

Matthew Zaldana

Mr. David K Song

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Primary Source Analysis #1

Mary Paik Lee and her family were one of the first few Korean family immigrants the immigrated into the United States as a family unit. This story is interesting in many different ways, as families and women were atypical – few Asian women came to the United States at this time. Paik mentions that the people she came with split ways between Hawaii, San Francisco, Dinuba, and Los Angeles. Main Korean migration between 1903 and 1920 to the United States resulted, for most, in a final landing on Hawaii, where most of the eight thousand Koreans landed and stayed to work on plantations. Paik’s story is unique as the “majority of entries were young, men; over 90 percent were between the ages of sixteen and forty-four” (Lee, 38).

Therefore, a family coming together, including women and children was extraordinary. However, what is most probable that caused them to emigrate out of Korea together was the political struggle that was seen in Korea at the time. The country’s shaky political status and its uncertain future led many “male migrants to bring their wives with them if they did not intend to return” (Lee 28).

On another note, Paik mentions that the “Japanese, Chinese, and Mexicans each had their own little settlement outside of town” and that they were not “allowed to live in town with the white people” (Paik Lee). Characteristically, due to the uncertainty of the Korean country, most Korean migrants emigrated out of the country in large numbers and settled together. But Paik’s story in Riverside also details the segregation and the racism that reigned over the California

land, which was only a window to what was lived across the United States during that time, as can be learned in any other American history class nowadays.

Paik's account of the "one-room shacks" she lived in was horrendous, to say the least. The fact that there a "few water pumps" for the familys that lived there depicts what life was like for newly arrived Oriental immigrants. They were given the leftovers of prior people's existence. Recycling and reusing seems to be a fact during this time, as the places used to be inhabited by Chinese "who had built the Southern Pacific Railroad in the 1880s" as Paik notes. No doubt, these men after working long days building something so large came home tired. The lack of water builds dirtiness among them as they cannot shower or wash up easily. From this, infestation may be born. When the Koreans later inhabited the place, it was surely dirty and disgusting. On the flip side, the American view of Oriental immigrants stealing American jobs built the tension between both populations but also exploded sentiments of rage and anger in the Americans which is why history later accounts for Korean murders perpetrated by Americans later.

Paik tells about her mother's work which Lee writes as "extra money" (Lee 62) as Mary Paik Lee's mother, Song Kuang Do, describing it as cooking "for about thirty single men who worked in the citrus groves" (Paik Lee). Waking up early and preparing lunches for the workers at 5 am and making supper at 7 pm as Paik describes must have surely been very tiring for Paik's mother. Paik comments that her father did not like for her to work "but was the only way to make things work" (Paik Lee). The amount of money that her father worked in the fields was minimal. The lack of gas or electricity added to the miserableness of Paik's situation as they "had to heat our bath water in a bucket over an open fire outside, then pour it into a tin tub inside" (Paik Lee). With minimal technology, Paik's Korean community had very little chances

of excelling in their life and create something useful for themselves or for anyone else for that matter. Her tone of voice, however, shifted as she started to meet her neighbors and later in life recognized them as successful movie actor Philip Ahn, who “lived across from us” (Paik Lee). As she kept meeting many familiar faces, she “felt happy to be there together...” (Paik Lee).

Additionally, Paik adds her beliefs into the mix. She recounts that an American lady named Mrs. Stewart, who “was interested in the Korean people and brought presents for everyone at Christmastime [...] gave me the first and only doll I ever had...” (Paik Lee). This must have had a lasting effect on her. Lee explains that most Korean immigrants were converted to Christians which has impacted society up to current days, as most Koreans are Christians and one can easily find many religious buildings in present-day Los Angeles. The fact that Paik glooms over the only doll she ever had shows how hard it was for any child, especially Asian immigrants in those days, to have any kind of toy.

Finally, the excerpt concludes with Paik’s account of her father’s many skills and talents, which Lee talks about as well for the general Korean immigrant population. Among Korean immigrants, there was a wide array of occupations. Paik’s father “among other things, had been an expert tailor in Korea” and hand-knitted a coat for her daughter (Paik Lee). He had also “studied to be a minister (Paik Lee). Undoubtedly, he must have helped in the Bible reunions that they celebrated in their community building. However, Paik notes that her father mostly did agricultural work, getting “paid by the sack for their labor” (Paik Lee). This was seen among Japanese and Chinese all over the California agricultural mainland. Paik’s experiences are just one of many Korean immigrant histories. Paik’s story highlights themes such as “labor migration, American racism against Asian immigrants, and the pattern of serial migration in which immigrants rarely had a single destination” (Lee 25).