

# Clio's Scroll



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## Editorial Board

### EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

**AAROHINI GHOSH** is a third-year history major from London, United Kingdom. She is interested in Public History and Postcolonialism, with a particular focus on the Middle East and North Africa. She hopes to pursue a career in humanitarian law or international development after her studies. Outside of her academics, Aarohini enjoys exploring new cafes, listening to podcasts and writing poetry.

**JACLYN QUAN** is a fourth-year history major and data science minor from Southern California. Her main research interests lie within the political and social history of 20th century Latin and Central America with a specific emphasis on American intervention in the region and left-wing social movements. She is also interested in Cold War history and immigration/diaspora studies. Outside of class, Jaclyn enjoys going on boba runs, listening to new hip hop music, and watching cringe-worthy TV shows.

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**MALAYNA CHANG** is a second-year history and comparative literature double major with a minor in public policy from Moraga, California, just two cities away from Berkeley. She is on the pre-law track and hopes to pursue a career in criminal defense or contract law. Her intended area of concentration within history is modern Western European history, though she is also interested in East Asian history. Outside of school, Malayna enjoys going to concerts, watching Formula One Grand Prix, reading, watching old movies and foreign films, and grabbing boba with friends in downtown Berkeley and SF!

**SOPHIE DURYEE** is a third year student from Marin County, California. She is studying Political Economy and Chinese at UC Berkeley. She is especially interested in Ancient Mediterranean and legal history. Outside of school she is a member of Phi Alpha Delta fraternity as well as a member of Berkeley's Political Computer Science club.

## ASSOCIATE EDITORS

**WILL BRANDT** is a fourth-year History student from the Los Angeles area. His research currently is focused on how Southern California was shaped in the 20th century by the emerging automobile and how this societal shift replaced previous modes of transportation. Besides areas of American urban history, Will is also interested in the Political History of Europe and Asia in the 1930s and 1940s and understanding the impact of industrialization/mass urban living in the early 20th century. When he's not nose deep in books, Will is usually working on his cooking skills, going on hikes in the Berkeley hills, and watching old movies.

**KACIE COSGROVE** is a senior from Valley Springs, California. She is majoring in History and French, and her emphasis in history is on the cultural history of the United States in the 20th century. Overall, she is interested in the power dynamics between oppressors and oppressed groups throughout world history. In her free time, she enjoys eating Thai food, writing letters to friends and family, and being in nature.

**AVA ESCOBEDO** is a second-year History major pursuing a minor in Global Studies. Her field of concentration is Latin American colonialism and imperialism, particularly in relation to the history of Mexico. She is passionate about public history and studying history from different and untold perspectives, and hopes to bring this passion into her future career. At UC Berkeley, Ava is a research fellow at the Institute of International Affairs and an intern for the Oral History Center.

**MIRIAM KLACZYNSKA** is a second-year student majoring in History, with a concentration in the history of science. She grew up in Krakow, Poland, but completed high school in Irvine, California. Her research interests lie in Cold War technological innovations and the politics surrounding the era. Miriam hopes to compose her undergraduate thesis on how Cold War secrecy and scare tactics influence the modern aerospace sector. Outside of Clio's Scroll, she is an active member of the Daily Californian, where she works as a writer and editor.

**DAVID KLINE** is a fourth-year student majoring in History and Political Science, with concentrations in economic history and political theory. He is particularly interested in neoliberalism and political representation. In his free time, he enjoys reading, cooking, and learning new things.

**AZURA LÊ HAYNES** is a fourth-year History major and Global Studies minor raised in the SF Bay Area. Her research interests include the history of popular labor movements in the United States. She is currently working on her senior thesis analyzing the rise of the Workingmen's Party of California in 1877 and how racism as a core tenet of the party divided the labor movement. On campus, she participates in Vietnamese traditional dance and interns at Renters' Legal Assistance.

**RONAN MORRILL** is a senior from Redwood City, CA studying History. He is interested in American 20th century political history and the history of architecture and city planning. Outside of Clio's Scroll, Ronan is a rower for Cal Lightweight Crew. In his spare time you will find him watching soccer and movies, hiking and trail running, or reading a good book.

**ROSA MURPHY** is a fourth-year History major and Chemistry minor from San Francisco, California. She is currently writing her thesis on the materiality of ancient Roman books. After graduation, she hopes to pursue a career in intellectual property law or history. In her spare time, she enjoys reading novels, thrifting, and watching baseball.

**DANIEL WONG** is a junior majoring in Political Science and Slavic Languages & Literatures, and minoring in History. He is particularly interested in Eastern Europe in the 20th Century. Outside of academics at Berkeley, Daniel is also involved in theater with BareStage Productions, and also enjoys learning languages in his spare time.



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*Clio's Scroll*, the Berkeley Undergraduate History Journal, is published twice yearly by students of the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley. The journal aims to provide undergraduates with the opportunity to publish historical works and to train staff members in the editorial process of an academic journal.

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## Note from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up our latest issue of Clio's Scroll, UC Berkeley's undergraduate history journal. We appreciate your patience and understanding as our staff works diligently to publish the Fall 2023 issue. Since our last issue, Clio's Scroll has undergone a major change in management and our new editors look forward to publishing new and exciting scholarship. For this issue, our journal's current theme centers on the historiography and historical significance of women during the late 19th century to mid-20th century, a time period marked by profound modernization and development in nation-state building, technology, science, etc.

The first paper, "The Fight For Survivance: A Study of Indigenous Women in Armed Conflicts of the American West, 1860-1890" by Purdue graduate Mikayla Klemp focuses on the "survivance" of Native Americans as opposed to their "victimry." It has a special focus on Indigenous women who exercises these survivance techniques to protect and preserve their tribes, cultures, and communities.

Our second paper, 'Bound by Love: Uncovering Familial Love and Sisterhood among Chinese Comfort Women during World War II' by Kavita Gawrinauth of Adelphi University provides an insight into the understudied history of Chinese comfort women, focusing on the diaries of missionary Minnie Vautrin to showcase how these women have been preserved in the historical record and examining social ties amidst the war.

The third paper, "Regression Female Representation in the Films of Ernst Lubitsch" by Katie Marie Terell at Stanford University explores the historical shift of female representation in films from the late 1910s to post WWII through an analysis of director Ernest Luitsch's films, *The Oyster Princess* (1919) and *Cluny Brown* (1946).

We would like to extend our utmost appreciation to our team of associate editors, both new and returning members, for working vigorously and determinedly in making publication possible. We also want to thank our readers, contributors, and everyone who has helped Clio's Scroll to continue and thrive.

## Contributors

**MIKAYLA KLEMP** grew up in Kouts, a small town located in northwestern Indiana. She graduated with a BA in History from Purdue University this December. During her undergrad, she curated her interest in Native American history by minoring in Indigenous Studies and Anthropology. One of her favorite classes at Purdue was participating in the Fort Ouiatenon field school excavations in the summer of 2022. Any time not spent on research and writing is devoted to riding on Purdue's Western Equestrian team. In January, she will start graduate school classes at Ball State University for a MS in historic preservation.

**KAVITA GAWRINAUTH** is a senior history major at Adelphi University, anticipated to graduate in May 2024. As a research assistant she immerses herself in Chinese historical works. Her capstone paper, inspired by the course Gender in Modern China, allowed her to explore the intricate gender dynamics, ultimately unveiling the experiences of Chinese comfort women. Recognized for her exceptional paper, she received the prestigious Clio award from the Adelphi History Department. Beyond academia, Kavita is a dedicated musician with a focus on the Harmonium and semiclassical styles. With aspirations to become a teacher and hopefully pursue a Ph.D., she seamlessly blends her scholarly and artistic passions. Above all, Kavita extends her sincere gratitude to Professor Zaccarini, a guiding light who has been beyond supportive throughout this entire process!

**KATHERINE (KATIE) TERRELL** is a senior art history major at Stanford University; she focuses on Contemporary and Modern art and is also a Film and Media Studies minor. (But she'll write about anything interesting regardless of the categorization.) In her free time, she likes to make art, read science fiction books, play board games, and watch multiple movies at the theater on the same day.

# The Fight for Survivance

*A Study of Indigenous Women in Armed Conflicts of the American West  
1860-1890*

Mikayla Klemp

## Abstract

Indigenous scholar Gerald Vizenor coined the term “survivance” to describe a particular purpose of American Indian historiography. He argued that it should focus less on Indigenous peoples’ “victimry” at the hands of past American government policies and more on their resistance and resilience to their historic struggles. Vizenor also emphasized how those efforts have resulted in the diverse and thriving cultures American Indian societies have today. This paper expands on Vizenor’s scholarship surrounding “survivance” by foregrounding the experiences of Indigenous women from the Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, Crow, and Arapaho Nations. These nations each exercised a variety of survivance techniques to preserve their cultures in the face of encroaching Euro-American settlement and the subsequent forced dispossession of their lands, lives, and traditions from 1860 to 1890. Through this lens, the historical contributions of these women may be credited with the prevalence of Indigenous Great Plains cultures today, despite the violent efforts of erasure employed by the U.S. government during the nineteenth century.

**Keywords:** Great Plains Indian Culture, Indigenous American Women, Reservation Era Politics, American Westward Expansion, Military History

**Author’s Note:** Photos are included in an appendix at the end.

## Introduction

The term "survivance" is little known by scholars outside of the sphere of Indigenous studies. Although a word with complex historical implications, its meaning in the simplest sense represents both resistance and survival. Coined by Chippewa poet Gerald Vizenor, the phrase was meant to more accurately describe how "the practices of survivance create an active presence, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence" regarding the American Indigenous experience.<sup>1</sup> The term "survival" simply refers to the state of being alive. As taught in elementary schools, "survival" means one is meeting the base requirements of food, water, shelter, and air. This was no small accomplishment for the Great Plains Nations, who were involved in armed conflicts with the U.S. military from 1860 to 1890. There were many violent incursions where innocent Indigenous people were killed outright, and even more died on the run. These deaths did not go quietly, however: they were met with much "resistance," defined as "a refusal to comply with something."<sup>2</sup> In this context, resistance seems to imply a failed attempt with a defined start and end date. So why the term "survivance" instead of "survival" or "resistance"? Although the research in this paper is based on past events of Indigenous resistance, these stories serve as a testament to their survival of cultural and general genocides from 1860 to the present day. The following case studies will primarily focus on the ways Indigenous women from the Lakota, Cheyenne, Crow, and Arapaho Nations fought against encroaching Euro-American settlement and the subsequent forced dispossession of their lands, livelihoods, and cultures during key moments like the Battle of the Rosebud and the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876. The Great Plains Native Americans today may no longer be the migrating horsemen of the nineteenth century, but their stories and traditions live on thanks to the fighting spirits of their women.

"The Fight for Survivance" analyzes the political, cultural, and military history of the American Great Plains from 1860 to 1890. It

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Vizenor, ed., *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Online: Oxford University Press, September 2022).



studies the repercussions of key events that would shape the American West, such as the migration of Euro-Americans to the American West in the 1840s, the Homestead Act of 1862, and President Ulysses S. Grant's Indian Appropriations Act of 1871.<sup>3</sup> The repercussions of these acts include the construction of the transcontinental railroads, Custer's Battle of Little Bighorn and Black Hills Expeditions, and the dispossession of ancestral homelands of the Great Plains Indians.<sup>4</sup> Primary Indigenous sources for this topic are limited. Due to the lack of Indigenous-authored scholarship in the early twentieth century, the Indigenous traditions of maintaining oral instead of written history, and vows of silence by some of the Nations after these horrific experiences, much of this paper's research has involved seeing an Indigenous woman's name briefly mentioned on a website and following a breadcrumb citation trail to dig up more information. This struggle is an additional reason for selecting my topic on Indigenous women in warfare; I believe this history is too important to not be readily available to a more general audience who may not have access to advanced research techniques. That being said, I managed to find some valuable primary sources to validate my research. Many white historians in the mid-to-late twentieth centuries conducted interviews with Indigenous women who were often present for multiple instances of armed conflicts with the U.S. military and included these interviews in longer secondary source publications. In addition to these interviews, I have found valuable clues into Indigenous women's history through art and material culture. Ledger art, sketches made in Euro-American trader ledger notebooks by Great Plains Indigenous people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shows evidence of women who were allegedly active soldiers in the wars against relocation.<sup>5</sup> These drawings continue to be a tradition today, and some Indigenous artists, such as Daniel Lone Soldier, have given

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Stuckey, "The Donner Party and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 14, no.2 (2011): 229.

<sup>4</sup> Lee Ann Potter and Wynn Schamel, "The Homestead Act of 1862," *Social Education* 61, no 6 (October 1997): 395-364; Kurt Cox, *Custer and His Commands: From West Point to Little Bighorn* (Philadelphia, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 7.

<sup>5</sup> "The Ledger Art Collection," *Milwaukee Public Museum*, Dawn Tomae, accessed December 12, 2022.

new life to the stories of these women through ledger art in the twenty-first century, a testament to the importance of the roles Indigenous women played in their resistance.

While previous scholarship has mentioned the roles of Indigenous Great Plains women in armed conflicts with the U.S. military, there are few publications that present their experiences as a main focus. Books such as *The Last Stand* by Nathaniel Philbrick and *A Terrible Glory* by Jim Donovan mention some Indigenous women by name and include the roles of others in a broad sense — indeed their research has been used in this paper as well — but their narratives focus on battles from the perspective of U.S. military personnel and the roles of the male Indigenous leaders and combatants that participated. By comparison, this paper aims to present the histories of these same battles through a female-centered view with the goal of including more women by name, citing their roles in both instances of Native American victories and losses, and analyzing how their roles as protectors and cultural preservers in these armed conflicts translates to the survivance of the traditions in these Nations today. My specific case studies will circulate around research of the Crow, Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Lakota Sioux Peoples. All four of these societies have records of Indigenous women who participated in armed conflicts surrounding the U.S. military's invasion of their homelands as either active soldiers alongside men or as negotiators of peace and culture keepers outside the realm of traditional gender roles within their societies. This list of Indigenous women in this study at present includes Buffalo Calf Road Woman of the Cheyenne; Pretty Nose of the Arapaho; and Moving Robe Woman, One Who Walks with the Stars, and Minnie Hollow Wood of the Oglala Lakota.<sup>6</sup> As my paper progresses, I will investigate whether an Indigenous woman participating as a warrior in battle was

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<sup>6</sup> Various terms are used to refer to general groups of people in this research including "Indigenous," "American Indian," "Native American," and "Great Plains Nations" to encompass the different referral preferences I've encountered in my research. These general terms are only utilized when a "big picture" analysis is needed to illustrate the place of Native American people in the historic context of this period. The specific tribal names of these groups are used wherever possible to differentiate between the cultures, customs, and traditions associated with these similar but unique Indigenous communities of the American Great Plains.

abnormal within the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, and Lakota Nations, why these cultural gender roles may have changed with the threat of forced relocations to reservations, and how other women participated in resistance and battles without landing the killing blows.

