

Alice Chai; A women in constant creative struggle

Christina Lowrie  
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Alice Chai

Alice please tell me your full name, place of birth, and date of birth.

It's very hard to say just one full name because Alice Chai is not my real name. In the beginning, I was given two Korean names one, Moon Kyung and Young Koo. Moon Kyung is joy of knowledge by my grandfather. And Young Koo is official name registered into family register. It means prosperity. And my grandfather gave both boys and girls same generation name, that is Koo, and other families of upper class origin usually don't give generation name to girls, just to boys. But they called me Moon Kyung, I don't know why. And then Young Koo. I used formally at the school. In you, know, documentation. And then in 1930's when I attended school, Korea was colonized by Japan. And a, we had to speak only Japanese, only learn Japanese language and history and literature. And we encouraged or forced to change our names into Japanese names. So I was called Ito and I didn't use Japanese given name. So I kept my Korean given name and pronounced in Japanese name Ito <sup>EIKYO</sup> ~~AKIO~~ until 1945. So names given to me by grandfather meant more to me, the nickname meant more to me. And I always liked to do reading and studying and almost gave me somekind of definition of myself. But the name Alice I gave to myself when Korean war broke out and we all evacuated to the South, no school, and no jobs so I was working for an American US Airforce chaplain's Airforce

office. As a interpreter for an orphanage and they couldn't pronounce my Korean name Moon Kyung. And everybody else who was working there had American names given by American soldiers. So you know, officers, and I didn't want somebody to give me name so I gave myself Alice after first American Methodist missionary who was my grandmother teacher and also arranged the marriage for my grandparents. Her name Alice Appenzeller. So I got name from that person. She was first president of where my grandmother and mother went.

Your grandfather that you speak of, was that your father's father or mother's?

- My father's father gave me the name.

Do you remember your grandfather vividly in your childhood?

He was somekind of government official when Korea was annexed by Japan in 1905. I think he was minister, vice minister of education. Anyway, he was exiled - he was taken by Japanese government to Japan and all high government officials including Korean King - prince were taken to Japan. He was educated - you know in Japanese language - literature and so on. Before that he was Confucion scholar. So he believed in christianity and westernization. So both sets of my parents on mother's side and father's side were first generation christians. And I heard from my mother that he was the first Korean man to own a modle T. And my grandmother on my father's side was first Korean women to do bicycling; first Korean women to wear red pants or any kind of pants or any kind of pants.

Anyway, they had money to buy those things. Because my grandmother's parents were first ambassador to U.S. by the Korean King or last before Japanese annexation anyway. So my grandfather was scholar but he was bad with his money. He spent lots of money collecting antiques. He was very bad in business dealing. So he lost lots of money and he had all sorts of western style mixed couple parties in his garden and so on. So he really lost all his money. Even though, when my father was still young. He had enough money to hire different governess for tutoring him with different languages. So my father learned lots of language, French, Italian, English, and foreign and so on with different tutors. But he became penniless. So when my father was in college he had to, he was educated in Japan, Prep school and Kyoto University in medicine. Anyway he had to have scholarship. He had hard time.

### The Effects of Colonization

What kind of impact did Japanese colonization of Korea make on you and your family?

It happened it long time before I was born. My father was administrator of one of the missionary founded private medical school. But even private schools were controlled by Japanese colonial government. And he had to speak in Japanese and had to wear Japanese, you know, officers Khaki uniform, you know all that. Things they wrap around the legs <sup>Gyahan</sup> and so on and we couldn't go to church. I heard before I was born some of the

church members, I mean Korean church members who were doing worship service on Sunday. They church, you know somebody put fire on the church - some people died and so on. We couldn't congregate in any large numbers. So the only things we heard about Koreans getting out of Japanese colonization was through the underground radio who listened. But in my family my mother because she was educated, she was one of the leaders in some kind of Korean national, Korean Female Association, Korean Patriotic Women's Association. She had to work with Japanese women in our neighborhood, but she didn't speak very good Japanese. Because she learned everything in English when she went to University by missionaries because they didn't have a Korean textbook and so on. So she had to learn Japanese and she had to ask me, what does this work mean? In front of Japanese women at my house. Anyway, they didn't say anything in front of me how Japanese were treating us. So all the things I got officially - anything about war or anykind of political situation, I got from school. So I believed in, you know, what ever they said.

Do you have any siblings?

Yes, I am one of seven siblings and the oldest of two daughters and five sons. One immediately below me is my sister and five brothers.

### Alice's Parents

My father was 33 and my mother was 28 when they were married. But somehow, I don't know, they said they had contraceptive but failed, anyway, they had seven children in nine years. My mother didn't have breast milk so raised us by American formula food. She learned from missionary. So we were experimented on those baby foods. May be we became taller because of the American diet. But, a, that's maybe the reason those contraceptive didn't work. And all this, but I am the shortest of all siblings. My sister is 5' 10", my brother's 6'. And they they say, "how did your children grow so tall?" Because my mother is five foot, my father is about 5' 9". But my mother is very short.

