutritional elements in their rations. They are compelled by hunger to catch and eat raw rats, snakes and frogs that may be in the area close by to compensate for the lack of protein. Some prisoners also steal food from the farm animals they are raising for labor and even eat grass and other small plants nearby. Some may even risk punishment and eat from the crops they are being forced to harvest. According to a former prison guard (Ahn Myong-chol), it is estimated that "1,500 to 2,000 prisoners at Kwan-li-so No. 22, mostly children, die[d] from malnutrition yearly."

Lack of heat, lack of food, lack of proper hygiene, and deplorable conditions all lead to medical problems such as pellagra, frostbite, lice, and tuberculosis. There are no doctors or medical staff at the camps and prisoners, when they are no longer able to work, are simply moved to isolation where they wait to die. One report states, "The combination of hard labor and below-subsistence-level food provisions results in rapid weight loss, industrial or mining work accidents, malnutrition-related diseases, and death. The largely doctor-less and medicine-less prison 'hospitals' or 'clinics' are essentially places where the sick and injured who can no longer work are sent to await death." <sup>20</sup>

Malnutrition and heavy labor can also lead to work accidents. In camps where inmates are forced to work in logging, there are various accidents that occur. One defector, Kim Young-soon describes that "Lumberman can break their limbs while cutting trees and die. They

<sup>17</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 42.

<sup>18</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 25.

<sup>19</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 39.

<sup>20</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 42.

can be knocked down or take a wrong step and die."<sup>21</sup> In a review of the documentary, *Beyond Utopia*, the author describes that "we hear one defector tell of being forced to cut trees 130 feet tall and 13 feet in width, their felling maiming men who are left to die on a mountainside with broken limbs and exposed entrails."<sup>22</sup> Similar labor accidents can occur in other industries such as mining, textiles, and farming. These prisoners who suffer from injuries, especially in cases of serious injuries, are merely left to die. Kim Young-soon tells the media that "dead bodies cover up the road in the wretched Yodok prison camp."<sup>23</sup>

In these camps the use of torture is customary to punish inmates. Punishment ranges from water torture to sleep-deprivation, to being hung from their wrists by handcuffs without their feet touching the floor. While it is common for guards to beat the prisoners, often to death, it is also common for prisoners to beat each other. The incentive can be to obtain more food, to escape a guard-beating, or it could be from the practice of "collective punishment" where if one prisoner makes a mistake as part of a "group", it can cause everyone in that group to be punished. This can provoke prisoners to beat up their fellow inmate, sometimes to death, for retaliation. There are also reports of children who are brought into the camp via yeon-jwa-je (연좌제) who beat or kill their parent(s). One defector, Kang Chul-hwan, notes "Many children have it all wrong. They think that they are suffering because someone committed a huge crime.... In some cases, a guilty person comes into a camp with his/ her family. In such families, the children often cornered their fathers and most of those fathers died."24 Motionless- kneeling, motionless-sitting, and "undersized punishment boxes" are also standard forms of punishment. Motionless-kneeling and motionless-sitting entails prisoners sitting or kneeling without movement for hours or days on end until guards decide otherwise, or until the inmate dies. "Undersized punishment boxes" are incredibly small sized cells where prisoners "were held for fifteen

<sup>21</sup> Lee, Jin Seo. North Korean Political Prison Camps. Washington: Radio Free Asia, 2016. url: https://www.rfa.org/english/bookshelf/9781632180230.pdf., 3.

<sup>22</sup> Laura Clifford and Robin Clifford, "Beyond Utopia," web log, *Reelingreviews.com* (blog) (Reeling Reviews), accessed April 7, 2024, https://www.reelingreviews.com/reviews/beyond-utopia/.

<sup>23</sup> Lee, Jin Seo. North Korean Political Prison Camps. Washington: Radio Free Asia, 2016. url: https://www.rfa.org/english/bookshelf/9781632180230.pdf., 3.

<sup>24</sup> Lee, Jin Seo. North Korean Political Prison Camps. Washington: Radio Free Asia, 2016. url: https://www.rfa.org/english/bookshelf/9781632180230.pdf., 5.

days, unable to stand-up or lie down."<sup>25</sup> Many of these torture methods continue for hours or even days, often resulting in the death of the inmate being punished.

Public executions are also extremely commonplace. In order to make a public example of inmates who break the rules or try to escape, the prisoners are rounded up and forced to watch the execution of their fellow inmate/inmates, either by firing squad or hanging. Everyone in the camp, the adults, the elderly, and the children, are forced to watch these executions. At political prison camps, "assemblies of more than two inmates were forbidden, except for executions. Everyone had to attend them. The labor camp used a public killing – and the fear it generated – as a teachable moment." These killings are used to exert control over the inmates and maintain order, deterring inmates from escaping or rising up against the guards.

There are scattered reports from North Korean defectors of forced abortions, the murder of pregnant women, and infanticide. Female defectors can be impregnated by Chinese men when they escape to China, before they are returned to North Korea through forced repatriation. In the camps, imprisoned women become pregnant either by another prisoner (except for a few privileged couples, sex and relations between prisoners of the opposite sex is strictly prohibited) or by rape or coercion into sex by prison guards. Most often these atrocities are committed against women who have had sex with Chinese men. One witness reported that she "helped deliver seven babies who were killed soon after birth by being buried alive. A doctor explained to her that 'since North Korea was short on food, the country should not have to feed the children of foreign fathers'."

# Human Trafficking, Forced Repatriation, and the Defector Experience in China

In order to escape the atrocities that take place in North Korea and the overall deplorable conditions of the country, defectors flee to

<sup>25</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 70.

<sup>26</sup> Blaine Harden, Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West (London: Pan Books, 2015), xxx.

<sup>27</sup> Charny, Joel R. "North Koreans in China: a human rights analysis." International Journal of Korean Unification Studies 13, no. 2 (2004): 75–97., 91.

South Korea and China. Due to the number of mines (estimated at around 1 million still buried in the area) and the danger of the DMZ that separates the two Koreas from each other, it is nearly impossible for defectors to escape straight into South Korea. This means the majority of them escape into China first. Most of the North Koreans who flee into China do so by crossing the Tumen River into Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, an area on the border of China that is home to over 800,000 ethnic Koreans with Chinese citizenship. 28 The paramount reason these people defect to China is for a chance at survival. According to interviews by RI (Refugees International), almost all the defectors interviewed faced extreme circumstances that led to their defection, such as: food deprivation, loss of employment, death of family members due to famine which collapsed support networks, or the need to help find treatment, or money for treatment, for a sick family member, or their own health problems.<sup>29</sup> These defectors face dire circumstances in their home country and fit the criteria to be considered a refugee as defined by the United Nations' 1951 Refugee Convention. However, as opposed to considering North Korean defectors refugees, the "Chinese policy towards North Korean asylum seekers is predicated on the assumption that all North Koreans crossing the border do so for economic reasons. They are treated as illegal migrants and subject to arrest and deportation." <sup>30</sup> Due to this policy, defectors who escape live in China under constant fear of deportation and arrest. They have no realistic options to "live freely" or meet basic needs, especially for men since traditionally they need to support themselves and their family outside of the home. Moving around outside their home in order to find labor or try to earn money can leave them extremely vulnerable to police searches and arrest.

North Korean children are also very susceptible to being arrested due to their lack of Chinese language skills. If they venture outside the home to play or receive an education, they risk detection. There are incredibly few opportunities for them to learn Chinese from home, which would offer some freedom to move about undetected. This makes the situation for young North Koreans incredibly bleak as they must stay

<sup>28</sup> Charny, Joel R. "North Koreans in China: a human rights analysis." International Journal of Korean Unification Studies 13, no. 2 (2004): 75–97., 77.

<sup>29</sup> Charny, Joel R. "North Koreans in China: a human rights analysis." International Journal of Korean Unification Studies 13, no. 2 (2004): 75–97., 80.

<sup>30</sup> Charny, Joel R. "North Koreans in China: a human rights analysis." International Journal of Korean Unification Studies 13, no. 2 (2004): 75–97., 81.

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home all day to avoid being discovered. According to on RI interview, one teenage boy said, "The situation here does not allow me to dream about my future." <sup>31</sup>

Young North Korean female defectors are often taken advantage of. In China there is an incredibly high demand for young "marriage material" women. From 1980-2016 the government implemented what was known as the "One-child policy" as a way to curb the rapid growth of the country's population which the government considered "out of control". During the time the one-child policy was active, Chinese families often preferred "to have a male child to carry on the family's name and inheritance."32 Many pregnancies were aborted due to this, and many female newborns were killed, abandoned, or adopted by citizens of foreign countries, causing the country to end up having a ratio of around 120 boys for every 100 girls (in some areas the ratio is as extreme as 14 men for every 1 woman). This gave China over 40 million "surplus" boys. 33 This crisis of the lack of potential wives for Chinese men created a demand for young, marriageable, and sexually exploitable women, opening up a new market for "black-market brides". The overwhelming majority of North Korean women who flee to China either decide to stay or are forced to stay as they are unable to go to any other country. These women end up establishing relationships with Chinese men as a survival strategy. These relationships are either formed through brokers or directly between the couple. While some North Korean women are lucky enough to find compatible spouses and develop genuine and loving relationships, it is estimated that 70% - 90% fall victim to human trafficking. The United Nations defines human trafficking as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit."34 According to Korean NGOs, it is estimated that North Korean women trafficked in China are sold for "between 6,000 and 30,000 yuan (\$890 to \$4,500), depending on their

<sup>31</sup> Charny, Joel R. "North Koreans in China: a human rights analysis." International Journal of Korean Unification Studies 13, no. 2 (2004): 75–97., 86.

<sup>32</sup> Kathleen Davis, "Brides, Bruises and the Border: The Trafficking of North Korean Women into China," SAIS Review of International Affairs 26, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2006): 131-141, 133.

<sup>33</sup> Lisa Cameron, Dan-dan Zhang, and Xin Meng, "China's One-Child Policy: Effects on the Sex Ratio and Crime," web log, *Ifstudies Org* (blog) (Institute for Family Studies, December 19, 2018), https://ifstudies.org/blog/chinas-one-child-policy-effects-on-the-sex-ratio-and-crime.