### A Declaration of War

Although the displacement of Indigenous people from their original homelands in America began as early as the fifteenth century, the Great Plains Nations had largely maintained the use of their ancestral homes in peace throughout the turmoil of the Revolutionary War. However, this is not to say Indigenous groups of the Plains had no contact or experiences dealing with the Europeans prior to the permanent English settlement of the Plains in the nineteenth century. The Spanish were the first Europeans to make contact with Indigenous Plains communities in the 1540s.<sup>7</sup> Led by Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, a group of Spanish explorers in search of golden cities made it as far as Kansas before returning to northern Mexico.<sup>8</sup> Rather than setting up missions for the violent conversions of Indigenous people as they had in the Southwest, Coronado's superiors decided to engage the Great Plains People in trade in the hopes that they would naturally buffer future expansion of the French and English powers.<sup>9</sup> Henry Kelsey was the first Englishman to venture into the Great Plains in 1691 on behalf of the Hudson Bay Company.<sup>10</sup> His records claim he lived and hunted buffalo with Indigenous people of the Great Plains, likely the Blackfeet, near the Saskatchewan River, and possibly made it into modern-day Montana.

The French made their first Great Plains contact through Bénard La Harpe in 1718 through his travels to Oklahoma. France maintained a presence along the Mississippi River and Great Lakes Regions, which resulted in additional contact in the Northern Dakota territories of the Plains. It is likely that fur traders deviated into areas of modern-day Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, and Arkansas which share Indigenous

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<sup>7</sup> John Allen, "New World Encounters: Exploring the Great Plains of North America," *Great Plains Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1993): 73.

<sup>8</sup> Allen, "New World," 74.

<sup>9</sup> Allen, "New World," 75.

<sup>10</sup> Allen, "New World," 76.

linguistic traditions connecting them to the Great Plains.<sup>11</sup> Throughout these encounters, the primary goal of Europeans in the Great Plains before the eighteenth century was solely to establish trade routes to increase the wealth of their parent countries and utilize Indigenous relationships to expand the resource procurement for these trade economies. Indigenous women of the Great Plains were often at the center of these economical relationships and intermarried with European and American traders from the mid 1500s into the nineteenth century, where they would act as interpreters and develop trade kinship alliances (fig. 1).<sup>12</sup> However, the increased permanent settlement of the West in the nineteenth century boosted by convictions of Manifest Destiny would bring about significant changes to the Euro-Indigenous trade relations the Great Plains Nations had become accustomed to thus far.

With President Thomas Jefferson's purchase of the Louisiana Territory in 1803, the American government took control of most of the Great Plains region — a decision made by the U.S. and French governments without consulting any of the Indigenous Nations that resided in the area at the time.<sup>13</sup> Among the first people forced to take advantage of this new acquisition were the American Indians of the Northeastern, Southeastern, and Great Lakes regions. President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830 "granted" Native American Nations, including the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Cherokee, Kickapoo, Muscogee (Creek), Potawatomi, Seminole, and Shawnee, new homes west of the Mississippi.<sup>14</sup> The forced relocations included the "Trail of Tears," the forced removal of the Cherokee, and other perilous journeys that resulted in unnecessary loss of American Indian

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<sup>11</sup> Allen, "New World," 78; John Keegan, *Warpaths: Travels of a Military Historian in North America* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), 103; "The Explorers," Virtual Museum of New France, Accessed February 8, 2023; "National Atlas. Indian Tribes, Cultures, and Languages," Library of Congress, Accessed February 8, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> David Beyreis, "If you had fought bravely...: The Changing Roles of Cheyenne Women during Nineteenth Century Plains Warfare," *Montana The Magazine of Western History* 69, no.1 (2019): 4.

<sup>13</sup> Guillaume Vandenbroucke, "The U.S. Westward Expansion," *International Economic Review* 49, no.1 (2008): 83.

<sup>14</sup> "American Indian Removal: What Does it Mean to Remove a People?," *National Museum of the American Indian*, Smithsonian Institution, accessed January 25, 2023.

lives and centuries of traditions tied to their lands. Some groups such as the Muscogee Seminoles fought back or used white third-party members to legally buy their ancestral homelands as was the case with the Cherokee of North Carolina.<sup>15</sup> However, the reality suggests that many Indigenous Nations were starting to lose their sovereignty in the eyes of the U.S. government and were thus undeserving of maintaining the places they had called home for generations. Evidence of this can be found in President Andrew Jackson's annual address to Congress in December of 1830, where he applauded the successful execution of the Indian Removal Act and comments that:

"[this removal may] perhaps cause them gradually, under the protection of the Government and through the influence of good counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community...that the wandering savage [does not have] a stronger attachment to his home than the settled, civilized Christian...and that rightly considered, the [removal] policy of the General Government toward the red man is not only liberal, but generous. [The Indian] is unwilling to submit to the laws of the States and mingle with their population. To save him from this alternative, or perhaps utter annihilation, the General Government kindly offers him a new home, and proposes to pay the whole expense of his removal and settlement."<sup>16</sup>

This address clearly shows how President Jackson and the U.S. government were starting to perceive American Indians not as powerful sovereign nations to be respected, but as lesser, uncivilized people who had no claim to the retainment of their ancestral lands. The Jackson Administration used this perception to argue that the Euro-American settlers had a right to confiscate the best plots of land belonging to the American Indian communities since they gave up their properties in Europe to move to America. As the American settler

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<sup>15</sup> "American Indian Removal: What Does it Mean to Remove a People?," *National Museum of the American Indian*, Smithsonian Institution, accessed January 25, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> President Andrew Jackson's Message to Congress "On Indian Removal"; 12/6/1830; Presidential Messages, 1789 - 1875; Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

wagon trains started their own journeys west of the Mississippi in 1841, the U.S. government sought to expand their American territory even more.<sup>17</sup> Texas became a state in 1845, an act that launched the Mexican American War. Britain ceded Washington, Oregon, and Idaho in 1846.<sup>18</sup> Between 1848 and 1853, the U.S. Government obtained Arizona, California, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah from the Mexican cessions after the Mexican American War.<sup>19</sup> Between the Louisiana Purchase and the lands acquired in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the U.S. had grown by twenty-two states in just fifty years and owned, at least on paper, the lands that would come to represent the American West.<sup>20</sup>

During the tumultuous land grabs of the 1840s and 1850s, the U.S. government began administering treaties to appease the American Indian Nations whose land they were now trespassing on. These documents were often meant to procure safe travel for Euro-American settlers by acknowledging the routes would take them through sacred lands that belonged to the respective Nations of that area.<sup>21</sup> Most significant to the Nations of the Great Plains including the Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho was the Fort Laramie or Horse Creek Treaty of 1851. Upwards of 10,000 Great Plains Native American women, men, and children gathered along the banks of Horse Creek with superintendent of Indian Affairs D.D. Mitchell and agreed to cease hostilities between each other's communities and between Indigenous Plains people and white settlers. The treaty would also allow the construction of roads and military posts on Native land in exchange for protection by the U.S. Government from entitled and violent settlers and an annual sum of \$50,000 per year for ten years to be paid to the present Indian nations.<sup>22</sup> Ironically, 1851 was also the year Congress passed the Indian Appropriations Act. This was the first piece of

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Stuckey, "The Donner Party and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 14, no.2 (2011): 229.

<sup>18</sup> "Westward Expansion (1801-1861): America's Manifest Destiny," Smithsonian American Art Museum, accessed February 9, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> "Westward Expansion (1801-1861): America's Manifest Destiny," Smithsonian American Art Museum, accessed February 9, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> "Westward Expansion (1801-1861): America's Manifest Destiny," Smithsonian American Art Museum, accessed February 9, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 18-22.

<sup>22</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 18-22.



legislation that created government sanctioned reservations for Indian Nations with subsistence and behavior restrictions not experienced by the Nations who were simply pushed past one state border or another in previous acts of removal.<sup>23</sup>

The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 caused President Lincoln to sign additional pieces of federal legislation in his desperation to create additional Union support. The Department of Agriculture Act promoted the conversion of the West into farmland, the Homestead Act of 1862 granted 270 million acres to private owners including women, immigrants, and African Americans, and the Pacific Railway Act sanctioned the construction of the transcontinental railroad through the northern half of the United States to link the east and west coasts.<sup>24</sup> Although these acts were regarded as improving the lives of America's Euro-American citizens, they certainly contributed to hostilities faced by the Native American populations determined to maintain their traditional lifestyles in the newly ceded Western Territory. With the mass migration of Euro-Americans launched by the prospect of new land, violence between the white settlers and the Native societies whose lands they were invading increased through the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> While the U.S. government may have taken steps to mitigate these hostilities through treaties and other agreements, their decision to purchase and encroach on Indigenous land at all without consulting the existing populations there can be considered a declaration of war on the validity of Native Americans' sovereignty over their ancestral homelands. While American Indian sovereignty would eventually be revoked with the Indian Appropriation Act of 1871, the various Indigenous Nations residing in these areas of the Great Plains which were bought out from under them in the 1860s were still technically foreign powers to the U.S. Government.<sup>26</sup> Ergo, the purchase of

<sup>23</sup> "The Indian Removal Act," Thirty-First Congress, Session II, Ch. 13,14, 1851;

"Native Voices: Native Peoples' Concepts of Health and Illness Timeline," National Library of Medicine, accessed February 13, 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Lee Ann Potter and Wynell Schamel, "The Homestead Act of 1862," *Social Education* 61, no. 6 (1997): 359-364;

Hannah Anderson, "That Settles It: The Debate and Consequences of the Homestead Act of 1862," *The History Teacher* 45, no. 1 (2011): 117- 121.

<sup>25</sup> Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> "Indian Appropriations Act," Forty-First Congress, Sess. III, Ch. 119-120, March 3,

Indigenous land west of the Mississippi without consultation between the U.S. Federal Government and the Indigenous Nations concerned was illegal and, although not directly stated, grounds for the upcoming war between these two groups. It is these early decisions that are the root cause for the battles Indigenous women would undergo to maintain their cultures and resist removal from their lands; the militant campaigns that would begin in the 1860s were simply the culmination of a series of backdoor deals to rid the West of the American Indian.

### Culture Clashes

To understand the roles Indigenous Great Plains women played in the armed conflicts with the U.S. military from 1860-1890, we must first examine their roles within their societies. The contemporary states and geographical areas associated with the Great Plains or Plains regions differ by time and source material (see fig. 2 for ancestral Indigenous Nations homelands defined as the Great Plains used in this research). The Cheyenne, Arapaho, Lakota Sioux, and Crow Nations discussed below all have records of military, ceremonial, and political roles for females within warrior societies and subsequent armed conflicts. However, it is worth noting these are likely not the only Indigenous Great Plains Nations with women who participated in warfare (the Mandan and Hidatsa, for instance, had separate war societies specifically for women); the four groups covered in this essay were chosen because they were allied together or fought against one another during the armed conflicts with the U.S. military from 1860-1890.<sup>27</sup> Because of these alliances and the intermarriage and cultural exchanges that they created, some cultural research may be stated only in one tribal context for the sake of length and clarity although the practice was shared by several Nations. Additionally, groups such as the Cheyenne, Crow, and Lakota have been researched more extensively than the Arapaho, and so there may be more information surrounding the former groups than the latter although they play equal roles in the topic covered in this paper. While each of these Nations has their own cultures and traditions, there are some

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1871.

<sup>27</sup> Carol Clark, "Crow and Cheyenne Women | Some Differences in their roles as related to tribal history" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Montana, 1969), 23.

common circumstantial factors that may contribute to the changing roles of women in armed conflicts within these societies. With the population decimation of Indigenous people at the hands of European diseases, intertribal warfare increased and came to target women specifically in hopes any captives could restore a group's falling numbers.<sup>28</sup> The introduction of the horse to Great Plains Nations in the 1730s and 1740s increased the ease with which these raids were conducted, and so Indigenous women had to be more prepared for the increased risk of attack, as well as the change in diet and habitation stemming from the horse's use in subsistence hunts. While these repercussions may have been indirectly caused by European influences, the resulting integration of Indigenous women into war cultures is based more on historical experiences with inter-tribal warfare instead of U.S. military or European trade interactions and consists of a complex array of roles instead of spontaneous acts.

The Cheyenne, or *Tsistsistas*, lived in present-day Minnesota and surrounding areas along Lake Superior when the first Europeans entered the Plains in the 1500s.<sup>29</sup> Their societies were a mix of agrarian farmers and hunter gatherers that lived in earthwork lodges, although villages were not always permanent and changed location based on intertribal warfare and European expansion.<sup>30</sup> During this time, Cheyenne women were fully responsible for the ownership, management, and labor that came with the crop fields that produced corn, pumpkins, squash, beans, and ceremonial tobacco.<sup>31</sup> Once the Cheyenne Nation acquired horses through intertribal trade between the 1730s and 1740s, the tribe became more mobile and increased their reliance on a buffalo-centered food economy, with summer bison hunts on the plains adjacent to permanent agricultural villages until the early

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<sup>28</sup> Linea Sundstrom, "Coup Counts and Corn Caches: Contact-Era Plains Indian Accounts of Warfare" in *Archaeological Perspectives on Warfare on the Great Plains* (University Press of Colorado, 2018): 133-134.

<sup>29</sup> David Wishart, *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 48.

<sup>30</sup> Wishart, *Encyclopedia*, 48; David Beyreis, "If you had fought bravely...: The Changing Roles of Cheyenne Women during Nineteenth Century Plains Warfare," *Montana The Magazine of Western History* 69, no.1 (2019): 4.

<sup>31</sup> Clark, "Crow."

1800s.<sup>32</sup> The use of bison increased Cheyenne women's influence through the hide trade. Women were responsible for preparing the hides for tipis and for procuring all of the clothing and agrarian foodstuffs for their families, so they had a high degree of economic importance.<sup>33</sup> Any money a woman earned from selling her hides to Europeans also remained with her and granted her status within her community.<sup>34</sup> The beading craftsmanship that arose with the use of buffalo hides was perfected in prestigious women's societies, and designs were used on war shirts, shields, and horse adornments to protect the males of the Cheyenne in battle (fig. 3).<sup>35</sup> The role of Cheyenne women in warfare extended past the decoration of hides, however. Once the Cheyenne Nation started to become fully mobile and established war societies in 1800, women sat in on war councils to offer advice, performed ritual singing and dancing ceremonies for the warriors before and after battle, and made all the gifts exchanged in peace treaties.<sup>36</sup> Historically, Cheyenne women learned how to care for children, cook, and maintain a home through child's play with dolls and little mock tipi poles tied to their dogs.<sup>37</sup> However as intertribal and Indigenous-American warfare increased in the nineteenth century, girls were taught additional roles such as how to guard tipis, protect children and elderly, and physically fight back in the event of an attack to continue the Cheyenne values of acting for the good of the whole tribe (fig. 4).<sup>38</sup> When a girl was grown, this training would allow her to join the war party of a loved one if she did not wish to be separated from him. While it was not encouraged, women who fought on these campaigns were respected.<sup>39</sup>

The Arapaho Nation was the first to ally itself with the Cheyenne in 1806 in response to the increased intertribal warfare

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<sup>32</sup> Clark, "Crow," 7-8.