How tall are you?

I use to be 5' 7", but now I'm shorter, you know, age. I think I'm 5' 6".

As a young girl in your adolescence were you close to your mother? Did you feel close to your sisters?

My mother, you know, besides feeding us with American food also believed in Dr. Spocks way of baby care. So we were raised in a crib. And she didn't give us any close physical contact; like Korean mother's do. Like carry on the back or sleep beside

her.

So we didn't have a very close physical or any kind of real close relationship. I was close to sister and my oldest younger brother. Because they were one and two years younger than me. So we were living very close to my mother's side grandparents house. Even though father's side grandfathers also - lived with us because grandfather died at a young age. -So I use to go to my other grandparent's house almost everyday. I was very close to my auntie, my mother's sister. She had five sisters, opposite from us, and two brothers.

Were your parents Christian? And what kind of values did your parents install? Were there conflicts with those values when you were an adolescent? Like religious values in relation to sex, dating, and relations to the opposite sex?

### Adolescence

It's not much of my parent's values but of society at large. You know, with sex, school system, high school, even college. Elementary school we had co-education until sixth grade. And then from middle school until seventh grade and up we were separated. We had girls and boys high school and college. So only college became co-educational after 1945. I went to a women's college at that time too. So the society is based on confucian ethics. You know, the separation of sexes and you know, arranged marriage, and virginity and all that.

I, you know, learned from school and just society at large. My parents were very liberal in terms of sex role socialization. Of course, we had maids who took care of house work. My mother didn't ask me or my sister to do any house work. She had enough help, and if she needed, the maids couldn't do, she asked my brothers rather than us. So my relatives usually said, "everything's upside down in this house. Daughters talking to guests and son who helps in the kitchen or something like that."

Were you middle class?

Yes, upper middle class, yes.

My mother didn't work, but my father was medical school Dean.

In high school did you want a career? What were your points of inspiration? And what did you study in college?

At high school we didn't do much of anything but learn Japanese language and history and literature. Then the rest of the day. You know a couple hours in the morning and the rest of the day we had to do factory work. So we sewed soldiers clothes, make weapons.

Was that only for girls or for both boys and girls?

So I really didn't know what I wanted to do. My mother was



a piano music major and she was a music teacher before she got married. And I played piano so I thought I'd be a music teacher. That's what I majored in in college. But didn't have any, you know, clear ambition of what I wanted to do. Until Korean war broke out, I worked with orphans. I wanted to continue working but I wanted to get degree in the United States. So, American Methodist Missionary and US Air Force chaplain collected money so, and also, got me a scholarship to, I could come to the US in 1953.

Where did you study?

Ohio Wesleyan.

Why did you want to come to America to study?

Because I wanted to learn something about sociological social work so I could work for the orphans, when I go back. That time social work was not a undergraduate field. I started out with sociology then I continued sociology because social work was something about how to help blacks or Puerto Ricans in Ohio. So you know, I didn't think I could relate to that so I changed to anthropology so that's how I became anthropology student and I got PhD. in anthropology.

Why didn't you feel like you could relate to blacks and Hispanics?

Because I had a hard time relating to whites, right, learning their culture and background and also because English language. You're suppose to do a practicum in those ghetto. Counseling experience and so, but that time I didn't. And also I liked something academic by that time rather than social work.

Were you happy when you were going to school in the United States? Was that experience a positive one for you?

Oh ya, in the beginning I had hard time I didn't have any English background. Other than just alphabet and children's books. So I really had a hard time a couple of years.

How did you study?

Dictionary, ya study until 2:00 A.M. And still I haven't mastered neither English or Korean. Japanese is the best one. But I'm forgetting because thirty years I didn't use. That's the first language I learned everything every subject.

Were you aware that you were a minority? Was that an important thing to you? Was assimilation important to you?

Of course I didn't fight with American society being democratic and equal; thought more equal. So, as a woman, I thought I would gain more, but my father, you know, studied in Columbia after 1945, came back to Korea, and I said that I

wanted to study in the United States, women are usually secretaries, or they go into nursing or home economics. So I don't know what you like to do with sociology or social work. Anyway, I found out that a women, Korean female of my background had more ambition than American women who were going to college. They were mostly in education with nursing and they suppose to be going steady as freshman and sophomores. Junior engaged. Then senior with graduation they're suppose to be, you know "Mrs", degree besides BA degree. So very few women majored in sociology so I thought because of my class background Asian women. I thought maybe Asian women were maybe ahead of them in terms of Korea. But Asian female also had this kind of dicotomy. Either you become single and become <sup>career</sup> ~~Korean~~ women or become married and became housewife. You didn't think of combining the two was possible. And American female also felt the same and they felt marriage was more important.