<sup>34 &</sup>quot;Human-Trafficking," United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed April 7, 2024, https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-Trafficking/Human-Trafficking.html.

age and beauty."<sup>35</sup> These women are often sold to men who are poor, disabled, or abusive, many times a combination of those factors. Many of these women who are trafficked to become brides end up being retrafficked after their husbands have "tired of them". The trafficking of North Korean women is so widespread "there have even been reports of other North Korean defectors and priests selling women as brides."<sup>36</sup> There have also been reports recently of Chinese border guards and police officials arresting women under the false pretense of illegal migration, who end up selling them to traffickers or directly to buyers.

While some are sold as brides to Chinese famers (since rural areas tend to have a significant lack of eligible brides) or are sold to the owners of brothels and karaoke bars, recently, due to the rapid development of technology, most trafficked North Korean women are sold into cybersexual slavery. These women are trapped in small apartments, often locked from the outside, and forced to perform sexual acts online for paying clientele. The majority of clients in these chatrooms tend to be from South Korea, where pornography and prostitution are illegal which has led to an increase in the popularity of these sites and services over the years. One victim estimated she made about 60 million won (\$51,000) from her cybersex activities for her captor. These women will often never see a cent of the money they earn through this work, with all the profits going to their captors. Living in these apartments they have little chance of escape, often having to rely on the slim chance a stranger in one of the chat rooms will help them.

Of the North Korean women trafficked, over 60% – 70% experience physical and psychological violence, often taking the form of being locked up, physically abused, repeatedly raped, and emotionally manipulated. These tactics carried out by the traffickers help break the spirits of the women and "essentially mold them into complacent sex servants." This type of violence also extends to their homelife where they

<sup>35</sup> Julie Zaugg, "These North Korean Defectors Were Sold into China as Cybersex Slaves. Then They Escaped," *Cnn. Com*, June 10, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/09/asia/north-korea-defectors-intl-hnk/index.html.

<sup>36</sup> Kathleen Davis, "Brides, Bruises and the Border: The Trafficking of North Korean Women into China," SAIS Review of International Affairs 26, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2006): 131-141, 133.

<sup>37</sup> Julie Zaugg, "These North Korean Defectors Were Sold into China as Cybersex Slaves. Then They Escaped," Cnn. Com, June 10, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/09/asia/north-korea-defectors-intl-hnk/index.html.

<sup>38</sup> Kathleen Davis, "Brides, Bruises and the Border: The Trafficking of North Korean Women into China," SAIS Review of International Affairs 26, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2006): 131-141, 134.

often experience domestic violence at the hands of their husbands. Due to their status as illegal migrants, brokers and buyers can easily control their movement and force them into subordination through the use of threats of exposing them to the police. One victim noted, "it is better to find a man, any man, than to starve to death in North Korea."

Even with the abuses and challenges North Korean people face in China, many choose to stay there. They indicate that they wish to stay due to "cultural compatibility and proximity to their homes in North Korea in case they wished to return to see their relatives, to respond to a family emergency, or to return in the event of a fundamental political change." 40

## Discrimination and the Refugee Experience in South Korea

For many defectors, their journey to freedom does not end in China. Instead, they often desire to travel to South Korea where they will be granted automatic citizenship and be able to receive aid from human rights workers. Since the DMZ makes it practically impossible for North Korean defectors to cross directly into South Korea, many escape through China and must make the journey to reach South Korea. Some defectors are able to find passage through brokers in China and reach South Korea by hiding in fishing boats or other vessels and travel directly there. Other defectors must travel all the way to Thailand in order to reach safety. This journey often starts in China and goes through Vietnam and Laos and is incredibly dangerous since Vietnam, Laos, and China will forcibly repatriate defectors to North Korea due to their strong ties with the regime. 41 This means that defectors are not safe and must be incredibly careful until they reach Thailand. Defectors will usually journey with the aid of brokers they have paid to help them cross through countries and across borders, often travelling during the night. The conditions are extremely hazardous as they must trek through jungle terrain and avoid the detection of border guards, who often are accompanied by military dogs. During the journey, brokers may take the defectors in circles, demanding more money to put them back on the right path.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Kathleen Davis, "Brides, Bruises and the Border: The Trafficking of North Korean Women into China," SAIS Review of International Affairs 26, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2006): 131-141, 133.

<sup>40</sup> Charny, Joel R. "North Koreans in China: a human rights analysis." International Journal of Korean Unification Studies 13, no. 2 (2004): 75–97., 97.

<sup>41</sup> Beyond Utopia, DVD (United States: Roadside Attractions, 2023).

<sup>42</sup> Beyond Utopia, DVD (United States: Roadside Attractions, 2023).

Even if defectors survive this journey and make it to South Korea, the conditions that await them there, while relatively safer, are not always favorable. When they arrive in South Korea, they are met "with a monthlong Cold War—style interrogation by military personnel to evaluate their backgrounds and security risk." After this they face a two to three month compulsory orientation on South Korean culture. During this time, the South Korean government attempts to undo the "brainwashing" that was put into effect by the North Korean regime. North Korean defectors are taught about the "norms" and values of South Korean society and are encouraged to become "cultural citizens". The South Korean version of history is often heavily emphasized along with learning the South Korean dialect, especially since many of the words on signs and commonly used today have western origins. 44

After the completion of these initial protocols, North Korean defectors still struggle to fit into society. One issue they face is the extreme cultural difference between living in a communist society and capitalist one. In South Korea, there is a cultural obsession with appearance. This can all be seen through keeping up with fashion trends, an explosive and expensive cosmetics industry, the consumption of commodities, and an innate need to possess expensive goods. This can lead North Korean defectors to become incredibly self-conscious and to spend significant amounts of money on "purchasing the commercialized symbols of cultural capital they feel are necessary to survive in a discriminatory class society." One report states that "many North Koreans become self-conscious about their height, which is, on the average, significantly shorter than that of South Koreans. Many youths take medicines and exercise to try to restimulate their stunted growth." This can cause them to spend most or even all of their settlement money.

While many people may argue that North Koreans have high rates of unemployment due to prejudice and discrimination (an unemployment rate of about 30%), this is not completely true. When

<sup>43</sup> Chung, Byung-Ho. "Between defector and migrant: Identities and strategies of North Koreans in South Korea." Korean studies (2008): 1-27, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Chung, Byung-Ho. "Between defector and migrant: Identities and strategies of North Koreans in South Korea." Korean studies (2008): 1-27, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Chung, Byung-Ho. "Between defector and migrant: Identities and strategies of North Koreans in South Korea." Korean studies (2008): 1-27, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Chung, Byung-Ho. "Between defector and migrant: Identities and strategies of North Koreans in South Korea." Korean studies (2008): 1-27, 18.

North Korean defectors arrive in South Korea, they are incredibly reluctant to take lower-class job positions that the government sets aside for new migrants, instead they expect and feel entitled to more. 47 They have an instilled belief in the class system, instilled in them by the usage of songbun (청란) that they grew up with in North Korea. This can leave many North Koreans "unwilling to accept the job that they feel will marginalize them into the lower class." Even defectors with professional jobs can have a hard time finding work due to the differences in standards and licensing. While some may try to reeducate themselves in order to meet these standards, many do not possess the resources or finances in order to achieve this. Recently, however, many defectors have become more open to the idea of taking "menial" jobs since this provides them an opportunity to help support their family back home in North Korea.

Around 88% of defectors who arrive in South Korea are Christian. 49 Even though everyone in North Korea is brought up with atheist ideologies, due to the influence and support from Christian missionaries that serve to assist the defectors during their escape and relocation to South Korea, many convert. It is also through the missionaries that North Korean defectors experience South Korea for the first time, therefore tying the cultural identity of South Korea to Christianity.

### Violations of International Law and Conventions

Many of the tactics that the North Korean regime uses to control their citizens are direct violations of important governing documents and international laws. North Korea became a permanent member of the United Nations in 1991 and as such is expected to adhere to and follow the rules and conventions set forth by the U.N. However, North Korea has been operating as a "rogue state" by not adhering to the norms of the international community and consistently breaking international law and conventions. Arguably the most important violations they have committed are against the Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>47</sup> Chung, Byung-Ho. "Between defector and migrant: Identities and strategies of North Koreans in South Korea." Korean studies (2008): 1-27, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Chung, Byung-Ho. "Between defector and migrant: Identities and strategies of North Koreans in South Korea." Korean studies (2008): 1-27, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Chung, Byung-Ho. "Between defector and migrant: Identities and strategies of North Koreans in South Korea." Korean studies (2008): 1-27, 21.

In the Genocide Convention, North Korea violates many articles, most importantly Articles II and III. Article II states that "genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group." North Korea violates this by imprisoning and killing members of lower songbun (청분) and political adversaries. By imposing yeon-jwa-je (연좌제), they further their genocidal conquest by eradicating three generations of "offenders". Article III states that acts of genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, attempt to commit genocide, and complicity in genocide are punishable offenses. North Korea's genocide of its people is state-sponsored and not only the Kim family but also higher-up members of the government are responsible for the implementation and execution of this.

North Korea violates most, if not all of the articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set forth by the United Nations. Most notably, North Korea violates Article 4, Article 5, Article 9, and Article 13. Article 4 states that "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude."52 In North Korean prison camps, inmates are forced to work 16-hour days doing forced labor, often for life sentences with the only way-out being death. Article 5 states that "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."53 Many citizens who are detained in North Korea suffer from torture during interrogations and while they are prisoners in the camps, being subjected to sleep deprivation, beatings, motionless sitting or kneeling, or "undersized punishment boxes". Article 9 states that "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."54 Many prisoners in North Korean prison camps are not informed as to why they have been detained, unaware of what crime they have been accused of committing as there is no judicial process for those sent to kwan-li-so (관리소) camps. Article 13 states that "Everyone has the right to leave any country,

United Nations, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1.

<sup>51</sup> United Nations, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1.

<sup>52</sup> United Nations. General Assembly. Universal declaration of human rights. Vol. 3381. Department of State, United States of America, 1949, 2.

<sup>53</sup> United Nations. General Assembly. Universal declaration of human rights. Vol. 3381. Department of State, United States of America, 1949, 2.

<sup>54</sup> United Nations. General Assembly. Universal declaration of human rights. Vol. 3381. Department of State, United States of America, 1949, 3.

including his own, and to return to his country."<sup>55</sup> It is against North Korean law to leave the country, with the punishment for doing so being incredibly severe, including torture and even execution.