<sup>33</sup> Clark, "Crow," 51.

<sup>34</sup> Clark, "Crow," 52.

<sup>35</sup> Clark, "Crow," 52; Beyreis, "If you had fought bravely," 12.

<sup>36</sup> Beyreis, "If you had fought bravely," 14-19.

<sup>37</sup> Leila Monaghan, "Cheyenne and Lakota Women at the Battle of the Little Bighorn," *Montana the Magazine of Western History*, 67, no. 3 (2017): 8.

<sup>38</sup> Monaghan "Cheyenne," 9.

<sup>39</sup> Clark, "Crow," 67.

brought by the mobility of the horse.<sup>40</sup> Like the Cheyenne, the Arapaho were originally a semi-sedentary Great Lakes people that gradually shifted to bison hunting in the Great Plains after obtaining horses in the 1740s.<sup>41</sup> Their origin story involves the creation of the world from mud under a large body of water (probably Lake Superior) by Pipe Person.<sup>42</sup> In memorial of this creation tradition, the Arapaho kept fourteen symbolic pipe medicine bundles, seven of which were cared for by women. Medicine bundles were an assembly of animal bones, beadwork, pipes, and other sacred items contained in a hide bag or other wrapping for the ensured wellbeing of the tribe.<sup>43</sup> The fact that women were entrusted with this position highlights their religious significance and power within Arapaho culture. Although the Arapaho had no societies for quill working, women did use bead designs for the protection of loved ones in armed conflicts and were responsible for clothing and tipi adornments. Arapaho men, however, did have political societies for tribal governance that their wives participated in along with the women who carried seven of the sacred medicine bundles.

From 1840 to 1880, the Cheyenne and Arapaho would also form militant alliances with clans of the Sioux nation.<sup>44</sup> The Teton Sioux, or Lakota, have ancestral ties to the Black Hills of the Dakotas, although oral traditions alternate between whether they emerged there or migrated from the Great Lakes Region.<sup>45</sup> Like the Cheyenne, Lakota women had societies that elevated their status based on their talent for quill working, which was used to adorn the hide clothing, tools, and homes these women owned.<sup>46</sup> Quill working was also a symbol of the kinship bonds women participated in within Lakota communities. Lakota girls gave their brother's children their first cradle board, often decorated with quill or beadwork, indicating the strong bond that

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<sup>40</sup> Wishart, *Encyclopedia*, 22; Clark, "Crow," 31.

<sup>41</sup> Wishart, *Encyclopedia*, 22; Clark, "Crow," 31.

<sup>42</sup> Wishart, *Encyclopedia*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Ubelaker and Waldo Wedel, "Bird Bones...in Plains Archaeology," *American Antiquity* 40, no.4 (1975): 446, 447, 449.

<sup>44</sup> Clark, "Crow," 31, 44.

<sup>45</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne and Lakota Women at the Battle of the Little Bighorn," 4; Wishart, *Encyclopedia*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Clark, "Crow," 27.

existed between siblings even after they started their own nuclear families.<sup>47</sup> In turn, a brother would give all the scalps he procured on a raid to his sister, which shows women played a ceremonial part in warfare even when not present on the battlefield.<sup>48</sup> The sexuality of women was also directly linked to a Lakota's success in battle; it was believed if abstinence was not practiced between a husband and wife before he went into combat, he was more likely to be wounded.<sup>49</sup> Although not as common within the Lakota Nations as it was in the Cheyenne and Arapaho communities, women could vote on tribal councils with men, were honorary members of male warrior societies, and played integral roles in ceremonies such as the Sun Dance.<sup>50</sup>

The Crow differed politically from the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Sioux Nations because they were one of the few to align themselves with the U.S. government against other Indigenous tribes during the reservation era from 1860-1890.<sup>51</sup> While this was partially due to their ancestral feuds against the Lakota Sioux, it was also a survival tactic because the U.S. military gave extra food, money, and horses to their families in exchange for their services as scouts and soldiers during a time when white Americans' decimation of natural resources created starvation and devastation for Native communities.<sup>52</sup> However, despite their opposition to one another, these Nations shared several cultural similarities.

Like the Cheyenne, the Crow enjoyed a half-agrarian, half-bison subsistence tradition after obtaining horses in the mid to late 1700s until their full transition to a migratory Plains lifestyle by 1800.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the Cheyenne, the Crow retained some of their agrarian lifestyle into this migratory period through the nineteenth century and continued to grow ceremonial tobacco.<sup>54</sup> Women were exclusively responsible for this important task, and they were also responsible for its preparation

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<sup>47</sup> Beatrice Medicine, "Child Socialization among Native Americans: The Lakota (Sioux) in Cultural Context," *Wicazo Sa Review* 1, no.2 (1985): 25.

<sup>48</sup> Medicine, "Child Socialization," 25.

<sup>49</sup> Clark, "Crow," 29.

<sup>50</sup> Clark, "Crow," 31.

<sup>51</sup> Wishart, *Encyclopedia*, 7.

<sup>52</sup> Wishart, *Encyclopedia*, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Clark, "Crow," 13-15.

<sup>54</sup> Clark, "Crow," 39, 78.



for ceremonies such as the Sun Dance. Crow women could also take on the roles of shamans or medicine bundle keepers during these ceremonies. The Crow also followed similar rules of property present in the Cheyenne Nation such as the woman retaining full ownership of the tipis, domestic equipment, and horses.<sup>55</sup> The Crow had no craft guilds or societies specifically for women, but it was a common practice for women to join a male war society in the event of a divorce.<sup>56</sup> If a divorce occurred, Crow (and Cheyenne) women kept all their children, save for older boys who wished to remain with their fathers, and raised them communally with grandmothers and aunts.<sup>57</sup> Familial ties also resonated deeply within brother and sister relationships. In both Crow and Cheyenne societies, it was a brother who approved a marriage between his sister and the suitor of her choice. This close relationship between brother and sister would become evident in armed conflicts as early as 1848 when a Crow woman named Pine Leaf allegedly killed one hundred enemies to avenge her twin brother's death.<sup>58</sup> Such actions would continue to play a part in armed conflicts where Indigenous women were concerned between 1860-1890 such as the Battle of the Rosebud.

Throughout their interactions with various Great Plains Indigenous Nations, male Europeans and Americans seldom recognized the important roles American Indian women had within their societies. Evidence of this can be found in various accounts. James P. Beckwourth was an American fur trader born in Virginia in 1798 who lived with the Crow Nation on the Great Plains sometime between the 1820s-1830s.<sup>59</sup> In his autobiography, Beckwourth recounted that "all [Great Plains] Indian women are considered by the stronger sex as menials...the superiority of their 'lords and masters' is their chiefest subject of boast. They are patient, plodding, and unambitious."<sup>60</sup> For someone who spent so much time fully integrated in Crow society, this was a very

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<sup>55</sup> Clark, "Crow," 69.

<sup>56</sup> Clark, "Crow," 61.

<sup>57</sup> Clark, "Crow," 76

<sup>58</sup> Clark, "Crow," 78.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas D. Bonner, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth as told to Thomas D. Bonner* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971): 11.

<sup>60</sup> Clark, "Crow," 77, 81; Bonner, *The Life*, 212.

shallow observation of women's work which was likely specialized and respected.

George Catlin had similar thoughts on the role of Indigenous women on the Great Plains. Catlin was an American artist who set out to paint a variety of Great Plains Indigenous peoples from the 1830s-1870s because he was convinced their traditions, customs, and perhaps even the individuals themselves would be brought to extinction by (American) "civilization."<sup>61</sup> In one of his journals, Catlin recorded that "[Crow women] like all Indian women, are slaves of their husbands, being obliged to perform all domestic duties and drudgeries of the tribe and not allowed to participate in religious rites, ceremonies, or amusements."<sup>62</sup> While Catlin spent much time producing accurate sketches and the names of the subjects in his paintings of American Indians, it seems clear his attitudes toward Indigenous women were less than inspiring and likely a result of not taking the time to understand the customs and traditions of the people he was painting.

Another common misconception Euro-American men held about Indigenous women on the Great Plains was their promiscuity, or lack thereof. When Beckwourth did speak highly of Crow women, it was backhanded, with phrases such as "her modest and becoming demeanor singled her out from her sex," implying that Crow women were generally immodest.<sup>63</sup> Jean Baptiste Trudeau, a trader who worked for the Spanish Commercial Company visiting various Great Plains Nations from 1794-1795, had a similarly dismal view of Indigenous women's virtue.<sup>64</sup> In his journals, Trudeau claimed that "[Arikara women are] so dissolute and debauched...that there is not one whose modesty is proof against a bit of vermilion or a few strands of beads" and "the Indians to whom we relate the circumstances of our marriages...are at a loss to comprehend how white men, possessing so much understanding and knowledge...cannot see marriage is a source of pain and torment to them."<sup>65</sup> In the Arikara Nation, women held

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<sup>61</sup> Bruce Watson, "George Catlin's Obsession," *Smithsonian Magazine* (2002).

<sup>62</sup> Clark, "Crow," 48.

<sup>63</sup> Bonner, *The Life*, 202.

<sup>64</sup> G. Hubert Smith, "J.B. Trudeau's Remarks on the Indians of the Upper Missouri, 1794-95," *American Anthropologist* 38, no 4 (1936), 566-567.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, "J.B. Trudeau's Remarks on the Indians of the Upper Missouri, 1794-95," , 566-567.

economic power due to their monopoly over agricultural labor and resources and there were special societies for women who had elevated skills in these areas.<sup>66</sup> While Arikara societies did practice polygamy, reducing the importance of Indigenous women to the presence of sexual virtue alone undermines the important economic, social, and cultural roles these women held in many Great Plains Societies.<sup>67</sup>

These short-sighted interpretations may be due to the way Euro-American women were treated by men within their societies at this time. As colonial America became more "civilized" at the dawn of the nineteenth century, women were gradually pushed from fluid roles necessary for settlement survival to gendered responsibilities. While American men were focused on the politics of running a new country, women were left to deal with domestic work and childcare.<sup>68</sup> This is not to say women did not have these responsibilities in the eighteenth century, however. At that time, it was also acceptable for them to earn wages by selling agricultural produce, textiles, or other fruits of their labor.<sup>69</sup> As white women lost this influence, they were additionally coupled with sexual stereotypes of their delicate states, erratic nerves and emotional incapacities, and general inferiority to men. These attitudes would snowball into a compilation of issues for women in the nineteenth century including forced internment in asylums for reading too much or disagreeing with one's husband, losing all rights to their children in the event of a divorce, lack of property and voting rights, and lack of protection from abuse.<sup>70</sup>

Settlement in the Great Plains both ameliorated and exacerbated some of these issues. While women were presented the opportunity to work with more autonomy as teachers or run businesses due to the lack of initial enterprise in the early years of westward migration, some (by force or by choice) worked as prostitutes, a position with no legal

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<sup>66</sup> Clark, "Crow," 25-27.

<sup>67</sup> Clark, "Crow," 25-27.

<sup>68</sup> Johnny Faragher, "Women and their Families on the Overland Trail to California and Oregon, 1842-1867," *Feminist Studies* 2, no. 2/3 (1975): 152.

<sup>69</sup> Faragher, "Women and their Families," 152.

<sup>70</sup> Kate Moore, *The Women They Could Not Silence* (Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2021), 38-41; Susan B. Anthony, "Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States by the National Woman Suffrage Association," (July 4, 1876).

protection.<sup>71</sup> Those that stayed in traditional domestic roles found their workload increase; in addition to managing children they also had to construct the home they would work in (which they would not have ownership rights to), gather natural resources and redevelop food sources, and were responsible for all care of the livestock.<sup>72</sup> If a woman accompanied her husband to a mining town or other outpost where not every male had a female companion, she would be expected to cook and care for all the men present with none of the female companionship she would have been accustomed to in the more developed states.<sup>73</sup> Ironically, during these pioneer women's lowest points when the workload seemed too much and the men too unwilling to help, they compared themselves to Indian "squaws," who as previously discussed enjoyed infinitely more support and respect within their societies on the Great Plains.<sup>74</sup>

### The Betrayals

While the Union and Confederate governments dealt with the Civil War in the North and South, state and Indigenous governments had their full attention turned to the increasing hostilities facing the settlement of the American West. New promises of land and gold caused white pioneers and prospectors to invade Indigenous Great Plains lands and resources in direct violation of the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty.<sup>75</sup> While some bands within the Sioux Nation raided settler wagons and homesteads to replenish their threatened supply of food, the Cheyenne and Arapaho held out for the peace promised by President Lincoln and his military officials in Washington, D.C.<sup>76</sup> The violence was especially bad in the Colorado Territory, and despite most of the Indigenous population maintaining a peaceful existence save for

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<sup>71</sup> Margaret Walsh, "Women's Place on the American Frontier," *Journal of American Studies* 29, no.2 (1995): 244; Susan B. Anthony, "Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States by the National Woman Suffrage Association," (July 4, 1876).

<sup>72</sup> Walsh, "Women's Place," 244.

<sup>73</sup> Lillian Schlissel, "Women's Diaries on the Western Frontier," *American Studies* 18, no. 1 (1977): 87-100.

<sup>74</sup> Schlissel, "Women's Diaries on the Western Frontier," 92-93.

<sup>75</sup> Wishart, *Encyclopedia* 7.

<sup>76</sup> Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee; An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Holt...& Winston, 1971), 70.

self-defense. On June 27, 1864, Colorado Governor John Evans ordered all "friendly Indians" to report to reservations and forts for their "safety."<sup>77</sup> In reality, Evans blamed the Cheyenne and Arapaho for violent raids orchestrated by the Sioux and contacted Washington D.C. directly for permission to raise the Third Colorado Regiment explicitly "to kill Indians."<sup>78</sup> Ironically, it was members of this Third Colorado Regiment who oversaw what was supposed to be a peaceful settlement of Black Kettle's Cheyenne band and Left Hand's Arapaho band at Sand Creek near Fort Lyon in accordance with Evan's proclamation.<sup>79</sup> What followed on November 29, 1864, would later be remembered as the Sand Creek Massacre; the systematic murder of 130 Cheyenne and Arapaho people along with any hope of peace in the American West.