When you were in college, was marriage a focus for you? Did you want to get married? What was your opinion of marriage and starting a family?

My mother who married my father was the oldest descendent of his big family, didn't have time because of too many things to do. Had many children - she said, don't get married and become Korean female or if you want to get married or if you have to get married, find some Korean and American husband who is educated who don't live like Korean, married couples. So I was

not looking for or anxious to get married. At that time there were three women's students in this school that I went to, Ohio Wesleyan. And about seven Korean male students nearby Ohio State University, they were university graduate students. Most all of them were married even though they are not married, we know they are married cause people from Korea say they have wives in Korea. So, a, I just said I will study and go back to Korea to do social work or teach. And then 1955, so two years after that, after I came, I met my husband who was going to Ohio State. He was thirty some years old, he was single. He came from a family that was similar to me. Actually he was living two doors down from my house, when he was young. Anyway, he had something in common. He was music major in Korea and became Engineer. So we started to date and 57 no, 53 we met until 55 when I graduated from Ohio Wesleyan we got married. So we went to Ohio State together.

When you were in college did you ever date caucasian men?

No, we had some kind of sorority. Made up of foreign students and some female of color. It's not a fancy social sorority. But it's called cosmopolitan. So we got together with other foreign students including man sometimes, married man, and a they didn't have dating.

Did you have a close girlfriend through college?

Ya, mostly Korean and Asian, foreign students on the campus.

We were not in the same dorm but all of us had to practically live in the library. So we worked together, back and forth and the short vacation time, we use to get together in one of our dormatary kitchen and we cooked dormatary food. Sometimes American families invited us and asked us to cook Korean food. And a serve them. One of my so called American mother who was friend of Enna, first Korean President Helen Kim, she learned how to make Kimche. So when ever I went over to her house she made Kimche for us.

Was it important to you through cooking or through other things to hold on to your Korean culture or were you aware of cultural things. Were you home sick?

I didn't know too much about Korean culture because colonized by Japanese. I didn't want to associate myself with confucian culture either. But when I came to US American culture was also different. Including food. So I became famliar with Koreanness after I came to US. And also we were forced to learn Korean songs and dance to entertain them. Because during the war they say, tell us about Korea.

So other then war, they wanted us to teach them Korean songs and do something about Korea. So I became more Koreanized in America, so to speak, ya.

During the Korean war, what were your political bellifs? Did you agree with American involvement in Korea?

Before I came to United States I was involved. I was member of so called upper class. Right. And many of my father side were higher government officials you know, great uncles and uncles. So communists took over Seoul and we were hiding at some bodies house. We had to back to our house to get some clothing and so on. Then I got caught by neighborhood some kind of police station and they interrogated me and tortured me and so on. I became very scared of communism. Because of my class background and that experience. Eventhough I didn't like what the South Korean government was doing in terms of too strong anti communist and so on. And too much political prissionors. So I guess, I was afraid of communism at that time because of that experience.

Did you return to Korea after college graduation?

Yes.

For how long.

Oh oh -

Before I finished my dissertation my husband got degree first. I finished everything except dissertation and went back to Korea. And had two sons and my dissertation, and two revolutions; one student revolution against Soo Mun dee and military cou against. Second republic, too much politics in the University also. So my husband resigned and he got a job here.

So we came here. We had two sons as a toddlers in 1963.

During the early years of your marriage - did you like being married?

Were you and your husband in love?

Ya, I think that was the best time in my life, in terms of after marriage we shared everything equally, no children just go to school. Somehow I was 94 pounds and gained 45 pounds after marriage. So my husband said - his cooking must have been good to me. And then I went to Korea. It was all right too because I had a maid with mother taking care of everything - even though I was teaching at two schools and also doing dissertation. I didn't have to do anything as far as child care. My mother-in-law and two maids lived with us.

Did you like your mother-in-law?

Ya, she was also christian, my father-in-law was taken to North Korea. He was a christian minister. Anyway, she was widowed. She always thought education was important and she wanted to be a music teacher or something. So when I was working on my dissertation, she was willing to help everything and my friends say rather than me serving my mother -in-law. My mother-in-law is serving you. And a, she was very good to me and also being a ministers wife she was a very good counsellor to everybody especially with female in distress. So they

nicknamed her as inner room psychiatrist, so she's very good at listening and talking to other women.

I felt more comfortable talking to her than even my own mother.

Beginning of 2 side tape.

Did you plan on having children?