## Humanitarian Solutions and Planning for the Fall of the Regime

Contingency plans exist for nearly any scenario that might include or befall North Korea, from potential peaceful reunification with the south, to the collapse of the Kim regime, to the potential invasion from foreign countries such as Russia or China. However, these plans contain little to no input from human rights groups, meaning there is no humanitarian plan to protect the citizens of North Korea. Any scenario that might befall the North requires "the provision of adequate food, medicine, potable water and sanitation" in order to prevent immense disruption or turmoil in North Korea. In a case of mass migration to nearby areas such as China or South Korea, protection and assistance will be essential for refugees and IDPs (internally displaced persons).

This type of planning is incredibly tricky for two reasons. The first being that there is "no established forum to bring human rights and humanitarian groups together, and there has been no effort to create one." This means that without a governing body for the humanitarian and human rights groups, there will be multitudes of plans and potentially conflicting ones, causing possible chaos and added conflict. Second, discussing change in North Korea violates their *modus operandi* of neutrality and cooperation with the regime. They fear that any planning for a situation could create an appearance of "regime change" and cause them to lose the ability to operate in the country. The main humanitarian concerns in the event of a change in North Korea are: protecting and finding solutions for North Korea's political prison population, identifying who should be held accountable for the Kim regime's crimes and human

<sup>55</sup> United Nations. General Assembly. Universal declaration of human rights. Vol. 3381. Department of State, United States of America, 1949, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 1.

<sup>57</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 1.

<sup>58</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 2.

rights abuses along with effective judicial arrangements, and effectively managing refugee flows and internal displacement.<sup>59</sup>

The first item on the agenda will be freeing the political prisoners hidden In North Korea's four main political prison camps. There are an estimated 80,000 to 120,000 prisoners incarcerated in these camps in the mountainous areas of North Korea. The North Korean government continues to deny the existence of these camps and in the event of an armed conflict or revolution camp authorities "have received orders to kill all prisoners" and "eliminate any evidence about the existence of the camps," according to a former prison guard. 60 "Drills" have also been held at these camps to teach guards and soldiers "how to kill large numbers of prisoners in a short period of time."61 In Camp 16, escapees have reported the existence of elevated guard posts, "equipped with machine guns meant to massacre prisoners in emergency situations."62 Rescuing prisoners should be given the highest priority as their testimonies about their experience in the camps will be of utmost importance to attesting how the Kim regime maintained their power through human rights abuses and brutality. In addition, the severe conditions in terms of diseases, hunger, and injuries that the prisoners suffer from in these facilities should put the prisoners at the highest priority for rescue, as immediate medical assistance is essential. At the end of World War II, Nazis attempted to hide evidence of their atrocities and murder inmates at their camps. The testimonies of the survivors of the Nazi concentration camps became crucial to hold the Third Reich accountable for their numerous crimes against humanity and to help develop the concepts of war crimes and crimes against humanity along with how to hold accountable and punish those responsible. Drawing a parallel between these two regimes and their treatment of their citizens, failing to rescue the prisoners "would be a shameful legacy for the international community." 63 The rescue and liberation of prisoners from concentration camps from World War II and the Soviet gulags provides insight into "how best to

<sup>59</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 2.

<sup>60</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 4.

<sup>61</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 4.

<sup>62</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 6.

<sup>63</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 5.

support and rehabilitate those treated so brutally."64

One area that will require particular attention are the female prisoners. Many of these prisoners have been subjected to brutal treatment in the past and will need extra protection against "potential sexual assaults by other prisoners, guards, or the local population" during the chaos that will ensue if the regime falls. "During the end of World War II, Red Army troops were known to have engaged in rampant sexual assault in the camp of Ravensbruck, a Nazi concentration camp that held women prisoners, resulting in the rapes of countless inmates." Troops liberating these camps will need to be sensitized and take extra care with the rescue of these prisoners.

After human rights and humanitarian emergencies, it is important not only to focus on reconciliation and peace but also to pursue justice for those who have suffered. Whom to hold responsible for the crimes against humanity in North Korea should be determined carefully. It should begin with those who gave the orders, such as Kim Jong-un and his top lieutenants. Determining others who are responsible should begin now with the dividing of elites based on possible criminal responsibility.<sup>67</sup> Some may propose special or ad hoc tribunals as an alternative solution for accountability. However, given the past track record of such tribunals (the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda), it may not be a very viable form of accountability. Instead, a more effective arrangement might be a "hybrid court", a domestic court that is set up with an international component that is associated with the United Nations.<sup>68</sup> This could tailor the court to the needs of the Korean situation and could work alongside the U.N. General Assembly, in which the U.S. along with other countries could participate as well.

In the creation of such a court and in the process of holding those in power accountable for their crimes, it is important to consider the role of The People's Republic of China. Due to the close ties between North

<sup>64</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 7.

<sup>65</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 9.

<sup>68</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 10.

Korea and China, there is a distinct possibility that China will attempt to interfere with these trials in order to not be held liable for collaborating with North Korea in terms of crimes against humanity due to the forcible repatriation of North Koreans back to conditions of extreme danger. There is also a possibility that China will need to be persuaded to "turn over North Korean leaders wanted by a Korean or international tribunal for crimes against humanity if they flee to China." In the case of Cambodia (where the U.N. set up a tribunal to prosecute the Khmer Rouge), China dropped its objections to the trials when "it became clear that its relationship with the Khmer Rouge would not be highlighted." By potentially reaching a similar deal with China, it may be easier to have these tribunals function well and with little opposition.

Protecting refugees and IDPs (internally displaced persons) will be the biggest concern and challenge given change or turmoil in North Korea. Many experts predict that "China and South Korea will be overrun by refugees."<sup>71</sup> One major concern with this is that China appears to have plans to seal its borders to block the mass entry of North Koreans. Over the past few decades, China has forcibly repatriated and punished tens of thousands of North Koreans seeking entry, "erecting restrictive barriers at its borders and stationing troops to keep North Koreans out."72 Also, according to leaked contingency plans, China intends to set up special zones or camps inside North Korea to forestall the entry of refugees into China.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, South Korea will "not want to jeopardize the economic progress and stability of its country by quickly accepting large numbers of North Koreans it cannot easily absorb."<sup>74</sup> If the unmanageable emergency overflow of refugees does occur, South Korea would likely set up camps along the border. Neither country appears to be prepared to integrate North Koreans. A more humanitarian plan is to restore order in

<sup>69</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 11.

<sup>70</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 11.

<sup>71</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 11.

<sup>72</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 12.

<sup>73</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 12.

<sup>74</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 14.

the North via international troops utilizing a multi-national plan agreed upon by the United Nations. With access to food and medicine readily available, most North Korean citizens may not need to, or desire to, flee. In emergency situations, "most people prefer to remain displaced in their own country rather than cross borders." This can be due to strong attachments to the country, limited resources, old age or illness, or fear of the challenge of adapting to new languages and cultures in neighboring regions. By providing stability, and playing into these narratives, it is possible not only to keep North Korean citizens in their country, but also incentivize them to help contribute to the building and transformation of their own country.

While many North Koreans may want to stay in their country, stability will not prevent certain groups from attempting to cross the borders to the north and south. These groups include: the Kim family and top Kim regime officials, the top 1% - 5% favored elite class in Pyongyang, ethnic Koreans from South Korea or Japan, abducted foreigners (from Japan most notably), South Korean prisoners of war, and North Koreans who desire to reunite with families who are already living in other countries. To It will be important to work with foreign countries and incentivize them to turn over members of the Kim family and the top regime officials, especially countries such as China or Russia which have close ties to the Kim regime and are likely to provide asylum for them. It will also be vital to help those who would like to return home or be reunited with family do so safely and quickly.

### Recommendations

Many human rights groups and the U.N. have come up with recommendations to remedy the situation in North Korea. The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea recommends the following in terms of instructions for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, and other members of the international community. In terms of recommendations for the Democratic People's

<sup>75</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 12.

<sup>76</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015), 13.

Republic of Korea, author David Hawk<sup>77</sup> recommends that North Korea decriminalize the right to leave the country, release all prisoners held in arbitrary detention in prison camps and permanently close those camps with the help of the U.N., and work with the U.N. to promote human rights and create a judicial system for human rights abuses that have occurred. For the People's Republic of China, author David Hawk<sup>78</sup> recommends that China stop forcibly repatriating North Koreans and grant them the status of refugees along with working with the U.N. to address to address the human trafficking that is widespread throughout their country. For other member states of the international community, author David Hawk<sup>79</sup> encourages them to keep an open dialogue about the human rights situation in North Korea and prohibit the use of slave, forced or prison labor, along with advocating for the abolition of the prison camps and release of the prisoners held there.

### Conclusion

The atrocities the citizens of North Korea suffer are direct violations of the Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Kim regime must be held accountable for these flagrant infractions. In the event of a major political change in North Korea, the international community, due to the lack of a humanitarian plan, will have to scramble to address the top humanitarian concerns, those being: protecting and finding solutions for North Korea's political prison population, identifying who should be held accountable for the Kim regime's crimes and human rights abuses along with effective judicial arrangements, and effectively managing refugee flows and internal displacement. <sup>80</sup> Ultimately, it is up to the international community, North Korea, and China, to adopt the recommendations set forth by Human Rights organizations and the United Nations in order to ascertain human rights for the citizens of North Korea.

<sup>77</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 74-75

<sup>78</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 73.

<sup>79</sup> David Hawk, The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps: Prisoners' Testimonies and Satellite Photographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 73–74.

<sup>80</sup> Cohen, Roberta. "Human Rights and Humanitarian Planning for Crisis in North Korea." International Journal of Korean Studies 19, no. 3 (2015).

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# Making and Deconstructing Mythologies in Yun-Fei Ji's The Three Gorges Dam Migration (2010)

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YUN-FEI JI's The Three Gorges Dam Migration, 2010, hand-printed watercolor woodblock mounted on paper and silk.

### Introduction

Ancient mythology makes its way into contemporary society through the hand of artist Yun-Fei Ji. Referencing legends of ancient kings and long-gone spirits, Ji unveils the "utopian dreams of Chinese history"¹ that persist today as mythologies – legends passed down and clung onto, dissolving with time. Such mythology is explored in his handscroll *The Three Gorges Dam Migration* (2010, hand-printed watercolor woodblock mounted on paper and silk), one of multiple works exploring the aftermath of the eponymous Three Gorges Dam (TGD), or 三峽大壩 sānxiá dàbà.

Crafted in collaboration with Beijing's Rongbaozhai Studio,<sup>2</sup> *Migration* was made using over 500 carved pear-wood blocks pressed in watercolor ink and stamped on long sheets of mulberry paper. These sheets were then mounted on silk to create a handscroll, traditionally read from right to left.<sup>3</sup> As such, *Migration* begins its tale with the declaration

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Genocchio, "Exploring Utopian Dreams of Chinese History," The New York Times (The New York Times, January 16, 2005), https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/16/nyregion/exploring-utopian-dreams-of-chinese-history.html.