The role of Cheyenne and Arapaho women during the Sand Creek Massacre is difficult to discern. The surviving military records speak primarily of their role only as targeted victims. Robert Bent, a half Cheyenne half white American man forced to guide Colonel John Chivington to the village, remembered seeing a Colorado militiaman break both arms of a woman who was down with a broken leg, a pregnant woman killed with her fetus cut out of her, and multiple female corpses whose genitals had been mutilated.<sup>80</sup> These atrocities happened in addition to the premeditated murder of women who huddled around an American flag in the village meant to guarantee their safety and point-blank shootings of five year old girls who were discovered in their hiding places.<sup>81</sup>

While it is a sad fact that more innocent Indigenous women were killed than trained men in events like the Sand Creek Massacre, the idea that they fell quickly and easily with no resistance is a flawed assumption of their characters based on an assessment of cultural roles. Cheyenne and Arapaho women were trained from a young age to protect children and the elderly in the event of an attack, an important role that would ensure the survival of a society's next generation.<sup>82</sup> The

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<sup>77</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 74, 79.

<sup>78</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 79.

<sup>79</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 80-84.

<sup>80</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 89-90.

<sup>81</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 90.

<sup>82</sup> Leila Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 8.

eyewitness account of the five-year-old girl hidden in the sand was likely the result of a mother putting her child's safety before her own life. Additional accounts of dead children in the arms of their mothers shows that Indigenous women probably tried to carry their children to safety for both additional speed and perhaps to use their own bodies as shields against the rain of artillery.<sup>83</sup> The children who did make it to safety and survived the massacre were almost certainly delivered there by their mothers and other Indigenous women responsible for their communal upbringing.<sup>84</sup>

Additional clues to help understand the role of Cheyenne and Arapaho women as protectors during armed conflicts may be taken from records of a second slaughter that befell Black Kettle's Village: the Washita Massacre. The Washita Massacre was meant to serve as punishment to the Indigenous Nations that turned to raiding in protest over the Sand Creek Massacre. In practice, it turned into another mass slaughter of a peaceful Cheyenne village that was mistaken for one of the violent protesting groups. Outrage over the murders at Sand Creek resulted in an official military alliance between the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota Sioux Nations by 1865.<sup>85</sup> Just as the Civil War was ending, the Plains Wars were beginning. In retaliation for the white man's deception, the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota conducted raids on various towns, wagon trains, and railway stations in Colorado throughout January and February.<sup>86</sup> However, Black Kettle and several other peace chiefs chose to separate themselves from these bands and participated in no violent acts of retribution themselves.<sup>87</sup> For the remainder of 1865 to 1867, the federal government was split on how to approach the downward spiral of Indigenous-white relations in the American West. After the Civil War, frontier militia was created in June 1865 under the control of General William Sherman, and its main focus was the protection of white settlers and the transcontinental railroad workers.<sup>88</sup> In a desperate attempt to stop the oncoming war, the U.S.

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<sup>83</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 90.

<sup>84</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 91.

<sup>85</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 94; Cozzens, *Earth*, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 94; Cozzens, *Earth*, 27.

<sup>87</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 96.

<sup>88</sup> Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 30.



government tried to mend the fractured peace with the help of a Peace Commission established by the Henderson Bill in July 1867 to be led by Major General William Sherman.<sup>89</sup> Peace in this case loosely meant "conform or die," and Indigenous Great Plains people were given the choice to either adapt to agrarian lifestyles on reservations or pay for the violence wrought upon the white settlers.<sup>90</sup> Once again, Black Kettle's Cheyenne village (no Arapaho were camped with them at this time in contrast to Sand Creek) was selected to pay the price for the sporadic violence of Indigenous people he was unaffiliated with, and the "punishment" would be doled out by a reinstated General George Custer and the Seventh Cavalry.<sup>91</sup>

It's important to note here that Cheyenne women tried to fulfill their roles as protectors of the good of their communities' wellbeing even before a shot was fired at Washita.<sup>92</sup> Black Kettle had been warned by various scouts that the U.S. army was on the move, and his wife Medicine Woman advocated for the immediate mobilization of the winter camp, utilizing her power in traditional Cheyenne culture as an advisor and a woman responsible for the wellbeing of children and the homes of her people.<sup>93</sup> As it were, Black Kettle was blinded by optimism, and he died along with Medicine Woman at the Washita Massacre in present-day Oklahoma on November 27, 1868.<sup>94</sup> As with the Sand Creek Massacre, Cheyenne women did their best to protect their children and their Nation's future before themselves during the shooting. Girls and mothers grabbed children and ran to the river with bleeding feet to try and save their lives.<sup>95</sup> The Washita Massacre challenged the roles of Indigenous women as cultural protectors and as protectors of their children in armed conflicts. One woman chose to protect her child by killing it before taking her own life in order to save her baby from any mutilation or other abuses at the hands of the U.S. military, a difficult choice as a member of a society where children were

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<sup>89</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 77-78.

<sup>90</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 82, 84.

<sup>91</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 91-98.

<sup>92</sup> Clark, "Crow," 46, 62, 66.

<sup>93</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 98; Clark, "Crow," 62, 63.

<sup>94</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 6; Cozzens, *Earth*, 98.

<sup>95</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 99; Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 6.

considered precious and even miscarriages were considered murder.<sup>96</sup>

Other women used their cultural roles to preserve their lives as captives under Custer and his men after the massacre. Mahwissa, sister of Black Kettle, was among the fifty-three women and children taken captive by the U.S. military after Washita.<sup>97</sup> When the U.S. soldiers started forcing the young women into their tents each night, Mahwissa stepped up despite the sobriety of the situation and performed traditional marriage ceremonies over Cheyenne women and the cavalrymen who would assault them. One such ceremony was even performed for General Custer himself and a Cheyenne woman named Monahsetah. In Cheyenne culture, chastity was a crucial part of a woman's identity and anyone who engaged in sexual activity was considered partnered; adultery came with severe punishment.<sup>98</sup> By enacting these marriage ceremonies, Cheyenne women maintained a sense of autonomy and retainment of their roles of keepers of their cultures during some of the first armed conflicts of the late nineteenth century even as captives of the U.S. military.

### **The Battles Begin**

The term "armed conflicts" instead of "battles" is used occasionally in this research to highlight the fact that not all fighting that occurred on the American Great Plains from 1860-1890 was between two *prepared* entities. With the Sand Creek Massacre and the Washita Massacre, Indigenous people were attacked during a time when they thought they had achieved a mutual understanding of peace with the United States, and so these events are designated as massacres or armed conflicts instead of battles. The roles of Indigenous women took on a much more complex form during a true battle where both Indigenous Nations and the U.S. military were prepared for the fight. While women served primarily as protectors of children in unexpected massacres and cultural preservers in captivity, they served as active combatants, nurses, morale boosters, and supply chain distributors when they had time to prepare for a battle.

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<sup>96</sup> Clark, "Crow," 55; Cozzens, *Earth*, 99.

<sup>97</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 6.

<sup>98</sup> Clark, "Crow," 56, 61.

Records of the ways Great Plains Indigenous women participated in armed conflicts from 1860-1890 exist in historic and contemporary ledger art. Ledger art is named for the illustrations made on Euro-American trade ledger books by American Indian artists starting in the 1870s as a means of recording their oral histories. See *Figure 5* in the photo index. This is a historic example of an American Indian woman's presence in ledger art depicted as an active combatant. It was illustrated by Yellow Nose, a Ute man captured by the Cheyenne in 1858 who fought in the Battle of the Rosebud and the Battle of the Little Bighorn and later used the tradition of ledger art drawings to depict the Indigenous side of Great Plains warfare in 1889.<sup>99</sup> The drawing depicts the Cheyenne Buffalo Calf Road Woman at the Battle of the Rosebud. She is shown rescuing her brother Comes-In-Sight with his arm wrapped around her horse and rifle in hand. The bravery of Buffalo Calf Road Woman in this image is clearly detailed; the volley of bullets and her brother's haphazard mount shows this was a feat that required skill and speed for brother and sister to make it out alive.

The tradition of ledger art is still prevalent among many Indigenous artists today. Daniel Lone Soldier, an Oglala Lakota artist, uses ledger art to record images of Indigenous women who participated in armed conflicts as combatants. *Figure 6* in the photo index is an illustration Daniel Lone Soldier made of Moving Robe Woman, a member of the Hunkpapa Lakota [Sioux] Nation who fought in the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

When President Ulysses S. Grant signed the Indian Appropriations Act of 1871, the U.S. federal government ceased considering Indigenous groups as sovereign nations and thus would no longer enter into peace treaties with them.<sup>100</sup> Although peace in the wake of American westward expansion was never a real possibility, it was now a truly impossible goal, and the only option the Indigenous nations of the Great Plains had was to fight to maintain their traditional lifeways and their very existence. This became especially evident after

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<sup>99</sup> Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 130.; Yellow Nose. *Depiction of Buffalo Calf Road Woman* (ledger drawing). In *Yellow Nose's Spotted Wolf Ledger*. 1889.

<sup>100</sup> Mark Hirsch, "1871: The End of Indian Treaty-Making," *American Indian*, 15 (2014), 2.

General Custer led a military campaign into the sacred Black Hills reservation of the Sioux Indians, where the discovery of gold in 1874 would forever disrupt the policy of white absence from the territory promised by the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868.<sup>101</sup> Although the *Paha Sapa* (Lakota word for the Black Hills) were a reservation belonging only to the Sioux according to the U.S. government's paperwork, the location held sacred significance to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and other Plains Indigenous groups; archaeological evidence and rock art indicates that this had been the case for thousands of years.<sup>102</sup> According to Sioux oral traditions, the Black Hills has been a sacred site since the emergence of their first ancestors from *Washu Niya*, or Wind Cave; a threat of white invasion in the Black Hills was a threat to the ideals of their very existence.<sup>103</sup> Because the U.S. government refused to renegotiate the treaty for peace with a non-sovereign entity, they tried first to buy the rights to the Black Hills, then developed a policy in November of 1875 that would give the U.S. military the right to launch a full scale military campaign against any remaining Indigenous nations who did not report to reservations within a year.<sup>104</sup> In response, Lakota Sioux and Arapaho nations, along with their Cheyenne allies conscripted after the Sand Creek Massacre, sought to drive Custer and the other U.S. military presences from their homelands with organized military force, convinced of their pending success by a vision of the Lakota elder Sitting Bull.<sup>105</sup>

One of the first battles after the federal decision of 1875 to record a significant presence of Indigenous females in their diversified warfare roles was the Battle of the Rosebud. On June 17, 1876, near the Rosebud Creek in southeast Montana, the allied Nations of Lakota and Cheyenne led an offensive charge on General George Crook and the group of U.S. military, Crow, and Shoshone warriors he was supposed

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<sup>101</sup> Kurt Cox, *Custer and His Commands: From West Point to Little Bighorn*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 7.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Nabokov, *Where the Lightning Strikes*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 207-208.

<sup>103</sup> Nabokov, *Where*, 214.

<sup>104</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 217-218.

<sup>105</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 215.

to be leading to attack the Rosebud encampment.<sup>106</sup> Because Cheyenne scouts discovered Crook's forces before they came to the village, the Cheyenne and Lakota were able to prepare and strike first.<sup>107</sup> In lieu of this preparation, Cheyenne and Lakota women packed up the camp and prepared to escort the children and elderly to safety if things went poorly.<sup>108</sup> Male warriors donned "their best clothing," which would have been made and embroidered with cultural symbols by women to protect individuals during the battle.<sup>109</sup> Even the saddles, perhaps the most important tool in Plains warfare used by Indigenous riders, were made by women who thus had a direct hand in determining a warrior's safe conduct during a fight.<sup>110</sup> The Battle of the Rosebud, along with most battles fought on the Great Plains, were horseback-mounted assaults. A soldier made every effort to stay on his horse to avoid being trampled or easily killed, and their speed made quick retreats easier if things turned sour.<sup>111</sup> During the Battle of the Rosebud, a Cheyenne warrior named Comes-In-Sight fell off his horse when it was shot by Crow allies of the U.S. military.<sup>112</sup> The loss of a mount could mean death to a combatant, as the fray of battle made it difficult for other warriors to get close enough to save a stranded comrade and there was a risk of getting trampled by opponents' mounts.<sup>113</sup> And yet, Comes-In-Sight did not die that day. While his fellow brothers-in-arms held back, his sister, Buffalo Calf Road Woman, caught her own horse at the Cheyenne encampment and charged through the battle, dodging bullets and

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<sup>106</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 234; Nathaniel Philbrick, *The Last Stand...*, (Detroit: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2010), 182. The term "warrior" in this context is not meant to imply Indigenous combatants had less training than U.S. soldiers. Rather, during battle they fought as individuals instead of as a trained unit under the command of one person and so this term is meant to differentiate between Indigenous and U.S. military combat techniques. Floyd Shuster Maine, *Lone Eagle The White Sioux*, (New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1956), 126.

<sup>107</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 235.

<sup>108</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 235.

<sup>109</sup> David Beyreis, "If you had fought bravely I would have sung for you..." *Montana The Magazine of Western History* 69, no.1 (2019): 12-13; Jim Donovan, *A Terrible Glory* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), 150

<sup>110</sup> Beyreis, "Fought Bravely," 12.

<sup>111</sup> Donovan, *Glory*, 151.

<sup>112</sup> David Miller, *Custer's Fall* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 77.

<sup>113</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 236; Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 77-78.

arrows.<sup>114</sup> The sister was able to reach Comes-In-Sight and help him onto her horse before racing back through the raging battle to get him to safety.<sup>115</sup> The Cheyenne bond between brother and sister was a source of many cultural traditions; Buffalo Calf Road Woman's rescue was not only an act of protection for her brother, but also a protection and continuation of cultural traditions during a tumultuous time for the Cheyenne Nation.<sup>116</sup> Although she was not a warrior, Buffalo Calf Road Woman's actions played a direct role in the outcome of at least one person's life during the Battle of the Rosebud. To the Cheyenne people, Buffalo Calf Road Woman's bravery was worthy of the battle name "*Kse e sewo instaniwe itatane*," or "Where the Young Girl Saved Her Brother's Life."<sup>117</sup>

Familial ties influenced other women to participate in the Battle of the Rosebud as well. Riding with the Crow war party on the side of the U.S. military was The Other Magpie, a woman who also had a brother but had lost him in a battle with one of the Sioux Nations.<sup>118</sup> While her brother did not participate in the Battle of the Rosebud, it's possible The Other Magpie felt fighting the Sioux (or the Lakota in this case) in any capacity would avenge him. Like the Cheyenne, the bond between a Crow brother and sister was not taken lightly, and there are records of other Crow women such as Pine Leaf who joined war parties to avenge the death of a brother in the 1830s.<sup>119</sup> The Other Magpie, along with a two-spirit named Finds-Them-and-Kills-Them, saved the wounded warrior Bull Snake by beating his Sioux opponent off his horse.<sup>120</sup> The Other Magpie would later take the Sioux warrior's scalp for the Crow women to use in their scalp dance ceremony.<sup>121</sup> The Battle of the Rosebud would not be the last time these women saw battle,

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<sup>114</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 236; Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 77-78.