I used diafram for first six year but in Korea it didn't work, I don't know why. So both boys were accidental. The third child, daughter, born in Hawaii was also accidental because I used pill and then it didn't work. I had spotting, and nausea as I was pregnant so I stopped and went back to diafram. I used diafram only when I thought it was safe. But it didn't work, so all three of them were accidental, babies, pregnancies, even though I was teaching family planning in Korea, Korea I was pregnant every year. Right, and I was wearing an A line dress and a both children were born in July after the vacation, summer vacation. So some of them didn't see me for a full term. Thought I was wearing A line dress because it was fashionable in U.S. And other people said, "oh, she's teaching family planning but she has two children so close". So rather than telling the whole truth I told the students - don't ask me but don't plan this way because this is not the way to plan. The second son was born on the first son's first birthday. So they are exactly twelve months apart. Twelve months and twelve hours apart.



When you had your three children were you and your husband doing OK financially? Was family planning a paid job or was it volunteer?

No, that was teaching, I was teaching in Korea. When I came here it was shock of my life because I couldn't get babysitter who speaks Korean. And they were scared of anybody who didn't speak Korean or who didn't look Korean. And, a they were both in diappers. First one spoak Korean the second one was learning Korean from first one. So I was stuck with two children and somebody gave me Betty Frerdan Femine Mystique even though I was not a femminist, you know, I read, every page was talking about me. And I lost 20 pounds, got all kinds of psychosamatis and that was the worst in my life and I said child rearing is the hardest job in the world. Then everyone including my husband said, "because your attitude is wrong!" Your attitude is, this is not my job I am not supose to do this but why I'm doing it. So that's why its making me mad, you know, very miserable. Because I was always doing, teaching, studying until age 33 and suddenly stuck with two children without any help. And I was spoiled, right, in Korea. So that's why. And then everybody ask me mostly my husband's colleque's wives or Korean wives at the church about children and about husband and they don't ask me about my life or anything about me. Just say so and so's wife and how many children do you have? Do you like America? So I thought I lost my identity because in Korea I was called Yan so on. That's my maiden name. Never changed to maiden

name to husbands name so even though I was married to some body they didn't call me Mrs. so and so. After two children were born some older women called me so mother's. So, I said don't call me so and so mothers because I have my own name. And even though I didn't know about feminism. I didn't want other people to name me wrongly.

Do you wish your husband would have been more supportive during this time - why don't you think he was?

He was going through his own adjustment teaching in Hawaii, but a, we lived on the campus right across the street. Right across the street <sup>from his office.</sup> ~~Punahoa~~. It's gone now. It's gone now.

Did you ever think about seeing therapy or talking to a counselor during that time?

No, I knew what would cure me. It was going back to teaching or studying. Right. And I couldn't do and sociology and anthropology didn't have me. Faculty wives. It's too bad we had too many faculty wives in the early 1960s - in the early 1960's. But they only gave me part time instructor job at night. And not even on campus because the professors have priority. So I had to go to Skidfield or a place like that at night.

When did you get the job as a professor here at U.H?

1975, I mean I was working at the east west center as a researcher and other usually half time jobs. And then I got

this half time job in 1975. Cause they were looking for anthropologists or somebody who could teach something about female in Hawaii.

Where did you do your field work when you were an anthropology student?

Oh, I did field work in Korea. I compared two generations of Korean female in terms of their marriage and parents. And my advisors was Norwegian student who became professor - only female who became professor. She was very understanding. She didn't impose me - said you have to do that one or this one. You can select any topic you want and a you can do it on your own speed and I can help you - I can help you do it and she was very supportive to me. And I don't know if she was feminist, but she was very good to me. And everything I sent from Korea, within two weeks she corrected and sent it back. So a, with two children coming, you know, during the time I was working on dissertation. It took until 1959 - ya, three years, it took three years to finish my dissertation.

After you read the Feminist mystique - did you read more feminist literature?

No, I was still sticking to anthropology. Language, things like that. So I was doing different work on language, kinship terminology with my former advisor. Because my dissertation was

on two generation of Korean women, but it still had to do something with Korean family, right. And in 1962-63 I didn't know anything feminism - it was just one look until I came to teaching.

During your early marriage did you keep in close contact with your mother? Who were your other siblings? Were they still in Korea?

Ya, we didn't have the kind of luxury that they have now in terms of calling each other over the phone. Because it was too expensive. Even sending money was very hard cause war was still going on when I came over. But my sister and oldest and youngest brother came to states when several years later so we had close contact. When I was in Ohio they were in Illinois.

While your children were young, did you and your husband put equal time into raising them?