<sup>2 &</sup>quot;A Brief Abstract of Rong Bao Zhai," A Brief Abstract of Rong Bao Zhai - 历史沿革 - 荣宝斋 官方网站, accessed December 15, 2022, http://www.rongbaozhai.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=3&id=75. Beijing's Rongbaozhai Studio specializes in painting, calligraphy, and woodblock printing, among other art forms, and is one of the most prestigious visual arts studios in China

<sup>3</sup> Wenshu Wang, "Displaced Mayflies: Ephemeral Ghostly Bodies in Yun-Fei Ji's Three Gorges Dam Migration," Unsettled Ground (University of Chicago), accessed December 5, 2022, https://voices.uchicago.edu/unsettledground/displaced-mayflies-ephemeral-ghostly-bodies-in-yun-fei-jis-three-gorges-dam-migration/.

that "water floods Badong [a region in western Hubei Province, China]" before going on to a detailed visual description of forced mass migration – at first glance due to the aforementioned flooding of Badong. The handscroll closes with a lone sampan carrying blurry-faced government officials and a colophon, which explains that the mass migration is occurring due to the construction of the TGD.

The TGD stands where the Yangtze River flows through Hubei Province. One of the world's largest dam structures and a feat of engineering, it is also the largest hydroelectric power station to date, supplying irrigation and electricity to east and south China. The colophon text in *Migration* stretches out the mythos of the TGD, threading a history that begins from the popular tale of Yu the Great diverting the Yangtze to prevent flooding in around 3,000 BC. The tale jumps to 1919, when Sun Yat-sen first proposed damming the Yangtze, and then to 1994, when the Three Gorges project began under the helm of President Jiang Zemin and Premier Li Peng. The making of *Migration* itself plays with time – created between 2009 and 2010, it recreates Ji's memory of a moment witnessed in 2003, three short years before the completion of the TGD's main wall in 2006.

*Migration* unites mythologies of ancient legend, modernization, and the spiritual life of nature to deconstruct contemporary mythologies based on sociopolitical situations in China, revealing the overlooked realities of environmental degradation, powerlessness, and propaganda.

## Myths and Legends: Yu the Great

Since ancient times, China has built its national identity on a historical need to "overcome the environment," to oppose natural hazards toward the supposed goal of improving human wellbeing. Such a need goes beyond history to ancient mythology: upon the completion of the cofferdam in 1997, Jiang Zemin proclaimed, "Man must conquer nature

<sup>4 &</sup>quot;Three Gorges Dam," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed December 5, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Three-Gorges-Dam.

<sup>5 &</sup>quot;The Three Gorges Dam: A Deluge of Doubts," The China Story, April 21, 2021, https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2020-crisis/forum-broken-river-shattered-mountain/the-three-gorges-dam-a-deluge-of-doubts/.

<sup>6 &</sup>quot;Three Gorges Dam," Encyclopædia Britannica.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Spence, "The Scroll and the Story of the Three Gorges," Art Journal 69, no. 3 (2010): 80–87, 80.

[...] This is a victory for the spirit of the Foolish Old Man who moved the mountains." Both the legends of Yu the Great curing the floods and the Foolish Old Man – who, through sheer faith and perseverance, chipped away at a mountain in order to clear a path in front of his house – stand testimony to the spirit of man conquering nature. Both legends also perpetuate the long-standing mythos that taming or overcoming nature is necessary for the benefit of the common people, and that it could be achieved for and through the sacrifice of the everyday person.

The TGD has boded ill for the region, however, in ways both ecological and social. 1.5 million people in total were displaced as a result of its construction. The west Hubei region has seen an increase in landslides and waterborne disease, with an accompanying decline in biodiversity and knock-on effects flowing downstream along the river. A landslide in Miaohe in July of 2003 took 14 lives; the resulting crack in the earth split the village into two, forcing residents to camp in a mountain tunnel for three months. <sup>10</sup> In the long term, the dam is estimated to have halved the Yangtze's water flow, with far-reaching effects: in October 2022, severe droughts swept across cities along the river, even threatening to cut off water supply to 27 million residents in Shanghai. <sup>11</sup>

Ji's depiction of nature reflects the instability of the environment in the face of humanity. Wet patches of ink seep into people's shoes; bushes and branches curve in from every corner to fill up slivers of space; quasi-brushstrokes on rocks push upwards like waves lapping at the legs of chairs. Nature has nowhere else to exist. As the clouds broil like a river threatening to spill over, a static pile of bricks dams it abruptly and haphazardly. Yet the clouds continue to ebb and flow in the curvature of tall, mountainous tarp and striped, wriggling piles of clothing. In this way, nature creeps into humanity despite humanity's best efforts to dam it. And so, the mythos of humans taming the environment shatters. As Ren puts it, "the true spirit of the Foolish Old Man reprimands the shortsightedness

<sup>8</sup> Annie Luman Ren, "THE THREE GORGES DAM: A DELUGE OF DOUBTS," *Crisis*, ANU Press, 2021: 159-164, 162.

<sup>9 &</sup>quot;大禹治水\_百度百科,"百度百科, accessed December 15, 2022, https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%A4%A7%E7%A6%B9%E6%B2%BB%E6%B0%B4/121970.

Mara Hvistendahl, "China's Three Gorges Dam: An Environmental Catastrophe?," Scientific American (Scientific American, March 25, 2008), https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/chinas-three-gorges-dam-disaster/.

<sup>11 &</sup>quot;Shanghai Says Water Supplies 'Normal' after Shortage Scare Sparks Hoarding,"The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, October 12, 2022), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/12/shanghai-says-water-supplies-normal-after-shortage-scare-sparks-hoarding.

of human ambition and greed."12

### **Mythological Creatures**

And yet, looking further along the scroll, the ambition and greed belongs not to humanity as a whole, but rather to a faceless government. People crowd every inch of land. Humans and nature cluster along a crowded riverbank, indistinguishable from one another. Just as the environment blends into humanity, humanity bleeds into the environment, evident in the fantastical mythological creatures in *Migration*: a wild boar standing upright and two fish-headed people in business suits. These strange, dehumanized creatures almost merge into the wild chaos of the landscape, as though signaling the merging of environment and human in their shared destruction. Neither has anywhere to go.

On the other end of the scroll, the packed scene opens into a vast swathe of river, where a sampan carrying five blurry-faced government officials bobs with the tides. Ji's use of almost-negative space here hammers the point home: the TGD does not serve the interests of those scrambling for living space along the riverbank. Instead, it serves the interests of a distant government, represented by lone figures whose blurry faces and uniforms conceal their humanity – a stark contrast against the clearly unique expressions of each individual person on the riverbank. The final paragraph of the colophon text reads, "With [the displaced people's] own hands, they tore down and moved thirteen cities, one hundred forty townships, and thirteen hundred villages, brick by brick, tile by tile. They had no choice but to leave the homes in which their ancestors had lived for generations." Ji points out the disenchantment of the mythos of Yu the Great: the common people have been sacrificed, but to what end?

## Crafting Mythos, 2003-2008

Indeed, China circa 2003 saw a number of different events that heralded both crisis and success, reinforcing the need for mythologization. The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) took a heavy toll on the country. Beyond the immense pressure placed on a still-developing healthcare system and the loss of countless lives, China also

saw "substantial decline in consumer demand"<sup>13</sup> alongside other economic impacts, such as reduced investor confidence and one of the largest negative impacts to national GDP in the world, second only to Hong Kong.

Internationally, China counterbalanced the domestic disaster of SARS by heightening its geopolitical influence. From the newly forged free-trade agreement with ASEAN countries to the launch of Shenzhou 7, China's rise to prominence on the global stage – along with the promises of technology and modernization – acted as a "spectacular patriotic show, a bread-and-circuses distraction from mundane political issues." <sup>14</sup>

While patriotism is far from the focus of Ji's *Migration*, the disillusionment of modernization haunts its riverbanks. Plain, worn slippers, traditional wicker baskets, and cloth-wrapped sacks are scattered across the handscroll. Technology, clearly, has not arrived in Ji's Badong. The irony becomes apparent: the TGD is a feat of engineering, a technological behemoth that has propelled China into the international spotlight. And yet, the people of Badong – who, as Ji points out, sacrificed their labor, homes, and ancestors for the construction of the dam – lead lives untouched by the technological developments that brought about the TGD. Who, then, does it serve?

## Mythology of Modernization, 2008

Even with all the social, economic, and political shifts that were taking place in the early 2000s, the most crucial factor in Ji's decision to commemorate the particular moment of water flooding Badong was likely his physical presence in China in 2002 and 2003. When he first drew inspiration from the scenes of mass migration, however, Ji was abroad in Rome and the TGD remained years from final completion. With that in mind, the sociopolitical context of 2008 – when he conceived of *Migration* – comes into focus as a motivating factor.

The year 2008 in particular is practically synonymous with a few major events in recent Chinese history: the global financial crisis, the

<sup>13</sup> Jong-Wha Lee, Warwick J. McKibbin, "The Impact of SARS," China: New Engine of World Growth, ANU Press, 2012: 19-33, 21-26.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Kraus, "CHINA IN 2003: From SARS to Spaceships," Asian Survey 44, no. 1 (2004): 147–57, 154.

Sichuan earthquake, and the Beijing Olympics. The financial crisis, which started in late 2007, hit first: trade surplus fell continuously, reaching a record 33% deficiency by mid-2009. Then, on May 12, 2008, an earthquake in Sichuan Province left 69,000 dead and 4.3 million homeless. What was perhaps felt most acutely was that in 2008, a 586-billion-dollar stimulus plan was distributed largely to state organizations, reinforcing the loss of confidence in and support for the government among the general population. Furthermore, in 2009, officials in Guangdong and Tianjin were arrested for corruption while the People's Armed Police received a 32.6% budget increase, highlighting the prioritization of state over citizens. But the support of the prioritization of state over citizens.