<sup>115</sup> Donovan, *Glory*, 151; Rosemary & Joseph Agonito, "Resurrecting History's Forgotten Women...," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 6, no.3 (1981): 8-9.

<sup>116</sup> Clark, "Crow", 32, 46, 57.

<sup>117</sup> Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 76.

<sup>118</sup> Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 239; Frank Bird Linderman, *Pretty Shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1932), 131.

<sup>119</sup> Clark, "Crow...", 77-78, 83.

<sup>120</sup> Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 239; Frank Bird Linderman, *Pretty Shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1932), 131.

<sup>121</sup> Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 239.

however, and while The Other Magpie may or may have joined the Crow warriors present, it's confirmed that Buffalo Calf Road Woman would be one of many Indigenous women to participate in the most infamous fight of the American West just a week later: The Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Accounts of Indigenous women during The Battle of the Little Bighorn are unique for their documentation of both the rare combatant and the more routine but vital roles women played during the fight. The Battle of the Little Bighorn, or the Battle of Greasy Grass as it would be identified in Indian Country, took place just eight days after the Battle of the Rosebud on June 25, 1876, also in southeastern Montana.<sup>122</sup> Had the women been given more notice of the impending assault, they would have been responsible for dismantling the tipis and securing belongings in saddle packs or travois poles and getting children and the elderly to safety, as was the case with the Battle of the Rosebud. However, the fighting launched by Major Reno, General Custer, and the Akira, Shoshone, and Crow Indians that rode with them caught the five thousand members of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota Nations by surprise; in fact, they had been feasting and celebrating in the days following the Battle of the Rosebud.<sup>123</sup> Major Reno and a group of Arikara scouts would lead the first offensive of the day on the Hunkpapa Lakota camp.<sup>124</sup>

Once it was evident the multi-tribal village was under attack, men prepared to fight while women grabbed children and herded the elderly out of the way of the horses and fighting to places with natural protection some distance away but still in sight of the battle.<sup>125</sup> This was crucial because by keeping within eyeshot and earshot of the fighting, women could run back into the battle to pull wounded soldiers to safety without worrying about the safety of their children.<sup>126</sup> Elderly women who could not move fast enough to rescue soldiers would sing songs to encourage soldiers or perform ceremonial death songs as they

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<sup>122</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 251.

<sup>123</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 247; Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 9.

<sup>124</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 256.

<sup>125</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 256; Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 11.

<sup>126</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 12.

fell.<sup>127</sup> One Cheyenne woman named Antelope (also known as Kate Bighead) even went so far as to ride her horse to the battle's edge because her nephew Noisy Walking wanted her to watch over him while she sang her courage songs.<sup>128</sup> Tragically, Noisy Walking did not survive the battle.<sup>129</sup>

Like Rosebud, horses played a pivotal role at Little Bighorn. Most able-bodied women were responsible for catching calvary and Indian horses once their riders were dispatched and dividing them between the warriors who needed them.<sup>130</sup> This task was largely completed by Cheyenne women, but there are accounts of other women such as Hunkpapa Lakota Pretty White Buffalo and Oglala Lakota Minnie Hollow Wood who shared the burden.<sup>131</sup> Minnie Hollow Wood would later be awarded a full headdress (typically reserved for males) for her bravery in getting ammo from U.S. Calvary saddle bags attached to the spooked horses running from the battle.<sup>132</sup>

Another similarity between the battles of the Rosebud and Little Bighorn was the small but undeniable presence of Indigenous female combatants. Once again, Buffalo Calf Road Woman, referred to in some contexts as Calf Trail Woman, fearlessly entered the battlefield with a six shooter to protect the men she held dear; this time, it would be her husband Black Coyote.<sup>133</sup> Antelope, one of the women present at the battle to sing "strong heart songs," remembered that Buffalo Calf Road Woman wielded a six shooter on horseback and shot at any U.S. soldier who got too close to Black Coyote, who was fighting on foot.<sup>134</sup> However, while Buffalo Calf Road Woman may have been the only woman at the Battle of the Little Bighorn to carry a gun, some sources have incorrectly cited her as "the only woman to fight Custer."<sup>135</sup> Like The Other Magpie in the Battle of the Rosebud, Hunkpapa Lakota Moving Robe Woman joined the Battle of the Little Bighorn to avenge

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<sup>127</sup> Peter Cozzens, *Earth*, 256.

<sup>128</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 16.

<sup>129</sup> Donovan, *Glory*, 189.

<sup>130</sup> Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 137.

<sup>131</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 12-14.

<sup>132</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 13.

<sup>133</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 15.

<sup>134</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 15.

<sup>135</sup> Rosemary & Joseph Agonito, "Resurrecting," 9.



the death of her brother, One Hawk, who was killed during the fighting.<sup>136</sup> Referred to in other accounts as Walking Blanket Woman and later renamed Mary Crawler, Moving Robe Woman rode into the battle alongside her father and became yet another Indigenous female combatant who fought for the loved ones they shared close cultural ties with on the battlefields of the Great Plains.<sup>137</sup> The sight of women on the battlefield was further motivation to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota warriors to push through to victory. Hunkpapa Lakota Rain-in-the-Face claimed that "No young man should ride behind [the women]" and saluted their bravery.<sup>138</sup>

The Battle of the Little Bighorn is perhaps most famous for its lack of survivors from Custer's battalion (excluding the Crow and Shoshone scouts that rode with them); this phenomenon was in no small part due to Indigenous women.<sup>139</sup> When the battle showed signs of slowing, Oglala Lakota woman One Who Walks with the Stars traveled down to the Little Bighorn River in search of stray horses to bring back to her husband, Brule Lakota chief Crow Dog, and the other warriors.<sup>140</sup> Instead of horses, One Who Walks with the Stars found a U.S. Cavalry man sliding down the bank in an effort to escape the slaughter. He would not succeed, and One Who Walks with the Stars clubbed the man to death with a piece of driftwood.<sup>141</sup> Further upstream, another soldier had succeeded in making it to the river and was in the process of swimming across. Wasting no time, One Who Walks with the Stars jumped in after him and killed the man with her knife.<sup>142</sup> Warriors Hollow Horn Eagle and Brave Bird would later tell the white author who recorded these stories that One Who Walks with the Stars had been braver and killed more men than her husband had during the Battle of the Little Bighorn (see *Figure 7*).<sup>143</sup>

On the battlefield, women from all the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and

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<sup>136</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 16.

<sup>137</sup> Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 137, 142, 247.

<sup>138</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 16.

<sup>139</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 19.

<sup>140</sup> Floyd Shuster Maine, *Lone Eagle, The White Sioux* (University of New Mexico Press, 1956), 128.

<sup>141</sup> Maine, *Lone Eagle*, 128; Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 156.

<sup>142</sup> Maine, *Lone Eagle*, 128.

<sup>143</sup> Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 250.

Lakota Nations were likewise ensuring there would be no survivors of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Women young and old scoured the bodies strewn out along the Little Bighorn, stopping to mourn and recover the body if they found a loved one, but also stopping to kill, scalp, and mutilate any wounded U.S. soldier they came across.<sup>144</sup> The names of some of these women have been recorded, such as Arapaho-Cheyenne Strong Left Hand, but more women participated in landing these final killing blows than have been credited.<sup>145</sup> One such woman may have been the Arapaho Pretty Nose, who has been recorded to have fought in the Battle of the Little Bighorn although the specific details of her participation are unknown.<sup>146</sup> Several accounts tell of the fate of African American Isaiah Dormer, who had been married to a Hunkpapa Lakota woman but fought against her people as part of Custer's forces.<sup>147</sup> Considered a traitor by the women who found him (believed to be Moving Robe Woman, referred to in some contexts as Her Eagle Robe), Dormer was shot and had his penis cut off and stuffed into his mouth for his betrayal.<sup>148</sup> Some men realized what the women on the battlefield were doing and tried to play dead to avoid a killing blow. This rarely worked in their favor, as was evident in the case of a male who tried to attack two women when they tried to mutilate his testicles thinking him dead only to be promptly shot by a third woman.<sup>149</sup> The killing and mutilation of Isaiah Dormer highlights an addition to the multi-faceted role of Indigenous women in the warfare of the Great Plains from 1860 to 1890: the responsibility of choosing between a love for a white significant other or the love for your nation. Just as Isaiah had been a non-Indigenous person married to a Native American woman who then acted as a guide in a massacre of her people, Robert Bent was the child of a Cheyenne woman and a white trader named William who was forced to guide Chivington to the

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<sup>144</sup> Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 153-154; Cozzens, *Earth*, 260.

<sup>145</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 17.

<sup>146</sup> Beyreis, "If you had fought bravely," 9; "Arapaho Historical Collection from Mark Soldier Wolf is Archived at Fort Collins Museum," *Coloradoan*, Accessed March 1, 2023.

<sup>147</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 260; Miller, *Custer's Fall*, 115.

<sup>148</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 260; Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 16-17.

<sup>149</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 17.

village of his mother's people for the Sand Creek Massacre.<sup>150</sup> Although his two mixed brothers Charlie and George survived the massacre, they left their father's ranch for good with their mother Yellow Woman who "swore she would never again live with a white man."<sup>151</sup> These examples show that the massacres and battles occurring on the Great Plains were in some cases personal for Indigenous women; they weren't being attacked by an unknown party whose cultural differences were incompatible with their own, but rather a group of people with whom they had shared intimate and economic relationships with for decades.

### Wounded Knee

Although the Battles of the Rosebud and Little Bighorn were Indigenous victories, they were followed by the eventual removals of the remaining free Cheyenne, Lakota, and Arapaho Nations to reservations by the 1880s.<sup>152</sup> With the decimation of the buffalo, the industrialization of the Great Plains with settlers, gold, and the railroad, and the constant threat of attack from the U.S. military, both Indigenous nations and individuals eventually surrendered. Here, again, women would play a pivotal role.<sup>153</sup> Sweet Water, a Cheyenne woman, negotiated the surrender of her people in 1877 with Nelson Miles.<sup>154</sup> Although the civil treatment negotiated in these surrenders was rarely executed (Sweet Water surrendered under the conditions the Cheyenne would be treated with respect and sent to Pine Ridge Reservation; in reality, Miles shipped them to a prison fort in Nebraska), it's important to note that Indigenous women spoke as equals with white men to fight for basic humane treatment of their communities in the wake of the armed conflicts that had torn their safety and numbers from them. These were not desolate victims but individuals who continued to advocate for their right to live on a fraction of their terms.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 87.

<sup>151</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 87.

<sup>152</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 20; Wishart, *Encyclopedia*, 9.

<sup>153</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 20; David Smits, "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no.3 (1994): 314.

<sup>154</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 20.

<sup>155</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 20.

The Wounded Knee Massacre was the tragic result of Indigenous Great Plains people simply trying to survive. In 1883, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price put forth "The Rules Governing the Court of Indian Offenses," which outlawed various Indigenous Great Plains traditions such as the sun dance, polygamy, bride prices, and medicine men.<sup>156</sup> The passing of this legislation not only attacked the subsistence traditions of American Indians as the reservations had, but also outlawed the cultural traditions and lifestyle traditions of the Great Plains people. In addition to this detriment to their spiritual health, lack of rations promised by the U.S. government resulted in starvation and sicknesses that served as detriments to their physical health.<sup>157</sup> When all hope seems lost, people usually start to look for a miracle, and that miracle came in the form of the Ghost Dance teachings from Wovoka, a Paiute from Nevada.<sup>158</sup> According to this new prophetic movement, performing the Ghost Dance would send the white man back where they came from and return the traditional Native American ways of life, with anyone who wore the sacred Ghost Dance shirts thought to be impervious to white man's bullets.<sup>159</sup>

Hunkpapa Lakota elder Sitting Bull was murdered when he tried to resist arrest by the U.S. military, who sought to prevent him from joining a group of Ghost Dancers in the Badlands of South Dakota.<sup>160</sup> His people fled to the Cheyenne River Reservation to seek sanctuary with Miniconjou's Lakota leader Big Foot, who later had a warrant put out for his arrest as a former Ghost Dancer.<sup>161</sup> While American Colonel Sumner had asked a local rancher to instruct Big Foot's community to come to Fort Bennet, a miscommunication between the Colonel and the rancher resulted in Big Foot trying to move his people and the Hunkpapa refugees to the Pine River reservation instead.<sup>162</sup> Instead of the peaceful move Colonel Sumner described, the rancher told the Lakota they needed to run away to Pine

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<sup>156</sup> Price, Hiram. Rules Governing the Court of Indian Offenses. March 30, 1883.

<sup>157</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 427-429.

<sup>158</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 428.

<sup>159</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 427-428.

<sup>160</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 440.

<sup>161</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 443-445; Brown, *Bury*, 440.

<sup>162</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 443-445; Brown, *Bury*, 440.

Ridge to escape the hostile U.S. forces headed their way.

By the time Major Samuel Whitside and Colonel James Forsyth caught up to the group with the U.S. Seventh Cavalry, Big Foot had caught pneumonia. The officers received orders to confiscate all weapons in Indigenous hands and deport the group (120 able-bodied males and roughly 250 women, children, and elderly) to a military prison in Omaha, Nebraska.<sup>163</sup> The morning of December 29, 1890, a search commenced by the U.S. military through the makeshift Lakota village for hidden weapons. This process again illuminated the active roles Indigenous women played in armed conflicts in the Great Plains. While the men were being interrogated, women hid their rifles in tipis, under their skirts, and laid on top of them pretending to be ill.<sup>164</sup> When the U.S. cavalry did find the weapons, women yelled and cursed the soldiers to distract them from uprooting all the hiding places.<sup>165</sup>

A misfire from one of the confiscated weapons unleashed a volley of bullets between the U.S. cavalry and the Lakota males under interrogation.<sup>166</sup> Shortly into the conflict, the gun smoke impaired the vision of the soldiers and women and children were fired upon.<sup>167</sup> Once the killing of innocents began, some inexperienced cavalry men took it as an invitation to single out and kill Lakota women.<sup>168</sup> As with the Sand Creek Massacre, girls and mothers tried to hide their children in holes dug into the ground to protect them.<sup>169</sup> Dewey Beard, a survivor of the Wounded Knee Massacre, recalled finding his wounded mother while running for his life. His mother only yelled at him to leave her and keep going before she was shot dead- a protector of her child to the end.<sup>170</sup> As with the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the women who managed to retain some weapons went around to the wounded U.S. cavalry men and delivered final killing blows for yet another betrayal of trust and peace.<sup>171</sup> One of the most striking images from the

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<sup>163</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 441; Cozzens, *Earth*, 449.