When they were really young because I nursed them for four months I took care of them more but as they grew older and he taught them how to read English because he was worried they might have difficulty in school. So he taught the oldest one how to learn by flash card. And also the second one learned over the shoulder from the first. And they could read everything on the bulletin board, the teacher told us when they started kindergarden. The oldest son was nicknamed by his

classmates as the best reader. So younger son, said even though he was a little ~~artistic~~<sup>artistic</sup>, and interested in something else said, "I want to be best reader like ~~monkey~~<sup>moon ki</sup>." The teacher ask him when he was kindergarden or first grade, "who do you admire most?" To the whole class, he raised his hand and said, "my brother". You know other people said Einstein. And my daughter is - "you said what does your daughter think about feminism."

Even though she says she is not feminist and she doesn't read any feminist things. Ah - except, talk with me about what I do. She sounds and act like myself. I think that she's a little bit different from other girls of her age. She use to be a varsity member of cross country at her high school and after. When everything was over I found out she and her best friend was also in cross country. And she had more Haloe friend then my boys because she was in German class and and my boys were in Japanese classes. Said this Haloe friend and her best friend the only two among four hundred juniors who didn't go to prom and I said, "How come?" And she said, "we had alternative life style by talking among other senior and junior members of the cross country team at the restaurant and we had best time. And she said, "2 or 3 boys asked me" and I said, "No". And I said, "How did you say No?" And she said, "because I don't believe in prom." And she said, "It's silly to go to a prom and dance when you don't know how to dance," "You try to dance with somebody you don't care." And even at college, she went to Harvard. She majored in Psychology and music. She has some influence from some other friends who were there who student women's studies or feminism.

But among all the ~~Ivory~~<sup>Ivy</sup> league schools, you know, the male dominated schools, not sister colleges. Harvard was the last institution to incorporate women's studies. It just started when she was a junior or senior. So, you know, it's really male dominant school. And she wanted to be a cook after majoring in psychology and music. She was very good in violin when she was in high school but she got discouraged by attending different summer music camps on the mainland. Because she thought she was not good enough to be a soloist. She didn't want to be symphony member because the directors will just work them like slaves. Ah psychology, she didn't like that much because she knew she had to get PhD to become psychologists. Anyway, she's working at a French Restaurant at Berkely. <sup>chez Panisse</sup> For the first year she thought she would learn how to cook but they didn't let her cook. And second year she's allowed to cook simple dishes like pasta. But because she found out she cannot be a chef starting from the bottom starting from the bottom until she wants to go to professional school. And my boys, both of them went to Stanford and got masters in engineering and computer science. The first one some how didn't like that. And is going to law school now. And the second one also didn't like that and wanted to be journalist or writer. He's studying in political science to specialize in Asian Politics at Stanford. And my husband say's - "They were influenced by social scientist mommy like me and they wasted time specializing in science and they don't know what they're doing." And he, you know, he had to ~~except~~<sup>accept</sup>, you know because they really didn't want to stay in the science field.

### Unique Parents

So even the immigrant parents almost force their children to go into certain fields. My husband and I in terms of making their decisions, in the field or specialty or who to date or who to marry - because they don't ask us usually so we don't have much say. And terms of marriage our boys usually had Asian friends, most of them, so we think they might marry Asian but I don't have any idea. They don't have any steady as of now. And they are 29 and 28.

And my daughter is 24 and she had boyfriend from Canada she met at Harvard but he went to Canada and attended law school so I don't know. I just tell them, as I tell other parents. We believe it's wrong to tell them who to marry and so on. We, in depths of our heart we feel more comfortable if they marry Koreans or Asians. I can only tell them it's better to marry some one with similar backgrounds rather than, say same nationality.

But they cannot marry anybody from Korea because it's different from them so, I don't know somebody that they knew in high school or college or somebody they met at the work place. They will get to know each other and get married. So it could be anybody but maybe not Korean.

When your children were living with you did you feel a sense of community whether it be in the academic Korean - Japanese community - did you feel that?

We went to Korean church and, we went to most of the activities held in the Korean community, Korean community center or Korean consulate. We were very close to Korean community. Rather than any other, communities other communities that we have some social contact was through my husband's department. And you know, some women's studies and I had just one hand full of Asian, foreign born Asian on the campus of the campus in Hawaii. And a little more in numbers on the mainland. Met women's studies conferences and you know met through writing about research and so on. And that's a very important support group for me. I don't have maybe another single person who is doing similar things that I have been doing in Hawaii.

During the 60's when the Black power movement was going on did you identify with that or were you detached?

After I became feminist I started to identify with them because feminism from a middle class white point of view didn't apply to me I felt scared by going to conferences and meeting people on the mainland. I met many black feminists and lesbian feminists and I got more influence from them and then some kind of inclusive, more broader level of feminist that include some kind of a social change based on elimination of all inequalities which include racism. And in the early 70's we used to argue among female of color or between female of color and whites. Which was more important for what group which was more important for racism or sexism. But now, gradually we have become more



consensual. Came to agreement that none of the oppressions that women of color or any women face, is less or more important but combine the influence of women's lives especially women's of color's lives or working class female's lives effect different for different individuals for different group. So that's why we have to look at everything, all at once.