The sense that everyday welfare was neglected in favor of strengthening the state was further bolstered by the media shift toward nationalism and patriotism through the Beijing Olympics. The Beijing Olympics entailed a deliberately crafted media campaign that political scientist Brady labels a "campaign of mass distraction, designed to distract the population from more troubling issues such as political representation, inflation, unemployment, corruption and environmental degradation." These issues include the aftermath of SARS, the financial recession and earthquake – and the construction of the TGD. Limits were placed on Chinese media regarding what they could and could not report on, with particular restrictions on safety, construction, the environment, labor matters, and major disasters.<sup>19</sup> While the political situation was nuanced - the anti-CNN mass movement protesting negative international news reports about China occurred simultaneously – it is undeniable that much of the dissent and dissatisfaction in China was silenced in 2008. More than that, the Olympics inspired massive construction projects on par with the TGD. This was conducted under the banner of modernization and infrastructural development and led to similar issues of forced migration, where over 2 million were forcibly removed from their homes in

<sup>16</sup> Valérie Niquet and N. Jayaram, "China in the Face of Economic Crisis," *China Perspectives*, no. 3 (79) (2009): 80-86, 80.

<sup>17</sup> July 29, 2009. "Sichuan Earthquake Caused Significant Damage to Giant Panda Habitat," The Ecological Society of America, accessed December 5, 2022, https://www.esa.org/blog/2009/07/27/sichuan-earthquake-caused-significant-damage-to-giant-panda-habitat/.

<sup>18</sup> Niquet and Jayaram, 83-85.

<sup>19</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, "The Beijing Olympics as a Campaign of Mass Distraction," *The China Quarterly*, no. 197 (2009): 1-24, 13.

preparation for the 2008 Olympics.<sup>20</sup> Despite developments in infrastructure being touted as progress toward "enlightenment," it became clear that this modernization came at massive cost to the people.<sup>21</sup>

The mythology of modernization for common benefit was thus further deconstructed in 2008 by happenings like the financial recession, the Sichuan earthquake, and the Beijing Olympics. At the same time, the optimistic façade of patriotic media propaganda through the anti-CNN movement and the Olympics media campaign concealed the devastation felt by people living in China, in a hollow echo of the mythos of the TGD. In *Migration*, Ji responds to this directly: a close look at the handscroll reveals wooden chairs, thick blankets, and overturned side tables amid rocks and trees. A sense of unease and the uncanny permeates the piece. Not only is this a symbol of migration, but it is also representative of what is supposedly interior being unveiled and forced into the open — an exposé of sorts.

### **Deconstructing Mythos**

Migration brings together the mythology of human superiority over ecology through the legend of Yu the Great and the mythology of sacrifice toward common benefit through the fantastical creatures Ji depicts. Combined with the mythologies of modernization crafted and dissolved throughout 2008, Migration paints a record of the sacrifices and disillusionments involved in the construction of the TGD. Where Ji's chosen medium of landscape painting-esque works recall literati traditions from dynastic China, his expression of modern social issues reveals his work as firmly rooted in moments of contemporary Chinese politics.

In a 2010 interview with the *New York Times*, Ji asked, "What do you do when so much control and power is concentrated in the hands of a few corrupt officials?" *Migration*, then, is his response to environmental degradation, powerlessness, and propaganda involved in the TGD and beyond. At its core, *Migration* is a political commentary on the divisions between nature & modernization, people & government, and the mythological & the real, in which Ji unveils the political mythos of China to reveal an overlooked reality, beyond mythology.

<sup>20 &</sup>quot;Olympics Blamed for Forcible Removal of 2m over 20 Years," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, June 5, 2007), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/06/sport.china.

<sup>21</sup> Yau, Yun-Fei Ji.

<sup>22</sup> Dorothy Spears, "Part Traditionalist, Part Naturalist, Part Dissident," The New York Times (The New York Times, February 17, 2010), https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/21/arts/design/21ji.html.

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# **Vietnamese Matriarchy and Modern Nationalism** Zoe Ly Sen

Zoe Ly Sen is a Vietnamese-American essayist, poet, and artist. She was born in the year of the water goat and raised in Northern Virginia after her mother and grandmother immigrated to the U.S. at the end of the Vietnam War. Her fondest memories of Virginia are time spent in the Appalachias. Zoe received a Silver Key at the Scholastic Art Awards for her oil painting, and her Girl Scout Gold Award in 2022 for her work in planting native trees and environmental advocacy. She is a Dean's Scholarship recipient at UC Santa Cruz, where she studies literature and critical race and ethnic studies.

The Vietnamese origin story of Âu Cơ is an "invented tradition" ingrained in Vietnamese culture as resistance against colonialism. This gender-critical essay will examine different theoretical approaches and interpretations of ethnosymbolism, "invented traditions," and the power of collective forgetting in forging a romantic nationalist navel, as well as the consequences on women's movements.<sup>1</sup>

## **Children of Fairies and Dragons**

The study of "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm) describes a type of tradition created during a period of social change during which a nation seeks to break from its past. The Vietnamese origin story of Âu Cơ, in its modern nationalist context, is such an invented tradition created during a period of political consolidation and anti-colonialism, forming a "politically awakened ethnic group" from separate ethnic tribes. Elites manufactured Vietnamese common descent to form a "politically awakened ethnic group" to separate from colonialism.<sup>2</sup>

Often, when nations turn to "invented tradition" it is because older traditions have become ineffective for party politics, or must be appropriated and recontextualized for social change, such as a nationalist movement.<sup>3</sup> Even though all traditions are invented at some point, Hobsbawn's "invented tradition" distinguishes a nationalist phenomenon where "use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel

<sup>1</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, editors. Canto Classics: *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, 6.

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, editors. Canto Classics: The Invention of Tradition. Cambridge University Press, 2012, 1-14.

type for quite novel purposes."4

According to legend, Âu Cơ is the mother of the Vietnamese ethnic people. Âu Cơ is an immortal fairy-bird from Vietnam's highland region, who is known for her skills in healing medicine and her compassionate heart. During her travels she is confronted by a seamonster, and she transforms into a crane to fly away. When Lac Long Quan, the dragon prince of the sea, sees her in danger, he grabs a boulder and defeats the monster. The two fall in love, and Âu Cơ gives birth to an egg sac, which hatches 100 children. Despite their love, Âu Cơ longs to return home to the mountains, and Lac Long Quan to the sea. The two separate, each taking 50 children with them to populate the earth. When Vietnamese children are taught the story of Âu Cơ, they learn the story of how the Vietnamese people came to be.<sup>5</sup>

Anthony Smith references *la longue durée*, an ethnic consciousness that stretches back to ancient civilization, and culminates over time into the establishment of modern nationalism. With an ethnosymbolic theoretical approach to historical analysis, the role of common myths, memories, values, and shared traditions create a nation. The nation then, is dormant until the political upheaval prompts an awakening of a politically conscious ethnic group. Though postmodernist historians challenge the idea of nations as fixed and immutable identities, there is an undeniable role that elite members of society hold, in manufacturing nationalist identity.

Though Vietnamese historians hold contradicting ideas about the history of the myth of Âu Cơ, the incorporation of the story into the "Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan" (Hồng Bàng thị truyện) by educated elites in 15th century Vietnam coincides with the concept of invented tradition. The biography traces genealogy of ancient royalty, interwoven with mythology. This medieval text provides a window into the invented tradition surrounding the Kingdom of Văn Lang. The fifty sons who

<sup>4</sup> ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Leeming, David Adams, Creation myths of the world: an encyclopedia, Vol. 1, ABC-CLIO, 2010. p. 270.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, Anthony (2004). Guibernau, M.; Hutchinson, John (eds.). "History and National Destiny: Responses and Clarifications". *History and National Identity: Ethnosymoblism and its Critics*: 199.

<sup>7</sup> ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Warwick Debates, 1996, www.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/units/gellner/Warwick2.html.

<sup>9</sup> Liam C. Kelley. "The Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan as a Medieval Vietnamese Invented Tradition." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2012, pp. 87–130. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2012.7.2.87.

followed Âu Cơ honor the eldest as the Hùng King, and form the Kingdom of Văn Lang, separate from dynastic China. <sup>10</sup> The story weaves together mythical and historical, with a constant thread of ethnic identity connecting the Vietnamese people, and distinguishing them from their colonial enemies.

While some historians claim that long before the elite wrote "Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan," the story was passed down through oral storytelling since antiquity. While a timeless oral history would indicate the true 'navel' of Vietnam, these arguments fail to provide evidence of an earlier invention of "Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan," where Âu Cơ is the mother of the region's first kings. Vietnam's territory in Southeast Asia was never homogenous in terms of ethnicity and languages, but rather consisted of many tribes without no clear boundaries where one particular people could be described as "Vietnamese" in the sense of a national–group. Ethnosymbolic approaches to Vietnamese mythology consequently underestimate the influence of elites on inventing tradition to legitimize nationalist sentiment. Consequently, the "political conscious ethnic group" narrative becomes ethnocentrist and dogmatic.

## **Gendering of the Nation**

When considering the history of ancient matriarchy in the geographical region of modern Vietnam, a collective forgetting makes room for a far more romantic nationalist thought: the Vietnamese nation is inherent, and long before it had been won, was already coursing through the blood of its women. However, gendered nationalism sentiments become dangerous, even when anti-colonial in nature, if they do not provide women tools for liberation outside of ethnocentric conviction.

Vietnamese scholars like Thi Tu and Le Thi Nham Tuyet claim that the matriarchal aspect of Vietnam's origin myth differentiates Vietnamese society from the spread of Chinese Confucian ideology, such as *The Three Obediences* that divided a woman's life into three stages of

<sup>10</sup> Leeming, David Adams

<sup>11</sup> Liam C. Kelley.

<sup>12</sup> Churchman, Michael (2010). "Before Chinese and Vietnamese in the Red River Plain: The Han–Tang Period" (PDF). Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies. 4. Archived from the original (PDF) on 8 March 2021.

obedience, obeying her father before marriage, obeying her husband after marriage, and her eldest sons in widowhood. <sup>1314</sup> Vietnamese women's struggles for liberation from Chinese patriarchy, when framed inside a matriarchal origin myth, becomes a metaphor for the entire nation's anticolonial struggle for independence. <sup>15</sup>

One could argue that matriarchal social orders, in addition to the important role of "Nữ Anh Hùng" (heroines), demonstrate Vietnamese women not only defended their precious homeland alongside their male compatriots, Vietnamese women also took up arms to protect their womanhood against colonial violence. In this argument, the celebratory and mournful history of women warriors and martyrs like Trưng Sisters, Lady Triệu, and Đặng Thùy Trâm echoed in Vietnamese classrooms and national holidays prove the existence of a "politically awakened ethnic group." Though these heroines gave their lives fighting colonialism, and contributed to a gendering of Vietnam, they are not the subject of this paper.