<sup>164</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 452.

<sup>165</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 452.

<sup>166</sup> Brown, *Bury*, 444.

<sup>167</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 453

<sup>168</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 455-456.

<sup>169</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 456.

<sup>170</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 456.

<sup>171</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 455.

Wounded Knee Massacre is the account of five Lakota girls who could not outrun some mounted U.S. cavalry soldiers. Rather than continuing their flight, all the girls stopped, sat down facing their assailants, and only "covered their faces with their blankets" before they were shot.<sup>172</sup> It's uncertain whether similar acts of brave acceptance such as this occurred at the Sand Creek or Washita Massacre or even among the disputed female casualties at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Regardless, this final act of defiance serves as further evidence that in all their varying roles during armed conflicts from 1860-1890, Indigenous women were anything but passive victims of militant American violence.<sup>173</sup> Rather, they chose to take whatever acts of autonomy they could in moments of attacks and massacres and became active participants by passing with dignity.

### The Legacy Continues

Some scholars cite the Wounded Knee Massacre as "the end of Indigenous resistance" in the Great Plains.<sup>174</sup> However, this implies that Indigenous cultures fully succumbed to the efforts of the U.S. government to eradicate their languages, cultures, and traditions through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If this were true, then there would certainly not be the 547 federally recognized tribes (and thus 547 groups of Indigenous people who regained their status of sovereign nations after the 1871 Indian Appropriations Act revoked it) present in the United States today.<sup>175</sup> This renewal of Indigenous respect and authority for the nations of the Great Plains is, in part, a direct result of the resistance and cultural persistence of Native American women who participated in armed conflicts from 1860-1890. After the remaining survivors gathered following the Wounded Knee Massacre, Lakota women led them in an Omaha Dance, a tradition meant to invoke positive memories of past times.<sup>176</sup> In light of the Court of Indian Offenses forbidding Indigenous ceremonies, this quiet resistance after

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<sup>172</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 455.

<sup>173</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 453-456.; Brown, *Bury*, 444.

<sup>174</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 7.; Brown, *Bury*, 12.

<sup>175</sup> Federally Recognized Indian Tribes and Resources for Native Americans," *USA.Gov*, accessed March 4, 2023.

<sup>176</sup> Cozzens, *Earth*, 465.

an armed conflict symbolizes the continuation of the role Cheyenne, Lakota, and Arapaho women would play in cultural preservation into the twentieth century.

Cultural preservation in the form of material culture also served as a means of quiet resistance to forced assimilation after the events of Wounded Knee. While traditional hide quillwork and beadwork was not allowed for Great Plains girls who attended the federally mandated Indian boarding schools, sewing and quilting was allowed and became a new form of cultural retention.<sup>177</sup> Some Great Plains Indigenous women used this loophole to transfer traditional designs into Euro-American approved mediums, often taking the form of beautifully crafted quilts. Regina S. Brave Bull was a Sioux artist who was forced to attend the assimilationist Indian School in Bismarck, North Dakota.<sup>178</sup> Once she graduated, she became renowned for her quilt designs, which depicted traditional Sioux designs. Her daughter, Elaine Brave Bull McLaughlin, learned quilting from her mother and is currently a Santee/Yankton Sioux artist herself. Elaine's quilts are used in the reestablished Sun Dance ceremonies and as community gifts, illustrating the multi-generational persistence of Great Plains women serving as cultural preservationists despite the cultural eradication efforts based in the armed conflicts of the late nineteenth century (fig. 8).

Perhaps the most important example of how the efforts of Great Plains Indigenous women in armed conflicts from 1860-1890 have served to preserve the cultures and traditions of these Nations today is in the archival material used for this paper. Some of the sources for this research came from interviews with women who survived these battles such as the Cheyenne Antelope and Moving Behind Woman, Hunkpapa Lakota Pretty White Buffalo, Moving Robe Woman, and Julia Face, the Crow elder Pretty Shield, and Mrs. Spotted Horn Bull.<sup>179</sup> In recording their stories, these early anthropologists challenged the twentieth century notion that women's history was less important than other male-centered topics that were popular at the time. Additionally,

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<sup>177</sup> Kendra Greendeer, "Emblems of Identity," *National Museum of African American History and Culture*, Smithsonian, Accessed 20 November 2023.

<sup>178</sup> "Regina Brave Bull," *The Bismarck Tribune*, September 7, 1983.

<sup>179</sup> Monaghan, "Cheyenne," 2-21; Frank Bird Linderman, *Pretty Shield*, 131.

the testimonies of these Great Plains Indigenous women solidified their roles during armed conflicts in the written record, preserving their histories and its cultural significance for future generations.

The survival of Great Plains Indigenous cultures through the twenty-first century continues to be maintained by women. Despite the U.S. government's best efforts to eradicate their traditions through assimilationist laws and boarding schools, Indigenous women fought and maintained their roles as seamstresses, quill workers, and ceremonial participants, not just surviving in their new roles in the white man's world but thriving in it with their ancestral cultures. Although the armed conflicts of the nineteenth century may be over, the roles of Cheyenne, Arapaho, Lakota, and Crow women are not so different as they were over one hundred years ago, and their survivance is a testament that they will continue to maintain these traditions for hundreds of years to come.



Figure 1 shows Alfred Jacob Miller's *Bartering for a Bride (The Trapper's Bride)*, 1845. This image shows a European fur trapper (left, seated) entering into a marital agreement with the Great Plains Indian woman shown in white. On the right is Alfred Jacob Miller's *Bartering for a Bride*



*(The Trapper's Bride)*, 1845. One may notice this is an amicable ceremony between consenting parties surrounded by mutual respect for the other. This is made evident in the offering of the calumet, or a "peace pipe," which signified the European male would now be considered a part of his Indigenous wife's community and would reap the kinship trade connections associated with that relationship. His Native American wife would likely serve as an interpreter for these trade relations. Such relationships continued despite the war-torn years of the nineteenth century.

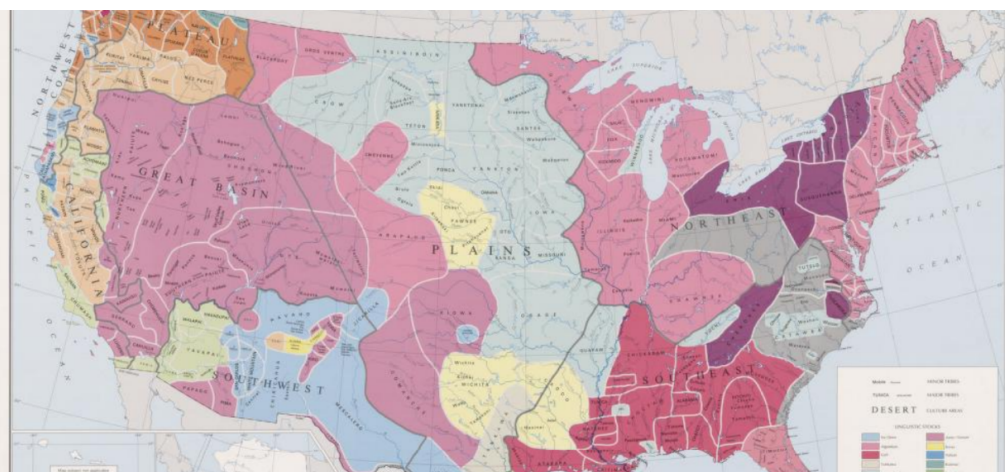


Figure 2 The geographic region defined as the Great Plains, or Plains, may vary based on the sources consulted. This map is shown as a reference to the areas considered to be part of the Great Plains/Plains for this research. The names of the Crow, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Teton Sioux are listed within their rough territories. Note that color indicates a language group and not a region. Map courtesy of William Sturtevant, *National Atlas. Indian Tribes, Cultures, & Languages: [United States]* (map), in "Interior, Geological Survey": 1991.



*Figure 3* shows an example of the traditional hide and beadwork art of the Cheyenne Nation. Although the exact name of this dress's creator is unknown, this garment was created by a Cheyenne woman between 1880 and 1910. Quill working and beadwork such as this is an example of how Cheyenne women would decorate shirts, shields, and equestrian tack meant for use in war to protect the male combatants of their communities. In doing so, Cheyenne women played an integral part in the armed conflicts of the Great Plains from 1860- 1890 without stepping foot on the battlefield. Photo courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis, Indiana.



Figure 4 shows a candid painting of a Great Plains Native American mother and child done in 1903 by Grace Carpenter Hudson, a white American woman. This image showcases the role of Indigenous Great Plains women as mothers and of the protectors of their communities' futures in the instance of armed conflicts from 1860-1890. Photo Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis, Indiana.

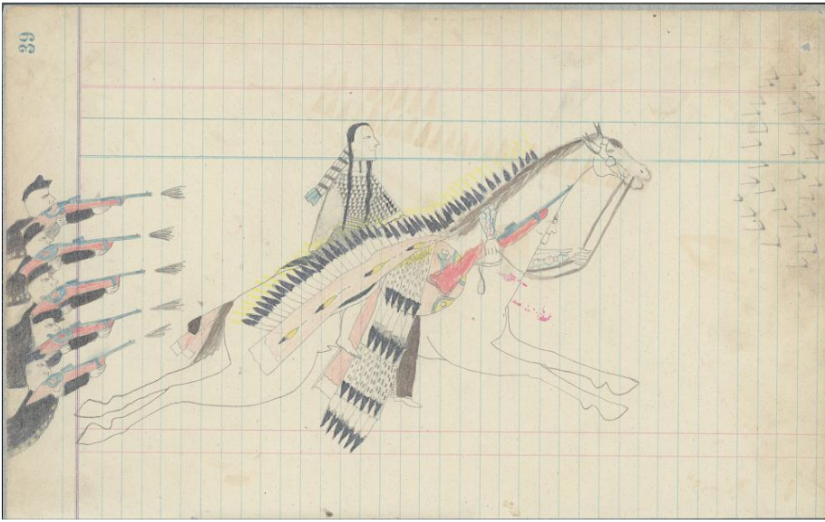


Figure 5 is a historic example of an American Indian woman's presence in ledger art depicted as an active combatant. It was illustrated by Yellow Nose, a Ute man captured by the Cheyenne in 1858 who fought in the Battle of the Rosebud and the Battle of the Little Bighorn and later used the tradition of ledger art drawings to depict the Indigenous side of Great Plains warfare in 1889. The drawing depicts the Cheyenne Buffalo Calf Road Woman at the Battle of the Rosebud. She is shown rescuing her brother Comes-In-Sight with his arm wrapped around her horse and rifle in hand. The bravery of Buffalo Calf Road Woman in this image is clearly detailed; the volley of bullets and her brother's haphazard mount shows this was a feat that required skill and speed for brother and sister to make it out alive.

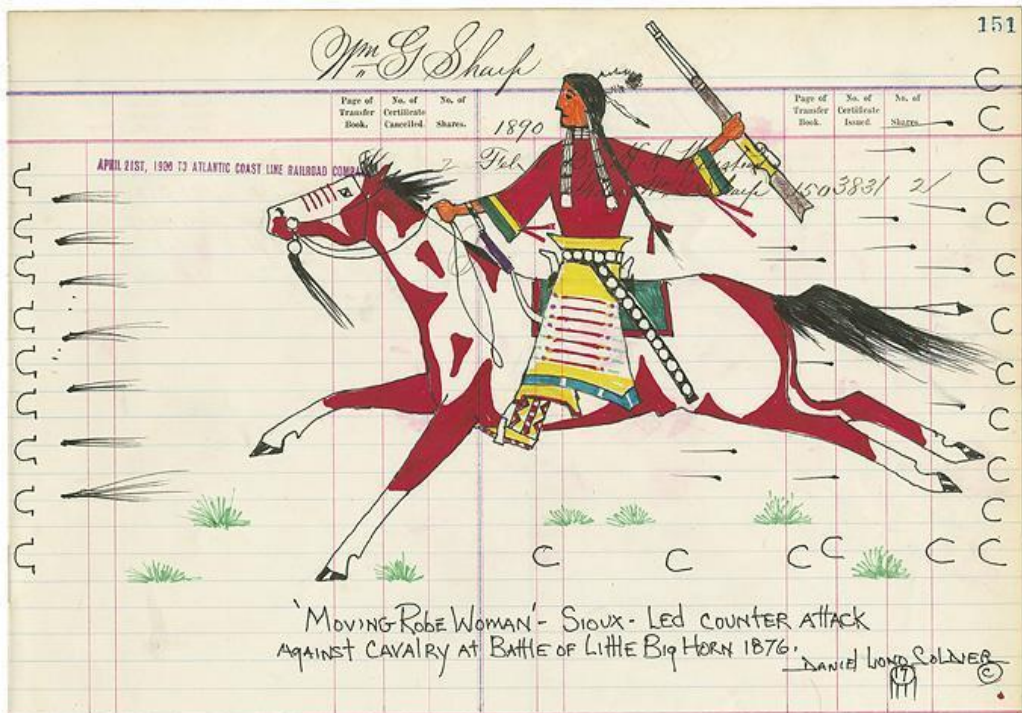


Figure 6 is an illustration Daniel Lone Soldier made of Moving Robe Woman, a member of the Hunkpapa Lakota [Sioux] Nation who fought in the Battle of the Little Bighorn.



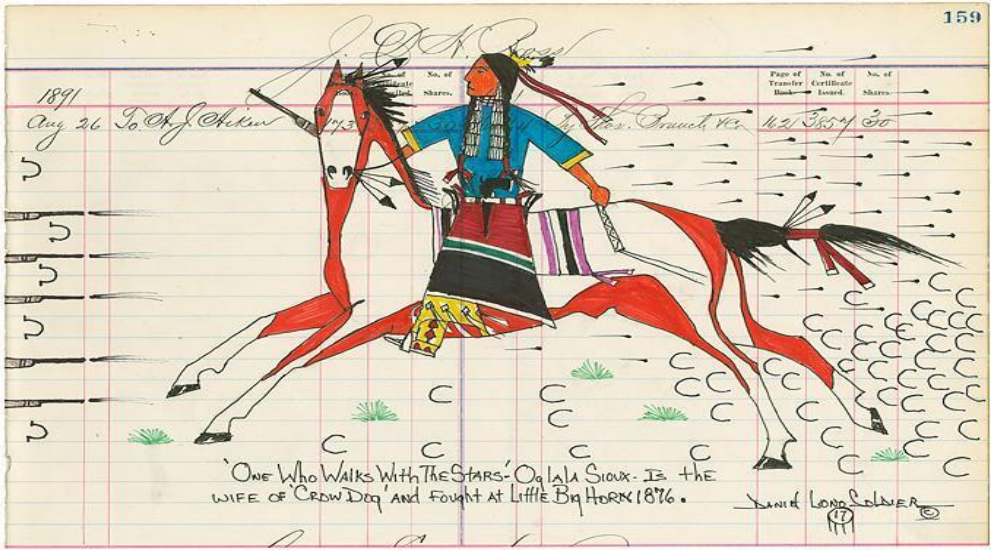


Figure 7 shows a contemporary ledger art drawing of One Who Walks with the Stars by Daniel Lone Soldier, an Oglala Lakota artist. One Who Walks with the Stars was an Oglala [Lakota] Sioux who killed retreating American cavalymen in the Battle of the Little Bighorn to protect members of her community.