You said you met a lot of Lesbians and black feminists, do you have a recollection of one of the first feminists who you became close to?

Ya, one of the women's studies colleagues who left long time ago was a radical lesbian feminist and she was white but she even attended my class on Asian American female and she also wrote a paper on her racism and how she grew up in California her father owned a farm and used Filipino immigrants and she was really going deeply into how racism came about and how, you know, very hard to understand where I'm coming from either female of color coming from like Hawaii - an activists. So I also, she didn't tell me you know, preach me about radical feminism. Or lesbian feminism through her act in terms of, what can I say, Herron believed in some kind of human dignity and equality of all people. And, including women of color! Made me think that those feminists who also lesbians and also working class or something else have something in common. So that's how I became interested in lesbian and radical feminist's even before I experienced breast cancer.

When you were first getting in touch with female who were with lesbians; and becoming interested in feminism - Did you discuss these things with members of your family?

Oh ya, I told my husband and he has prejudice about the lesbians he use to say, "oh but they need boy they need husbands" or He say, "I feel sorry for them," and so on, but I just, you know, didn't pay much attention anyway, whenever I bring my friend. I had one Asian lesbian women student from Hawaii whom I was very close and who came to my house, met husband and so on, and other then this one women's studies colleague and when they come they usually tease my husband - "house husband" you know different kinds of feminist terminology and he jokes back he, really doesn't accept them. My son's, my daughter, they don't say anything. They know I have this lesbian friend. They don't think they are funny - but they don't think they're great either.

Did you ever become aware of internalized oppression in you or homophobia?

Oh ya, ya, when I went to a National Women's studies conference in 1981, the theme was racism and homophobia. Women against racism and homophobia and two lesbian women were key note speakers <sup>Adrienne</sup> ~~Adrian~~ Rich and <sup>Louise</sup> ~~Audre~~ ~~Leard~~ ~~Leard~~. I thought, it was shock right. The first time I attended and two lesbian women talking about homophobia and racism but mostly homophobia.

What's this, white women always sexualize everything including women's friends. And I really don't know what things were involved in, in terms of lesbianism and wrote a reaction paper and it was published in News later and so on. So I said we had sisterhood and we were very close to women's friends you platonically or physically because we were sexually segregated so we can hold hands with women friend.

### Alice Challenges Her Homophobia

But cannot hold hand with my own husband in front of other people. So in that kind of, raised in that kind of a background; I really, didn't understand what was going on in terms of lesbians hugging each other, in the public, you know, being out in air that. But it took me several years to find out where they are coming from. By reading and my breast cancer experience and my friends who are lesbians. And they are the people who are politically, more radical willing to go out of their line in terms of the sexism issue. And also I think they understand racism a little more than straight, white feminists which some of female of color feminist don't understand or don't agree with me. And straight women told me - "oh lesbians can choose" even they say some of them cannot choose but my blackness, black skin I was born into, I didn't have any choice. So some of them think it's not comparable.

Do you think it possible to give a western analyses trying to, understand female in third world countries in classes, like the one I'm in, "Asian female." What kind of sensitivities do you have about classes like that or giving western interpretation giving Asian female experience.

When I'm teaching Asian female and Pacific Asian female, I try to use article any kind of poetry or literature written by Asian female or Asian feminists because where I'm coming from in anthropology third world female are looked at by white middle class academician usually male. Now usually white middle class academicians usually feminist or white. And they impose then concepts, methodology, and values on third world women and Moslem women or Indian women or Chinese women. And especially radical feminist who are one track minded in terms of gender oppression. They take things, they pull things out of cultural historical context and compare with their experience and say this is worse, this is better. They have their own ranking of different kinds of gender oppressions. They site all these awful things like genital mutilation and this is bad so we have to go in and fill them what to do about it and how to get rid of it. But being an anthropologist also think that a, you know, anthropologist usually go to other people's culture, you know, less energy spent to study about it. They think its simple and so on. But also anthropologist, you cannot change one part of the culture without changing the whole thing. See education system is not there. Women also get upper class education. They cannot get jobs, and they have to marry distant family

members and distant members won't genitaly, you know, female circumcise, you know, women with femal circumcism to be ideal wives, so other then people changing other things economics, education, and marriage system. That means arranged marriages and so on. We cannot tell them, don't do this awful thing. Even though, I don't agree with that awful thing. I don't think its a great thing to do. It's very hard to change one you know, look at Hawaiian Kapu system. Just because they changed their taboo who is eating or not eating banana changed the whole political structure. By changing one aspect of their religion. In simpler society religion is everything else. Religious leader is a healer and politician and patriarch and everything else. You know has power in more then one sphere. There's no public, private split either. Everythings public. Now everything is public. Then concept of these dichotomies - public/private, what ever as an example is wrong. Even, they cannot even apply to their own society. So you know they say they don't want to use male dominant research melodology and so on and then they turn around and use it because that is the only thing they learned. And life history, oral history is a little bit better because it, the subject telling the story from their perspective without imposing anything on them even though we were try to intervening by editing and changing language around.