Anti-colonial nationalism does not distinguish itself from official nationalism in the sense that both assert cultural identity as a way to empower women. Vietnamese people have endured hundreds of years of occupation, and many bloody wars for independence. Vietnamese nationalism is built upon the principles of anti-colonialism, and is highly critical of remnants of colonial rule. After Vietnam's reunification in 1975, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam became a one-party system. In turn, anti-colonialism and anti-colonial women's movements have become synonymous with party politics. Vietnam cannot responsibly distinguish itself as a type of bottom-up nationalism rather than top-down nationalism, wherein the proletariat shake off the shackles of the oppressive elite, without some contradictions.

With vastly differing gender roles and cultural values, much of the discourse between Eastern women's movements and Western feminism are incongruent or unsatisfying. For start, there is no direct translation of the English word 'feminism' in Vietnamese, and the historical waves of feminism within the West do not have the same cultural relevance to

<sup>13</sup> Tu Mai Thi and Tuyet, Le Thi Nham. Women in Vietnam / Mai Thi Tu, Le Thi Nham Tuyet Foreign Languages Publishing House Hanoi 1978.

<sup>14</sup> Roces, M., & Edwards, L. (Eds.). (2010). Women's Movements in Asia: Feminisms and Transnational Activism (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203851234, 129.

<sup>15</sup> ibid 125.

<sup>16</sup> ibid.

the Global South. But Vietnamese gender studies scholars often use the term "women's movement," regarding movements supporting Vietnamese women's right to education, autonomy, and equality. 17

Vietnam's limited advocacy for gender equality is demonstrated in Vietnam's 2000 National Action Plan written after the UN 4th World Conference on Women in Bejing in 1995. It asserts cultural identity as a way to empower Vietnamese women, but consequently, does not imagine a women's movement that approaches cultural identity without ethnocentrism. Such romanization of a primordial past is impractical, only hindering progress in the future. <sup>18</sup>

Modern Vietnamese nationalism asserts that women's cultural identity is based on the history and folktales of Vietnam, but ethnic minorities make up 20% of Vietnam's population, and have their own cultures and languages and gender histories. A shared cultural past referenced as the solution to women's issues erases women's rights issues facing ethnic minority women, who do not share the same cultural past even though they are Vietnamese citizens.

Customs and traditions grouped with anti-colonial nationalism become trite when used to hold back Vietnamese women's movements and confine them to an ethnocentric solution to genuine limitations of gender equality. Perhaps put best by modern Vietnamese heroine Út Tịch, "Còn cái lai quần cũng đánh," which can be translated, in essence, to "even by the string of your trousers, still fight to the end."<sup>19</sup>

### The Ethnic Navel

While educated elites invented these ethnic ties to a common matriarch, their quality of being invented does not make them any less real;Vietnamese people have drawn blood and laid down their lives for national independence. A sign of an effective nationalist movement then, is the combining of the ancient and modern, so that the two would be hardly distinguishable, or not even worth distinguishing, compared to a

<sup>17</sup> Roces, M., & Edwards, L. (Eds.). (2010). Women's Movements in Asia: Feminisms and Transnational Activism (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203851234, 124.

Wendy N. Duong, Gender Equality and Women's Issues in Vietnam: The Vietnamese Woman—Warrior and Poet, 10 Pac. Rim L & Pol'y J. 191 (2001). https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/wilj/vol10/iss2/2

<sup>19</sup> Hội Liên Hiệp Phụ Nữ Tinh Trà Vinh. "Người Nữ Anh Hùng Trên Quê Hương Tam Ngãi." *Phunutravinh. Org. Vn*, 19 Nov. 2019, phunutravinh.org. vn/phu-nu-tren-cac-linh-vuc/guong-dien-hinh/nguoi-nu-anh-hung-tren-que-huong-tam-ngai.html.

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far more romantic idea of "shared placenta." Though its land is ancient, Vietnam as a nation is modern. Uncovering the history of Vietnam then becomes a sort of paradox, where origin stories and traditions that seem to point toward the primordial mists of a nation, are actually relics of modern history.

Ethnic identity and party politics are deeply intertwined in Vietnamese nationalism The Vietnamese Fatherland Front, "Mặt trận Tổ quốc Việt Nam" is an umbrella group of movements aligned with the Communist Party of Vietnam. <sup>20</sup> As a single-party state, all Vietnamese people are tied by "Tổ Quốc," or "fatherland." The Vietnamese language faculty of the phrase "Tổ Quốc," demonstrates that beyond just a country, Vietnam is something innate, it is "Đồng bào," the term meaning "same placenta" as reference to Âu Cơ. As a political entity, the party chooses "Tổ Quốc," rather than other more colloquial Vietnamese terms for "nation." "Tổ," closely translates to ancestor, and "Quốc," nation. "Tổ Quốc," indicates more than citizens united by a central government, it is a political statement, that Vietnamese people are descendents united by a common ancestor. For Vietnamese nationalism, origin stories like Âu Cơ, and the Vietnamese Fatherland Front are what historians have conceived as the national navel or "same placenta." <sup>21</sup>

The consequences of imposing modern nationalism onto ancient history mean recontextualizing or manufacturing relics for political gain. While Vietnamese people have fought for independence from colonial oppression, and formed a community around a matriarch. Vietnam's repetitive and prolonged war and poverty have overshadowed gender issues. Gender equality in Vietnam has become engaged in what this article describes as the "fallacy of a trio" where gender equality becomes synonymous with nationalism and socialism. Romantic nationalism cannot be the only solution without falling into euphemism.

<sup>20 &</sup>quot;Trang Thông Tin Điện Tử Của Uỷ Ban Trung Ương MTTQ Việt Nam." *Uỷ Ban Trung Ương Mặt Trận Tổ Quốc Việt Nam*, 9 Mar. 2024, m.mattran.org.vn/#ref-vi.wikipedia.org/.

<sup>21</sup> Warwick Debates

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## Diverse Perspectives on the Model Minority Myth: Listening to Second-Generation Chinese Americans

Vivian Wang

Vivian Wang is an incoming freshman at Brown University. She is involved in journalism at her school and is passionate about finding ways to engage the Asian American community with research. Outside of school, she has conducted interview-based research on the Chinese American experience and has also figure skated competitively on behalf of Team USA.

### Introduction

Asian Americans have long been depicted in popular culture as a "model minority." The model minority myth (MMM) is the belief that Asian Americans are academically successful due to their strong work ethic and cultural emphasis on education (Chew 1994). Sociologist William Peterson originally coined the term in the 1960s to praise Japanese Americans for their accomplishments and to set an example for other racial minority groups (Wong & Halgin 2006). The term then rose to popularity in the media and has been used for decades to emphasize Asian American academic, financial, and occupational success (Wong et al. 1998). Importantly, the myth has both positive and negative connotations: On the one hand, Asian Americans are seen as high-achieving, intelligent, and hard-working. On the other hand, they are simultaneously stereotyped as monolithic, quiet, passive, and unsuited for leadership and executive positions (Jin 2021; Liu 2021; Wong et al. 1998).

A substantial portion of the popular discourse regarding the model minority myth is focused on how *non*-Asian racial groups engage in perpetuating or challenging this myth (e.g., see Girard 2021, Nguyen 2020). Less attention is paid, however, to whether and how the myth is understood and debated by Asian Americans themselves. In this paper, I aim to help fill this gap by using interviews with second-generation Asian Americans to explore three interrelated questions pertaining to the model minority myth. First, how do second-generation Asian Americans make sense of the model minority myth? As I show through both a review of the academic literature as well as original data from interviews, there is some variation in how Asian Americans engage with the myth. Secondly, why do some Asian Americans subscribe to (or internalize) the model minority myth while others do not? It is important to understand why

some Asian Americans feel strongly about the myth while others hold more ambivalent attitudes. Lastly, what effects, if any, does believing in the model minority myth have on behavior or preferences? The 2023 supreme court ruling against affirmative action in college admissions has inflamed racial tensions between Asian Americans and other racial minority groups. Research has yet to examine post-ruling links between the MMM and Asian American attitudes towards affirmative action and other minorities.

The importance of asking the above questions cannot be overstated. Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in the United States and make up 7% of the national population as of 2023 (Ruiz et al. 2023). 27% of Asian Americans are classified as second-generation, meaning they were born in the U.S. to immigrant parents (Zhou et al. 2005). Understanding how this growing population makes sense of and is impacted by the dominant stereotype assigned to their racial group will contribute to our knowledge of immigrant integration and inter-group relations in the United States.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section II provides a review of literature relevant to each of the three questions outlined above. Sections III describes the research methodology and relates the data to claims in the literature. The final section summarizes main takeaways, notes the limitations of this study, and outlines future research directions.

### **Literature Review**

Question 1: How do second-generation Asian Americans make sense of the model minority myth?

Is there a common understanding of the model minority myth amongst the Asian population, or is there variation in how Asian Americans engage with the myth? Existing literature points us in both directions. For example, in a survey of 704 students from Washington State University, Wong et al. (1998) found that Asian Americans tended to perceive themselves as more prepared, motivated, and more likely to have higher career success than all other (minority and non-minority) racial groups. However, when researchers tested for statistically significant differences in *actual* academic performance between racial groups in this sample, no consistent difference was found. These results indicate that Asian Americans may at least *indirectly* buy into the model minority myth

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by seeing themselves as better performing than other racial groups (even if these expectations are not matched by real performance). However, one limitation of this study is that it does not ask respondents to directly report their understanding of the MMM. In addition, the study only reports *average* responses among the Asian students, which does not preclude the possibility that there is still significant variation in whether respondents subscribe to the stereotypes generated by the MMM.

Other literature does indeed show that such variation exists. For example, Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997) conducted a survey of 162 Asian American university students to better understand their views on the model minority myth. 51.7% of the students expressed negative views of the model minority label, 26.3% expressed positive views, and 15.9% were ambivalent.

Negative attitudes were associated with a desire for individual over group recognition, as well as the pressure associated with conforming to the myth. Meanwhile, positive attitudes were associated with the belief that the label stands for and promotes positive behavior and treatment. Finally, Asian Americans who expressed ambivalence towards the myth tended to reason that while the model minority myth is a stereotype and stereotypes are generally harmful, it is at least a positive stereotype (compared to certain stereotypes about other groups).