*Figure 8* shows a quilt made by Santee and Yankton Dakota [Sioux] Elaine Brave Bull McLaughlin. This quilt represents the persistence of traditional Dakota quill working and beadwork traditions today despite assimilationist efforts impressed upon Great Plains Indigenous people in the twentieth century.



Figure 10 shows a painting titled *Return From War Dance* done in 2015 by Sicangu Lakota Linda Haukaas. The painting now hangs in the Chicago Field Museum, and its depiction of Lakota women in different traditional dresses over time shows that Great Plains women today are using colored pencil and paper as a new medium to pass on cultural traditions of Lakota quill working and seamstress traditions to the next generations.





*Figure 11* shows a modern Dakota Sioux powwow dress made by Norma Robertson for her daughter and granddaughter from the early 2000s. This outfit is a symbol of the first reemergence of women's roles in traditional ceremonies since 1890 after the passing of the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act. A result of various protests against treatment of Native Americans in the 1970s including Dennis Bank's American Indian Movement, AIRFA legalized the practice of traditional American Indian religious ceremonies (including music and dancing) and access to sacred sites for the first time since it was outlawed after the Wounded

Knee Massacre of 1890.<sup>180</sup>

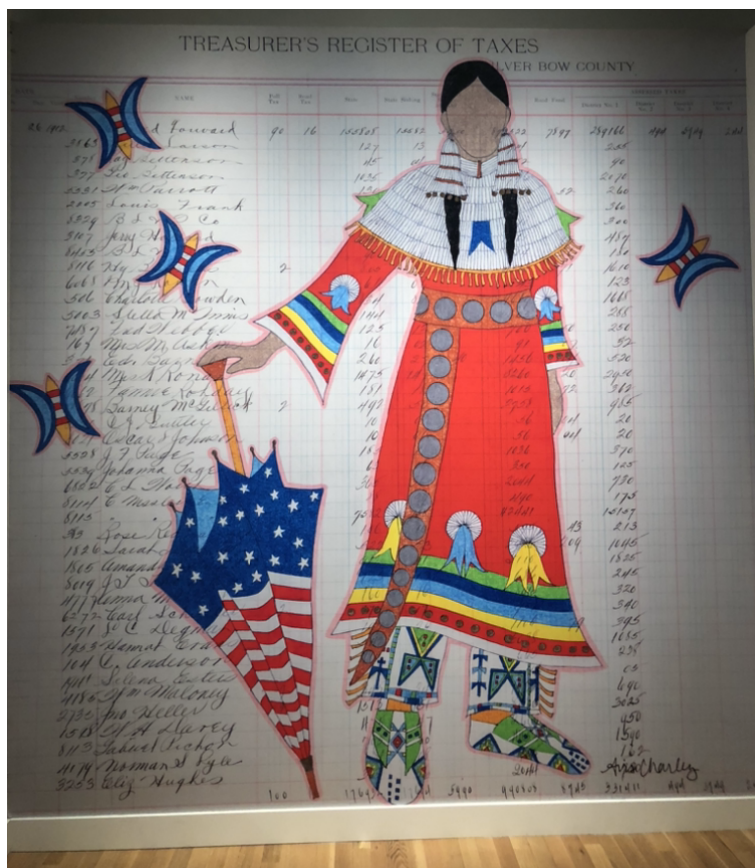


Figure 12 is a unique example of an Indigenous woman represented in ledger art made by an

<sup>180</sup> Brian Pogue, "Testimony of...The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978," BIA.Gov, 2004.; *A Good Day to Die*, directed by David Mueller and Lynn Salt, aired November 12, 2010.

Indigenous woman. Historically, ledger art was a male outlet for cultural recordings and interpretation while women used hides and beadwork to record their traditions. Avis Charley's *Hope 2020* hangs in the Eiteljorg Museum as a positive reminder of how the Indian woman of the Great Plains have fought, resisted, adapted, survived, and now thrive as mothers, cultural carriers, wives, and activists in the continued political warfare for Indigenous rights.

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# Bound by Love

*Uncovering Familial Love and Sisterhood among Chinese Comfort Women during World War II*

Kavita Gawrinauth

## Abstract

Scholars have spent nearly a century examining the topic of comfort women, the system of sex-trafficking instituted by the Japanese from 1932 to 1945. However, Chinese comfort women have not been given their due attention until the 1990s. Since 1991, academics from all over Asia have sought to reconstruct the concealed history of the Imperial Japanese Army's "comfort women" to shed light and recover the facts relating to this system of sexual slavery throughout East Asia by interviewing survivors and analyzing documentary records. Initially, the examination of monographs, testimonies, and documentaries revealed how Chinese comfort women were entirely excluded from the history of comfort women. Later in the 2000s, the scholarly neglect surrounding Chinese comfort women became apparent, causing significant chaos and prompting other historians to acknowledge them. Intellectuals have been able to piece together and identify the key themes influencing the tragedy while advancing the conversation so that it remains politically and socially relevant. The historiography of Chinese comfort women has been constructed by the works of Yoko Hayashi, Toshiyuki Tanaka, Peipei Qiu, Zhiliang Su, Lifei Chen, Li Hongxi, Edward Wang, and Hata Ikuhiko, all of whom have shed tremendous light on the terror and violation experienced by countless Chinese women. This paper focuses on a valuable yet underutilized source: the letters of Minnie Vautrin. Historically, these letters have not received the attention they deserve in the context of the Chinese comfort women's experiences. However, they fill a critical void and offer fresh insights. In addition to supporting existing scholarship, Minnie Vautrin's letters reveal hitherto unexplored aspects of the lives and suffering of Chinese comfort women. These letters provide a unique perspective that encompasses the themes of familial love and

sisterhood, offering a more holistic understanding of the hardships endured by these women during a dark chapter in history.

Author's Note: Photos are included in an appendix at the end

**Key Words: Chinese Comfort Women, Minnie Vautrin, Second Sino-Japanese War, World War II, China**

### Introduction

Within the chronicles of history's darker chapters, the narrative of Chinese comfort women stands as a profoundly unspoken testament, one that has long escaped the broader public's consciousness. These women, subjected to unimaginable suffering within clandestine brothels, bear witness to the depths of human resilience and the enduring scars of war. Their harrowing stories are deeply interwoven with the Second Sino-Japanese War—a pivotal conflict often considered the inception of World War II for China and Japan.<sup>181</sup> This military conflict ignited on July 7, 1937, catalyzed by the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in Peking,<sup>182</sup> China, which stemmed from a dispute between Japanese and Chinese troops.<sup>183</sup>

Yet, the roots of this conflict delve deeper into history, including Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria driven by the pursuit of raw materials for industrial growth. As Japan expanded its territorial grasp across China by 1937, atrocities such as the infamous Nanjing Massacre,<sup>184</sup> incidents of biological warfare, and the use of chemical

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<sup>181</sup> Edwin Moise, *Gender in Modern China*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 92.

<sup>182</sup> "Peking" or present-day "Beijing" refers to the capital of the People's Republic of China. However, during this time scholars and historians referred to China's capital as "Peking." See Moise, *Gender in Modern China*, 2.

<sup>183</sup> Matt Clayton, *Second Sino-Japanese War: A Captivating Guide to a Military Conflict Primarily Waged Between China and Japan and the Rape of Nanking*, (Stockholm: Storytel, 2021), 8.

<sup>184</sup> The capture of Nanjing by Japanese forces in 1937 marked a period of mass atrocities, including the murder and rape of Chinese civilians. In response to the Nanjing incident, where unchecked violence faced increased scrutiny and consequences, Japan established comfort stations. These stations served multiple purposes, aiming to control and redirect the actions of Japanese soldiers, providing an authorized outlet to maintain their fighting spirit within legal boundaries. This establishment contributed to the systemic abuse and suffering endured, particularly by Chinese women. See Moise, *Gender in Modern China*, 92.

weaponry left a lasting and tragic impact.<sup>185</sup> This period, often referred to as the "War of the Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression" had a catastrophic impact on China, resulting in massive casualties and significantly altering the course of Chinese history.

In this grim tapestry, a prominent figure emerged in the form of Wilhemina "Minnie" Vautrin, an American missionary and educator stationed in Nanjing, China (see fig. 1).<sup>186</sup> Serving as the President of Ginling College for 28 years, Vautrin is widely commemorated for her humanitarian work as a savior, caring for and protecting as many as ten thousand Chinese

children and women during the political strife in China.<sup>187</sup> According to historian Carol Chin, who specializes in United States-East Asian relations, missionary actions during the Second Sino-Japanese War were "closely connected with a beneficent imperialist mindset, driven by Christian beliefs and a perceived moral duty,"<sup>188</sup> exemplifying the complex interplay between missionary zeal

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<sup>185</sup> During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), Japan engaged in large-scale biological and chemical warfare in China. The infamous Unit 731, a major research facility, conducted experiments on live patients, produced deadly chemicals, and violated international agreements like the Geneva Protocol. Notable incidents include dropping plague-infected fleas over Quzhou in 1940, causing over 2,000 deaths, and anthrax and glanders attacks in Jinhua in 1942, infecting at least 6,000 and resulting in 3,000 deaths. Poisonous gasses were extensively used by Japan, estimated at over 2,000 times in 77 counties of 14 provinces, leading to tens of thousands of Chinese casualties, including civilians. Post-war, Japan abandoned hundreds of thousands of chemical weapons in China, posing ongoing health hazards. The denial of these atrocities by the Japanese government remains a contentious issue. See Friedrich Frischknecht, "The history of biological warfare. Human experimentation, modern nightmares and lone madmen in the twentieth century," *EMBO* 4, no. 1 (2003): 47-52, doi:10.1038/sj.embor.embor849.

<sup>186</sup> Minnie Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008), xx-xxii.

<sup>187</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>188</sup> The concept of "beneficent imperialism" aligns with the idea that Minnie Vautrin's role as a missionary was intertwined with a savior complex. "Beneficent imperialism" refers to the idea that imperial powers, in this case, Western missionaries, believed they were bringing benefits and improvements to the societies they deemed in need of help. This belief often stemmed from Christian convictions and a perceived moral duty to uplift and civilize. See Carol C. Chin, "Beneficent Imperialists: American Women Missionaries in China at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 3 (2003): 327-349, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24914416>.

and imperialistic attitudes prevalent among Westerners in Asia at that time.

Motivated by a commitment to safeguarding the vulnerable, Vautrin reflected a broader portrayal of "missionaries as agents of benevolence, compelled to uplift those deemed in need of salvation."<sup>189</sup> Evident in her expressions, where she referred to the Chinese women as "poor women" and lamented "how unfortunate their situation," were instances reflecting the imbalance of power dynamics, displaying "the influence of an orientalist view prevalent among Westerners engaged in missionary work."<sup>190</sup> As scholar Nancy Mason articulated, "this perspective tended to view non-Western cultures through a prism of exoticism and, at times, as entities in need of Western guidance."<sup>191</sup> An exploration of Vautrin's actions in light of this orientalist lens is important to understanding her role during the war. While embodying prevalent Western prejudices of their era, the endeavors of Vautrin and other missionary perspectives serve as illuminating conduits for comprehending Chinese culture, society, and the intricacies of gender dynamics.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Chin, "Beneficent Imperialists," 334.

<sup>190</sup> In Europe and the United States, Orientalist discourse was reproduced in academic studies, literature, popular culture, and policy circles. American Orientalism shares a number of characteristics with its European progenitors. The persistent representation of the broader East as an inferior, irrational, and emotional 'other' reflected and reified disparities in power that then informed the production of knowledge about these vast regions and their inhabitants. American missionaries, social scientists, and counterinsurgency experts used Orientalism to justify their attempts to reshape the broader East in the image of the United States. See Nancy Mason, "From The Lab to The Lotus Pond: Interactions between Orientalism and Ideals of Domestic Science," *Virginia Tech Undergraduate Historical Review* 5, no. 1 (2016): 79-83, <https://doi.org/10.21061/vtuhr.v5i1.42>, <https://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-985?p=emailAAFSZ6w8zfFQ&d=/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-985>.

<sup>191</sup> Mason, "From The Lab to The Lotus Pond," 92.

<sup>192</sup> The scholarly contributions of my paper's advisor, Professor Zaccarini, exemplify a meticulous approach to interpreting missionary sources. Her work demonstrates the importance of reading these sources with sensitivity, avoiding the imposition of Western terms and issues. Instead, it emphasizes a nuanced understanding of Chinese matters that respects and honors the voices of the Chinese people. See Maria Cristina Zaccarini, "Chinese Nationalism and Christian Womanhood in Early Twentieth Century China: The Story of Mary

The strategic transformation of Ginling College into a special camp, marked by American flags and proclamations from the embassy, stood as an attestation of her efforts. This tactical move, though not foolproof, successfully deterred Japanese soldiers from entering the college, saving the lives of more than ten thousand girls and women from death by gunfire, bayonet, sword, and rape.<sup>193</sup> Vautrin's stories offer valuable historiographical insight into her pivotal role in providing shelter and support to the victims of this tragedy, highlighting the resilience and strength of these women. Despite the profound historical significance of this war, the narrative of Chinese comfort women remains largely overshadowed.

As early as the 1930s, the Imperial Japanese Army abducted and forcibly enslaved hundreds of thousands of young girls and women in covert brothels throughout China under their oppressive system of sexual slavery. Around the same time, the euphemism "comfort woman," which verbatim translates to "a woman who gives ease and consolation," from the Japanese word "ianfu," became commonly used to mask the true horror of the plight of these women.<sup>194</sup> Chinese comfort women endured immense adversity by being compelled to sacrifice their bodies, and even after the war, they continued to bear the burden of shame and humiliation. These women suffered not only physical damage, but also endured profound mental and emotional trauma. Although the term originated in the early twentieth century, these women suffered in silence, with their stories largely ignored by the media and academia until the post-World War II era. In fact, it was not until the 1990s that scholarly communities in Asia began to study comfort women as an academic subject.