### Surviving Breast Cancer

When did you find out you had breast cancer?

The year after I started teaching here, the third year I volunteered for breast cancer screening test. They were experimenting on this new machine to detect early breast cancer and they wanted Korean women volunteers because they didn't have many and third year, they asked me to come. They said the nurse who was working on that project. She did nothing but feel the breast for any kind of lump at early stage and she said she found small lump that was not there previously. But I couldn't feel it and the mammogram which is suppose to detect early stage didn't have it show it, my doctor didn't feel it. And, you know, except this nurse. So doctor said, "I feel something on the other side, but not the side that nurse said." So we have to have biopsy one at a time so which one should we do? And I said, "I cannot forget the nurses facial expression and she said she found one. So let's do a biopsy on my left side.

So it's a biopsy and everybody said it was "just imagination and you're just getting old. You have some lumps and because of it", but anyway, they found two kinds of cancer after that biopsy. One was fast spreading kind to the limbs and the other was bilateral, highest percentage of bilateral cancer that was going to the other side. So that time they didn't have too much choice in terms of what surgery they should do until 1976. They said I should get modified mastectomy, radical mastectomy. They take out everything, breast and lym nodes just leaving pectoral muscles in the chest wall. So they did it, and the pain was very, very bad, but in the mean time, while I was waiting for the surgery for 2 to 3 days. I read lot's of articles and asked

lots of questions and everytime I asked a question the doctor would say, "only God know", you know. I understood why because when I read twenty articles or so on my own particular cancer type. All the research was having different conclusions, depending on the length who did it and how kind. So anyway, I learned from that experience that any kind of system, like care system is very authoritarian and they treat patience whether as man or women as children and they don't explain too well and they don't like to answer too many questions even my husband said, "Don't ask too many questions and get mad at the doctor just because he made one or two mistakes because he will not treat you well if he is mad." I said, "you know why should I worry about getting him mad when my life or death is at stake. And I said if something is happening to your penis, you know, doctor make mistake on your penis and took away the whole thing, would you still say - don't ask too many questions? So after that my husband didn't say anything. So I gradually understood what radical feminist was saying "my body my self" and so on. And I started to read all kinds of things on that sexuality. And at the same time, I gradually understood lesbian and feminism and so on and also I felt since I got some kind of second chance to live, oh and then otherside had to be operated on because I had many lumps appearing. I was not malignant yet. But the doctor said, would you want to go through again even if it's not malignant. You mare have a little more peace of mind. And I had second masectomy following it. And after that, everybody said, "you should look normal, wear this and that to

look like woman." Including plastic surgery recommended and introduced by plastic surgeon. Also at the same time reading Church <sup>Louise's</sup> ~~Louise's~~ cancer journal and other things and felt that women had been <sup>faking</sup> ~~even~~ without prosthesis and plastic surgery. And I had some kind of symetric surgery. So I said I don't have to worry about being lopsided or one having breast and the other doesn't, you know little prosthesis that I wore for a short time. I decided not to do anything, and let people know what I went through and how you know, came out of it. Even though man go into the war and come back as heroes, women had all kinds of bodily and social battles that we fight and win. We never get metal but at least people should know what we went through, and share with other women what we went through. May have, there are relatives of friends who might go through, to know a head of time or why they are having it. To know other women went through and how they survived it. So by being, what can say, by speaking about our experiences, and especially showing with other women. We can make changes in male dominant system like health care or; we learn from each other and help each other. To become some kind of voice and power in the system. So my doctor actually changed his attitude toward me and now he sits down and tells the nurse, "Don't bother me for 30 minutes because we have lots of talk." So even though I don't have any question, he says lots of things. And asks me questions. So it's both ways, you change each other by coming out and speaking out. And if he gets mad and withdraws or drops me that's is alright. But if he doesn't he learns, and you know it's mutual.