Additional studies have provided more evidence for such reasoning behind positive and negative views of the myth. Lee (1994, 1996) conducted 47 ethnographic interviews of Asian American students at a coed, public high school in Philadelphia. Asian American students in this high school showed wide variation in their perceptions of the model minority myth. For example, some Asian American students anecdotally believed in the model minority myth and attempted to meet model minority expectations. For example, one student said, "[Asian Americans] are smarter. I mean, I don't think it's a stereotype—look at our report cards. We are better, and we have to show it." Lee found that those who viewed the MMM positively saw the myth as a path to success and higher education.

Meanwhile, other Asian American students distanced themselves from the MMM. One such student expressed that "[whites] will have stereotypes, like, [Asians are] smart—They are so wrong; not everyone is smart. They expect you to be this and that, and when you're not—[shakes her head]." Lee's findings show that there is great variability in how

Asian Americans perceive the model minority myth, which subsequently impacts how they choose to behave.

Kiang et al. (2017), in a review of the literature, describe additional concerns noted by those who hold negative views of the myth, including unrealistic expectations for academic success, pressure for creating a certain social image, and presumed submissiveness. In contrast to these findings on positive and negative attitudes, ambivalent attitudes are less documented in the existing literature.

Finally, having negative views of the model minority myth does not necessarily prevent Asian Americans from subscribing to the myth. Some Asian Americans choose to conform to the model minority myth despite believing it is inaccurate or harmful. Chae conducted 13 in-depth interviews with Korean American high schoolers and found that Asian American youth may subscribe to the myth despite being critical of it in order to take advantage of its benefits. These benefits included avoiding social judgment and being perceived as intelligent and well-behaved. This suggests two important distinctions: Subscribing to the model minority myth is not equivalent to believing the myth to be accurate, and believing it to be accurate is not the same as believing it to be harmful.

## Question 2: Why do some Asian Americans subscribe to (or internalize) the model minority myth while others do not?

As discussed in the previous section, some Asian Americans appear to "internalize" aspects of the model minority myth, some reject the myth entirely, while others feel more conflicted or ambivalent. In addition to understanding the full range of Asian American perceptions of the model minority myth, it is important to ask *why* this variation occurs. Relative to the literature (discussed above) on how Asian Americans differentially grapple with the MMM, there is little work that explicitly addresses the causes of this variation. There are also gaps in the literature when it comes to examining model minority myth internalization in the present-day context, specifically among second–generation Asian Americans. Below, I discuss the limited literature addressing this "why" question, but also expand my discussion to papers that *implicitly* point to certain sources of variation.

Some studies indicate that internalization of the model minority myth is influenced by exposure to the myth through social networks and the composition of one's environment (e.g., ethnic make-up of one's school). Atkin et al. (2018) conducted the survey of 367 Asian American adolescents in two American high schools. One high school was predominantly Asian while the other was predominantly non-Asian. They found that Asian American adolescents in predominantly non-Asian schools were more likely to internalize the model minority myth than adolescents in predominantly Asian schools. The authors argue that - in schools with large Asian populations - Asian American students were less likely to be treated as homogeneous and more likely to engage in conversation to challenge stereotypes. Social support geared towards Asians and the presence of counterexamples (Asian students that did not fit the model minority stereotype) also minimized the perceived reliability of the model minority myth. This suggests that the racial/ ethnic composition of a school, specifically the number of Asian American peers, impacts how Asian American adolescents view the model minority myth. School is one environment among many that can solidify certain perceptions of the model minority myth.

Alongside schooling, one of an adolescent's most prominent social influences are their parents. Existing literature suggests that Asian parents may reinforce or challenge the MMM with their stories and expectations. Park (2008) conducted interviews with 88 Chinese and Korean teenagers to examine why they tended to give similar descriptions of their family's migration experience (despite differences in race, class, history, culture, and geography, etc.). The knowledge that Chinese and Korean teenagers shared about their family's migration experience fit the image of a model minority success story. These stories preserved the image of Asian Americans as a "good" minority, indicating that the stories and experiences that Asian parents share with their Asian American children may play a role in reinforcing the model minority myth. Asian American adolescents' views of the model minority myth has also been connected in previous studies to parental expectations. While conducting ethnographic interviews of Asian Americans at a high school, Lee (1994) found that Asian students commonly cited a sense of responsibility to their families and guilt for parental sacrifice for accepting the model minority myth.

Existing literature also implicitly points to other factors that may contribute to different levels of model minority myth internalization among Asian Americans, including ethnicity and immigration status. For example, Ngo & Lee (2007) conducted a literature review of how the model minority stereotype, in conjunction with assumptions that

Southeast Asians are underachieving, impact the experiences of Southeast Asian students. They found that the contrasting stereotypes of Southeast Asians as both "model minorities" and "high school dropouts, gangsters, and welfare dependents" complicates the experiences of Southeast Asians with the MMM. This indicates that different Asian ethnicities have different experiences with the model minority myth, which may lead to different levels of myth internalization.

A final source of variation implicitly discussed in the literature is immigration status. Lee (2001) interviewed Hmong Americans at a Wisconsin public school and observed that first generation and second-generation Hmong Americans tended to have separate and distinct views about education. The first generation students tended to be more academically motivated. Teachers observed them as "good kids" who conformed to the model minority myth. The second-generation was more "Americanized" and tended to be wary of stereotypes such as the model minority myth. This suggests that immigration experiences and length of time in America can indirectly influence how Asian Americans view the model minority myth.

Question 3: What effects, if any, does believing in the model minority myth have on behavior or preferences (such as attitudes towards affirmative action, and attitudes towards other minorities)?

How does the model minority myth impact the way Asian Americans experience the world and how they view themselves in relation to other members of society? Existing literature that examines such questions reveal that the variation in Asian American views of the model minority myth, as discussed in previous sections, is highly consequential. The model minority myth's known effects show that studying diverse Asian American perspectives on the myth is important, and its lesser-known effects need more research.

The bulk of the existing literature surrounding the impacts of the model minority myth focuses on academic performance and help-seeking tendencies. Kim & Lee (2014) studied help-seeking attitudes among Asian American students in a survey of 106 self-identified Asian American university undergraduates. Using survey scales, the researchers gauged the attitudes of their participants towards help-seeking and the model minority myth. The researchers found that internalized model minority myth significantly predicted unfavorable help-seeking attitudes. They

argue that the model minority myth encourages exemplary academic and financial performance and conversely discourages behavior that contradicts the stereotype.

Comparatively less literature discusses the social and political impacts of the model minority myth. The previously discussed influence of the model minority myth on help-seeking attitudes, however, may have implications for social and political spheres as well. One potential implication is in attitudes towards affirmative action. Affirmative action programs seek to promote opportunity for underrepresented minority groups in admissions and hiring contexts. These programs may be seen by some as a form of help-seeking in which underrepresented minority groups receive aid and preferential treatment. Yi & Todd. (2021) surveyed 251 Asian American college students to examine the links between internalizing the model minority myth and socio-political outcomes such as opposition to affirmative action and anti-Black attitudes. The researchers found that greater internalization of the model minority myth is a predictor for anti-Black attitudes and opposition to affirmative action. Internalizing the model minority myth was also linked to just-world beliefs – i.e., the belief that the world is a fair place in which people get what they deserve no matter what racial group they belong to (Lerner, 1980; Lipkus, 1991). These findings suggest that internalizing the MMM influences how Asian Americans view other racial groups.

The literature that examines the relationships between Asian Americans and other, non-Black racial groups is sparse. Existing literature on this topic focuses predominantly on the relationship between Asian Americans and Black Americans. Both quantitative and qualitative studies have indicated that internalization of the model minority myth is a predictor for anti-Black attitudes. For example, Lee (1996) observed that high-achieving Asian-identified students resented Black Americans because they believed that African Americans received unfair advantages through affirmative action programs. Lee also found that Asian Americans were perceived by students of other races as "unfair competitors" while certain Asian American students viewed Black Americans as "lazy welfare recipients." This indicates that anti-Blackness, for Asian American students, may come from the model minority myth's implication that Black Americans lack the work ethic to become more successful and must receive help to achieve the success that Asian Americans achieve without aid.

However, other studies have not found such a clear link between MMM internalization and antiBlack attitudes. Matriano et al. (2021) investigated this question by examining Asian American college students' support for Black Lives Matter. They surveyed 272 Asian American college students from a large, public university in the Southwest. Their findings suggested that internalization of the MMM was not related significantly to BLM support. Critical reflection (thinking critically about racism and systemic inequality), however, was related to Asian Americans' support of BLM. Additionally, because the stakes and nature of affirmative action have changed since the 2023 supreme court ruling against affirmative action in college admissions, there is still a need for present-day data.

## Methodology

In order to answer the three questions discussed above, this study collects original qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. Participants were 10 self-identified second-generation Chinese Americans, and were recruited through a snowball sampling method. The first round of respondents (three people) were recruited from my inner circle. I asked them questions about their personal background (eg. family, schooling), the model minority myth (whether they believed it was harmful/ beneficial, accurate/inaccurate, etc.), and their attitudes towards affirmative action and other minority groups. After the interview, participants were asked to refer an individual who was also a second-generation Chinese American. There were three rounds of interviews in total, with one person from the second round referring two individuals, making the total number of participants 10. Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview which lasted, on average, 32.7 minutes in length. A table with details about each respondent, including age, gender, and length of interview, can be found below.

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	Date of			
Name	interview	Age (years)	Gender	Length of Interview
Respondent #1	8/17	22	Male	36 min
Respondent #2	8/17	22	Male	45 min
Respondent #3	8/18	82	Male	27 min
Respondent #4	8/21	66	Female	50 min
Respondent #5	8/24	17	Female	26 min
Respondent #6	8/25	21	Female	22 min
Respondent #7	8/28	34	Female	27 min
Respondent #8	9/3	18	Female	21 min
Respondent #9	9/4	21	Female	26 min
Respondent #10	9/2	21	Female	46 min

Each of the interviews was recorded and transcribed with the participant's consent. I then reviewed each of these transcripts thoroughly, and deciphered emerging themes and patterns across respondents. The quotes were edited for clarity. Below, I present the findings from this analysis.

## **Findings**

This section presents findings from the qualitative data collection exercise discussed above. In particular, for each of the three core questions motivating this study, I provide examples of claims made by my interview respondents and link these to debates in the wider literature.

## Question 1: How do second-generation Asian Americans make sense of the model minority myth?

The interviews conducted in this study are in line with the existing literature in that Asian Americans have a diverse range of opinions about the model minority myth. In my sample of ten second-generation

Chinese Americans, 50% of individuals expressed unequivocally negative attitudes towards the myth, 20% expressed mixed negative-leaning attitudes, 20% remained ambiguous, and 10% expressed mixed positive-leaning attitudes. None of the participants took a fully positive stance, which differs from previous studies such as Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997) and Lee (1994), in which a significant portion of the respondents felt positively about the myth. This suggests that general attitudes towards the model minority myth may have shifted in a negative direction since these studies were conducted. Of the 10 interview respondents, two individuals were unfamiliar with the term "model minority," though both participants recognized the substance of the myth (Asians are intelligent and successful) upon a brief explanation.

Those respondents who felt decidedly negatively about the MMM tended to think of the myth as harmful and demeaning to Asian American individuals, and as perpetuating stereotypes of submissiveness. Of the five out of ten respondents who felt negatively about the myth, three mentioned that the myth was an oversimplification of the diversity in Asian American experiences. They explained that this oversimplification is harmful to Asian American individuals even if the values being assigned to Asian Americans are positive (intelligent, successful). As one participant said, "[The model minority myth] is a stereotype and I think a stereotype is problematic whether it may be viewed in a positive or negative light." Another respondent expressed concern about the pressure Asian Americans feel to conform to the myth: "I think it brings a lot of pressure to kids who feel like "oh, because I'm Asian, I'm supposed to be super smart in a very specific way, right?"...Yet, what they're good at or passionate about is something else. The model minority myth would make them feel less than for that."

The majority of those who had mixed views about the MMM leaned in the negative direction. These respondents generally thought the myth to be harmful but acknowledged potential benefits of being perceived as intelligent or successful. One participant commented, "[The model minority myth is] a double edged sword. I would say that it simultaneously allows certain Asian Americans who fit the criteria to benefit from it and oppress other people. And then it also simultaneously places them within a very confining box."

Other respondents with mixed views mentioned how a positive image may encourage positive behavior: "I just suppose, like, it can be motivating to uphold that kind of image, you know, it can motivate students to do their school and stuff. But it can also harm students too, because it can put really harsh expectations or ideals. It can be really

damaging, especially when things don't always go the way that you want them to." Positive ideas about the myth as expressed by those with mixed attitudes tended to revolve around increased academic motivation and privilege over other minority groups. As one participant noted, "As a result [of the MMM], we are better equipped than the other [racial minority] groups in terms of knowing what to do and what to pursue for success."

In comparison to the existing literature, reasoning about the MMM among Asian Americans seems to be similar in many ways but has also evolved in the past twenty years. In particular, none of the respondents in my sample viewed the model minority myth as unequivocally positive. There seems to be an increasing awareness and emphasis on the negative impact of the MMM on Asian Americans.

## Question 2: Why do some Asian Americans subscribe to (or internalize) the model minority myth while others do not?

Existing literature points to explicit factors such as social networks and parenting styles as moderating levels of internalization of the MMM. Implicit factors such as ethnicity and immigration status are also discussed in previous studies. The interviews conducted in this study further explore these factors and their relationship to MMM.

The participants were asked to share details of their schooling experience with questions such as "what is/was the ethnic/racial composition of your school?", "Would you say that you are/were a minority?" and "Would you say your high school was competitive?" Participants were also questioned about the ethnic composition of their social networks. In this sample, the racial/ethnic composition of a respondent's school did not appear to have a significant impact on their views towards the model minority myth. There were participants who went to schools with very few other Asian Americans and viewed the myth as fully negative. There were also participants who went to schools with high Asian American student populations and also felt negatively about the MMM. This finding opposes Atkin et al. (2018), who found that Asian American adolescents in predominantly non-Asian schools were more likely to internalize the model minority myth than those in predominantly Asian schools.

Instead, it may be that the experience of going to college tends to shift Asian Americans' views about the model minority and about Asian American identity in general. Of the eight interviewees who have attended college for at least two years, six said that college changed or developed their understanding of the MMM. All six of these participants

attended liberal colleges and either felt fully negative or mixed (leaning negative) about the MMM. One participant stated how he expected other Asian American students to behave in high school: "When I heard the term Asian in high school, I would attribute values of, like, 'hard working' and 'heads down.' Because, to be honest, if I saw an Asian kid who didn't behave like that in my school, I'd be like, "Whoa, like, they're different." He then explained how his views changed *after* going to college. "Meeting more people outside of high school, maturing a little bit more, learning more about terminology, having more of a political awareness, learning in classes about the model minority myth...I think that just in general increased my worldview," he said.

Another participant expanded on the impact of a diverse and flexible college environment: "It wasn't until I went to like college that I felt like I was able to take courses that I could relate to...I'm very grateful and lucky that I am in this different kind of academic sphere where I feel like my lived experiences do matter." The participants who mentioned their college experience tended to reference their conversations with peers, Asian American history classes, and campus diversity. The two out of ten participants who were unfamiliar with the term "model minority myth" before the interview either had not attended college yet or attended college a long time ago. This suggests that knowledge about and internalization of the model minority myth may be moderated by contemporary liberal discourse on college campuses and access to classes about Asian American history.

Another existing hypothesis in the literature is that children of parents who preserve "model minority" values such as academic success, intelligence, or submissiveness, are more likely to internalize the MMM. Of the 10 participants in this sample, four indicated that their parents actively promoted and enforced such values. These four respondents did not tend to view the myth any more positively than the other respondents. Three of them felt negatively about the myth and one felt mixed (leaning negatively). All four respondents, however, expressed that they felt the MMM was partially truthful. As one individual said, "I think, like a lot of stereotypes, [the MMM] does stem from some truth. Especially knowing what Chinese American values are sometimes. Sometimes my parents would tell me to just like, you know, sit down, shut up, like put your head down and just do your work. So there definitely is some truth that comes from that." The same respondent said, "I think [the MMM] primarily harms [Asian Americans]." These findings indicate that, while parental pressure may not influence whether an individual views the MMM as being harmful, it may influence whether an individual

perceives the myth to be accurate.

In regard to implicit factors, ethnicity and immigration status were kept constant in the sample with all participants being second-generation Chinese Americans. However, when asked: "Do you think your answers to any of these questions would be different if you belonged to a different group of Asian Americans?" nine out of ten of participants said that their responses would likely be different if they belonged to a different ethnic subgroup (for reasons such as differences in physical appearance, history, culture, and experiences).

Question 3: What effects, if any, does believing in the model minority myth have on behavior or preferences (such as attitudes towards affirmative action, and attitudes towards other minorities)?

Existing literature suggests that internalizing the model minority myth may have social and political implications such as on attitudes towards affirmative action and towards other minorities. Since no individuals in my sample expressed a fully positive view of the model minority, this study lacks the full range of responses that would provide for a more comprehensive analysis of MMM links with social/political attitudes. There are, however, several links that the responses from this sample seem to support.

My interviews support the claim in existing literature that internalization of the model minority influences an individual's degree of support towards affirmative action (Yi & Todd. 2021). Six out of ten respondents expressed support for affirmative action (opposition towards the recent decision against affirmative action in college admissions). Of these six individuals, five viewed the model minority myth negatively and one was mixed (leaning negative). Of the four individuals who did not feel positively about affirmative action, three people felt unsure or neutral and one person opposed affirmative action programs. The three individuals with unsure or neutral attitudes towards affirmative action also felt mixed or ambiguous about the MMM. The one respondent in opposition to affirmative action felt ambiguously about the MMM.

"To be honest, I could probably see both sides. I think I'm leaning towards the fact that this is not necessarily a good thing—having it be race blind. I think it's just not fair because there is a lot of systemic inequity in this country that is associated with race," said one participant, who also expressed a 'double-sided' view of the MMM but leaned negatively. Those who felt decidedly negatively about the MMM tended to take a more firm stance about affirmative action. For example, one participant who felt negatively about the MMM said, "I don't think [the

supreme court decision] was a good ruling. In some ways, I feel like the Asian Americans that were involved in the lawsuit were actually kind of manipulated."

Other existing literature links internalizing the MMM with anti-Blackness. Participants were asked about their understanding of the current relationship between Asian Americans and Black Americans. Some included the model minority myth in their response without being prompted, emphasizing Asian Americans are pitted against Black Americans. Those who did so either viewed the MMM negatively or were mixed (leaning negatively). "Especially with the model minority...I think there's times when Asian Americans are put up on this pedestal for other like minorities to look at. And I think that in general, that doesn't play well," one participant, who viewed the MMM mixed leaning negatively, said. Others responded that Asian Americans are more privileged than Black Americans, citing resources, education, home-ownership, and colorism. Two participants declined to describe the relationship between Asian and Black Americans or answered ambiguously. They had mixed or ambiguous attitudes towards the MMM.

### Conclusion

This study has examined three main questions: How do secondgeneration Asian Americans make sense of the model minority myth? Why do some Asian Americans subscribe to (or internalize) the model minority myth while others do not? And what effects, if any, does believing in the model minority myth have on behavior or preferences?" I first outlined claims in the existing literature for each of the three questions. I then examined original qualitative data (10 semi-structured interviews with second-generation Chinese Americans) in light of the claims. For the first question, I found that second-generation Asian Americans do have a diverse range of attitudes towards the MMM, but those attitudes tend to lean negative. This is a departure from earlier literature, in which significant portions of the samples viewed the MMM positively. For the second question, I found little connection between internalizing the MMM and school racial/ethnic composition. However, liberal discourse and Asian American-centered courses in college appear to be associated with more negative views towards the myth. Finally, parenting style seemed to influence the extent to which an individual believed the MMM to be true, but did not influence how much they believed it to be harmful. For the third question, those who felt strongly

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about the MMM tended to also feel more strongly about affirmative action. Negative views towards the MMM were associated with positive views towards affirmative action. The connection with anti-Blackness was not as clear, but those who believed the MMM was harmful to Asian-Black relations tended to view the myth negatively.

This study probes hypotheses suggested in the existing literature through the use of original qualitative data, and also suggests a new hypothesis regarding the impact of college education on views towards the MMM. However, qualitative data collected through snowball sampling is necessarily limited in making generalizable claims. In particular, this study only examines the experiences of second–generation Chinese Americans. Further study is needed to understand the experiences of other Asian American ethnic groups, especially those that are frequently underrepresented in data pertaining to Asian Americans, such as Hmong Americans or Filipino Americans. To understand the full diversity of contemporary Asian American experiences with the MMM, future research should further test these claims by collecting and analyzing probability–based quantitative data, and by expanding the sample to Asian Americans from all ethnic backgrounds.

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