## Analysis

Although the interview was conducted several months ago, the material contributing to this project has been an on going process. Since the interview, I have had an opportunity to get to know Alice a little better through taking her course and outside activities. One of my fondest memories of my Hawaiian experience will always be walking arm and arm with Alice on International Women's Day. I felt so honored to be feel so intimate in the presence of this women. Initially, I decided to interview Alice because she was the first Korean women I had really had any kind of contact with. One of my objectives in travelling to Hawaii was to attempt to discover my Asian ethnicity and the significance this plays in my life. Alice has served as a great role model for me as I am sure she embodies this function for many others. She breaks all detrimental "oriental" stereotypes that plague our struggle as Asian feminists. Alice is completely committed to "yellow feminism" thus she exists as the foremother in the liberation of all women. Her courage has taken away my feeling of invisibility, indeed, she has inspired me and redefined my vision from a sense of hopelessness to an inevitable victorious achievement. Alice obviously did not need this oral life history project to document her place in history. Her accomplishments are endless. However, through recording her words, thoughts, and emotions. we may obtain a better understanding of how we as Asian feminists may empower ourselves and work to overtake our oppressors.

I want to emphasize the caution I under take in the following analysis. I do not feel comfortable with the following part of the essay. Nevertheless, I will examine three areas in which my personal analysis may be thought provoking.

The affects of colonization do surface in Alice's life. Her grandfather was taken bu the Japanese for political indoctrination.(p.1)<sup>1</sup> She was forced to learn Japanese thus becoming more fluent at Japanese then her indigenous language. It was interesting in the interview when Alice shared that she had become "Koreanized" in America then in KOrea. It was common for white women to invite Asian young women to lunchens. This was a time of community for Asian women, a time when they were expected to share thier culture with other women. These activities may have been enjoyable and a time for sharing. However, it was also a form of tokenism for many Asian women. These women were bridges to other cultures perhaps legitimizing liberal whites. The violent effects of colonization haunts the women of Asia. More over, psychological violence also touches Asian American women both foreign born and native born. The minds of Asian American women are colonized systematically through the media, government, and the overwhelming pressure sto be as white as possible. Asian women are also supposed to be submissive, exotic, and potentially erotic creatures for white men on call and without rejection. As a Korean American women, Alice experienced many complex forms of colonialism.

Through experiencing Alice's class, I discovered she was a Methodist. Because of my generation and geocentric views, I felt this was a contradiction in her struggle to liberate Korean women. However, I also learned that the church educated many Korean women thus liberating them from the isolation of every day middle class life. The church was a center to meet, discuss politics, and experience a community in solidarity. In Alice's article, "We are all in this together: A common struggle toward total liberation", Alice does recognize that Christian missionary movements were a symbol of western cultural imperialism. However, the film "Picture Brides," illustrated how the church allowed women to gain leadership skills which led them to engage in the activities which helped free Korea from Japan. I gained a new perspective and learned that is arrogant and non-productive to analyze anyone's spirituality. I feel far too much respect for Alice to trivialize her belief in God.

Through listening to Alice talk about lesbians and her struggle to overcome her own homophobia. My reactions to her were a mixture of different emotions. On one hand, I did not understand why such a strong woman working to overcome patriarchy could marry a man. Then I listened to her, really listened to her, and I realized how detrimental my judgments were. Later I asked Alice if she was ever attracted to a woman. She looked puzzled and her response was thought provoking. In Korea the women touch each other, walk hand in hand, and exist with less rules than American women. Sexuality is not as stigmatized as it is in America. Perhaps it is not sexuality but simply, women loving women. In America lesbianism is

political act of resistance. However, this is only the case because of the existing violent social rules indoctrinated into American culture. To demand a third world women to to separate herself from her brothers is to advocate genocide for her people. As first world women we must respect our sisters autonomy and learn to be silent as we demand the same from out white sisters. Breaking the silence is one of the most effective tools we have in overcoming our oppression. However, there is also an art to silence thus we may develop listening skills to allow other women's vision to lead us.

Asian women are set up against the white standard of beauty. It is easy to spot because we see everywhere. Beautiful means having long legs, blond hair, and large breasts. Asian women's body type contrasts with this standard. more over, because of the exoticization of Asian women, we often experience male validation for our differences. Such a paradox, manifests itself in the factors of Asian oppression. Therefore, there is pressure from all sides to be beautiful like an "oriental" flower blossom, but also this means to never aspire to be beautiful in the truest sense like white women. Some how our beauty is freekish, submissive, and only serves a visual function that further enslaves us. Such enslavement only objectifies and slowly destroys our self worth. Alice is a walking example how one has freed herself from this paradox. In her refusal to wear a prostheses after her bilateral mastectomies, Alice resisted many different elements of oppression. Obviously, a life threatening experience changed her life, but she even made this difficult change political. She wanted the rest of the world to see her changed body as evidence of many complicated emotions she

felt during her breast cancer experience. She demanded from her doctor to communicate with her, as she demanded from her husband to support her anger at her doctor. Courageously she demands from the rest of the world to recognize her whole being full of complex beauty, pain, and struggle.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **ALICE CHAI'S FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS**



Alice's mother + father.



Family





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Mother's birthday



# Her father's funeral





Her father's funeral;

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