Categorically, Chinese women constitute one of the most underrepresented groups among the diverse backgrounds of comfort women, although being the largest group of women subjected and

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Kao (Kao Meiyu)," in *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity, and Social Mobility*, ed. Jessie Lutz (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, Publishers, n.d.), 351-370.

<sup>193</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, xxv-xxvi.

<sup>194</sup> Edward Wang, "The study of "comfort women": Revealing a hidden past—introduction," *Chinese Studies in History* 53, no. 1 (2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094633.2019.1691414>.

coerced into serving the Japanese military.<sup>195</sup> Due to the perception of aiding the nation's enemy, Chinese academics and the broader public rarely discussed their experiences. The reluctance to acknowledge the suffering of Chinese comfort women was ingrained in the cultural concept of "mianzi" or "face," which holds significant importance in Chinese society.<sup>196</sup> "Face" is closely tied to an individual's dignity and prestige, and the fear of "losing face" led to the silence surrounding these women's experiences. It was not until the 2000s that scholars began to unveil the horrors experienced by Chinese comfort women.

Despite having been chastised, shamed, and ignored by most of society for having served Japan, these unique circumstances, as witnessed by individuals like Minnie Vautrin, emanate the extreme brutalization felt by the Chinese comfort women. The diary entries penned by Vautrin in *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*<sup>197</sup> offer a new and compelling perspective on this matter. These letters not only support existing scholarship on the subject, but also unveil hitherto unexplored aspects of the experiences of Chinese comfort women, particularly the profound ways in which familial love and sisterhood played a central role in their resilience and survival during these harrowing times.

### Historical Context

Amidst the horrors of the war, this historical chapter sheds light on the remarkable acts of love and support carried out by parents, who embarked on perilous journeys in wartime China to find and protect daughters taken away by Japanese soldiers or gone missing. These extraordinary displays of familial love and determination not only challenged prevailing stereotypes, but also played a central role in nurturing sisterhood among Chinese comfort women. Their shared hardships and traumatic experiences created profound bonds, offering

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<sup>195</sup> Peipei Qiu, Zhiliang Su, and Lifei Chen, *Chinese Comfort Women : Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>196</sup> The notion of "saving face" is a long-established practice in Chinese culture. This concept is particularly important in social interactions and holds great significance today, given how interconnected it has become. See Anne-Laure Monfret, *Saving Face in China: A First-Hand Guide For Any Traveller To China*, (Bloomington, In: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 9-13.

<sup>197</sup> Historian Suping Lu's dedicated efforts in 2008 were instrumental in bringing Minnie Vautrin's diary entries to publication. See Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, iv.

solace, emotional support, protection, and a sense of belonging. These stories stand as tribute to the enduring power of human connection, even in the darkest of times, and exemplify the resilience of the indomitable human spirit in the thick of adversity.

While the Second Sino-Japanese War ended in 1945,<sup>198</sup> justice remained elusive for Chinese comfort women who endured suffering in the comfort stations. Their plight went largely unrecognized by the Chinese public, leaving many living in dire conditions. The establishment of comfort stations across East Asia exemplified the gender-based violence rooted in a patriarchal society. In China, this patriarchal system was characterized by men possessing primary authority, dominating positions of power, enjoying social privileges, and asserting moral superiority. It was within this societal framework that women were oppressed, and their sexuality was tightly controlled.<sup>199</sup> The patriarchal structure also upheld patrilineal traditions, where inheritance of property and titles was restricted to the male line.<sup>200</sup> These cultural values, influenced by Confucian traditions in Chinese society, imposed restrictive gender roles and standards on women.<sup>201</sup> Confucian social conventions demanded female virginity until marriage, even at the cost of her life. Consequently, society deemed a woman who survived rape impure and considered her a disgrace to her family.<sup>202</sup>

The influence of Confucian traditions, coupled with the concept of yin and yang, further reinforced the historical portrayal of Chinese women as passive and subservient. The cultural belief of yin and yang emphasized distinct gender roles and standards, where women were associated with "yin," representing qualities such as passivity and

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<sup>198</sup> Moise, *Gender in Modern China*, 93.

<sup>199</sup> Yu Xie, "Gender and Family in Contemporary China," *Population Studies Center Research Reports*, October 2013, 3, retrieved from <https://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/pubs/pdf/tr13-808.pdf>.

<sup>200</sup> Xie, "Gender and Family in Contemporary China," 3.

<sup>201</sup> Z Xie, "Regarding men as superior to women: impacts of Confucianism on family norms in China," *China Population Today* 11, no. 6 (1994): 12-16,

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12290499/>.

<sup>202</sup> Qiu, Su, and Chen, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 5.



tranquility.<sup>203</sup> In contrast, men embodied "yang," symbolizing strength and dominance.<sup>204</sup> This hierarchical structure restricted women from expressing their concerns, reinforcing their subordinate status in both public and private spheres. Practices like foot binding, concubinage, and widow suicide additionally underscored the oppressive nature of these traditions.<sup>205</sup> Despite sociopolitical changes in late twentieth-century China, patriarchal norms, narrow gender roles, and shame culture persisted.<sup>206</sup> These factors hindered former comfort women from sharing their experiences of Japanese military abuse and sexual trauma. Most communities lacked understanding or a culture of addressing the immoral actions of the Japanese Army, making redress challenging for the survivors.

During the era of these cultural and traditional norms, an influx of missionaries began arriving in China in the early 1800s.<sup>207</sup> These missionaries came from various Western countries, bringing with them their own set of beliefs, values, and humanitarian motives. This movement followed earlier efforts by European Catholics in the late sixteenth century, such as Jesuits like Matteo Ricci, who achieved both religious converts and the respect of influential Chinese figures during the Ming and Qing dynasties.<sup>208</sup> While their primary goal was often religious conversion, missionaries also challenged societal norms and were involved in promoting education for young girls, introducing physicians and addressing healthcare issues, along with social welfare

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<sup>203</sup> Qing-hua Zhu, "Women in Chinese Philosophy: Yin-Yang Theory in Feminism Constructing," *Cultural and Religious Studies* 6, no. 7 (2018): 391-393, <https://www.davidpublisher.com/index.php/Home/Article/index?id=37767.html>.

<sup>204</sup> Qing-hua Zhu, "Women in Chinese Philosophy" Yin-Yang Theory in Feminism Constructing," 393-394.

<sup>205</sup> Qing-hua Zhu, "Women in Chinese Philosophy" Yin-Yang Theory in Feminism Constructing," 394-395.

<sup>206</sup> Qiu, Su, and Chen, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 6.

<sup>207</sup> Paul Harris, "Cultural Imperialism and American Protestant Missionaries: Collaboration and Dependency in Mid-Nineteenth-Century China," *Pacific Historical Review* 60, no. 3 (1991): 328-330, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3640451>.

<sup>208</sup> Harris, "Cultural Imperialism and American Protestant Missionaries," 329.

initiatives.<sup>209</sup> Still they faced formidable challenges, such as Chinese resistance to Christianity, cultural differences, and the need to learn the language, which compelled missionaries to be resourceful. In spite of this, missionaries aimed to contribute to a broader transformation of Chinese society, providing critical services to Chinese communities.<sup>210</sup>

Until the 2000s, Chinese comfort women remained in the shadows, burdened by the shame and guilt of their experiences.<sup>211</sup> They did not wish to be further stigmatized and preferred to live discreetly. However, when Korean and Japanese survivors spoke up about the atrocities they faced, they compelled the Japanese government to acknowledge comfort women as a significant part of Japan's unresolved war crimes and denial of fundamental human rights.<sup>212</sup> Inspired by their courage, Chinese survivors went on a journey to seek justice, and soon survivors gained recognition and public sympathy. As a result, many local Chinese supporters and activists played crucial roles in researching and interviewing former comfort women.<sup>213</sup> They have also laid the foundation for further historical research and spreading the message globally to focus more attention on comfort women's issues. This transformative period not only elevated the voices of survivors, but also initiated a nuanced exploration within the realm of

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<sup>209</sup> Missionaries started schools and began educating young girls, who were considered inferior to boys in Chinese society. And they fought tirelessly to end the practice of foot-binding. Medical missionaries made efforts to spread knowledge of public health and opened free clinics to treat diseases, malnourishment, and general neglect for health efforts and hygiene. See George B. Pruden, "American Protestant Missions in Nineteenth-Century China," *Asian Intercultural Contacts* 14, no. 2 (2009): 27.

<sup>210</sup> Harris, "Cultural Imperialism and American Protestant Missionaries," 330-332.

<sup>211</sup> Qiu, Su, and Chen, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 77.

<sup>212</sup> In the face of the lawsuits brought on by former comfort women and the evidence presented by historians on the Japanese army's involvement in running and recruiting the women, Japanese government leaders have offered apologies on various occasions to South Korea. In 1994, the government organized the Asian Women's Fund, paying compensation to some "comfort women," along with an apology from the Japanese government. While the governments in Japan and South Korea both seem to have put this matter behind them and move on, the controversies over the comfort women have lived on because comfort women hailed from other countries as well. Even though China had a large number of women who also became comfort women, none of them have thus far been recognized, won a legal case, nor has anyone received compensation. See Edward Wang, "The study of "comfort women": Revealing a hidden past—introduction," 2.

<sup>213</sup> Edward Wang, "The study of "comfort women": Revealing a hidden past—introduction," 3.

historiography. Scholars grappled with diverse perspectives, methodologies, and narratives to unravel the complexities of this historical epoch. The evolution of public awareness and activism significantly influenced the scholarly discourse on Chinese comfort women, shaping the ongoing dialogue that sought to comprehend and contextualize their experiences.

### Historiography

As the international movement to address the plight of Chinese comfort women gained momentum in the early 2000s, intellectuals began to explore and understand the historical complexities surrounding their experiences. Pioneering this academic inquiry was Japanese Lawyer Yoko Hayashi, whose seminal 1999 work, "Issues Surrounding the Wartime 'Comfort Women,'" not only highlighted the prevailing lack of awareness, but also laid the foundational groundwork for subsequent scholarly discussions. In her meticulous examination, Hayashi clarified that, for many of the women who were abducted from their home countries, their ordeal was "nothing but rape and sexual enslavement."<sup>214</sup> She also noted instances in which the murder of Chinese women by Japanese soldiers was exploited as a means to "hide evidence of their crimes."<sup>215</sup> Through her groundbreaking research, Hayashi challenged the use of the term "comfort women," revealing its inadequacy in capturing the full extent of the women's brutal and cruel experiences.

While Hayashi contributed to the foundational awareness and understanding of the circumstances faced by Chinese comfort women, Professor Toshiyuki Tanaka conducted a meticulous examination of the systemic recruitment and exploitation of Chinese women by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II. In his 2002 publication, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During World War II and the US Occupation*, Tanaka explained that after the Nanjing Massacre, Japanese army units established comfort stations in their stationed areas, such as Nanjing and other nearby towns of Huzhou, Yangzhou, Changzhou, Chuxian, and Bengbu. In these comfort

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<sup>214</sup> Hayashi, "Issues Surrounding the Wartime 'Comfort Women,'" 55.

<sup>215</sup> Hayashi, "Issues Surrounding the Wartime 'Comfort Women,'" 55.

stations, "the Imperial Japanese Army primarily used Chinese girls and women, who it is strongly believed were local residents and not prostitutes."<sup>216</sup>

Tanaka highlighted that "the Japanese were very concerned about the danger of local Chinese women, who they feared could be used as spies by the Chinese forces."<sup>217</sup> Despite these concerns, the Japanese forces subjected these women to sexual violence, revealing the unjust and brutal treatment they endured. In the "liberated districts" or "hostile districts," where the Chinese Liberation Army operated, the Japanese Army implemented a brutal "scorched-earth strategy," known as "shōdo sakusen."<sup>218</sup> This strategy involved not only the deliberate destruction of resources, infrastructure, and communities, but also the ruthless act of setting fire to them. Primarily located in Shanxi and Hebei Provinces, "the treatment of local civilians by the Japanese Army was vicious."<sup>219</sup> Japanese soldiers committed acts of violence with the belief that this scorched-earth approach would eliminate both the population, and any potential support for the Chinese Liberation Army.<sup>220</sup>

Building upon this examination, East Asian historians Peipei Qiu, Zhiliang Su, and Lifei Chen significantly advanced collective understanding in their 2013 English-language monograph, *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves*. Their research delved deeper into the targeted exploitation of Chinese women by the Imperial Japanese Army and provided nuanced insights into the distinctive brutality faced by Chinese comfort women. Indeed, historians Qiu, Su, and Chen revealed that "in contrast to comfort women from different parts of East Asia who were recruited during the war, Chinese women counted for half of the estimated total of 400,000 victims that had been forced into sexual slavery since 1931 when Japan occupied Northeast China."<sup>221</sup> This perspective, coupled with the earlier foundational work of Professor Toshiyuki Tanaka and Lawyer Yoko

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<sup>216</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 45.

<sup>217</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 45.

<sup>218</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 46.

<sup>219</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 46.

<sup>220</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 46-47.

<sup>221</sup> Qiu, Zhiliang, and Lifei, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 45-46.

Hayashi, contributes to an evolving narrative surrounding the experiences of Chinese comfort women during World War II. A closer examination into the comparative analysis of comfort women revealed stark contrasts. Historical records, as uncovered by Qiu, Su, and Chen, illuminated that while "Korean and Japanese women were raped and assaulted, brutality against Chinese women was far worse. Chinese women were directly kidnapped by the Japanese, while Korean and Japanese women were tricked into comfort stations with false job offers and militaristic brainwashing."<sup>222</sup> To further illustrate this disparity, "Korean and Japanese families were paid for their daughters' false job offers, while Chinese families would instead spend large sums to save their daughters."<sup>223</sup> This discrepancy extended to the living conditions as well, "Japanese kept the Korean and Japanese women in updated comfort stations, while Chinese women endured slave-like conditions in worn-down locations."<sup>224</sup> Often, the Japanese soldiers killed the close family members of Chinese women to prevent their rescue.<sup>225</sup>

Whilst the narratives explored by Qiu, Su, and Chen shed light on the brutal realities faced by Chinese comfort women during World War II, recent scholarship by Artist Hongxi Li in 2020, titled "The Extreme Secrecy of the Japanese Army's 'Comfort Women' System," introduced a novel dimension to broaden public understanding. Li's work explored the intricate dynamics between the Japanese military and government in establishing comfort stations during the Second Sino-Japanese War. He unveiled the extreme secrecy surrounding the system, revealing implicit cooperation between the Japanese military and government officials. Li stated, "Their secrecy is also reflected in the extremely strict management system adopted by the Japanese military to prevent external leaks on the internal state of the 'comfort stations.' For example, all 'comfort stations' required that outsiders may not arbitrarily enter them, and 'comfort women' could not go out at will."<sup>226</sup> Li's findings exposed the lengths to which the Japanese government

<sup>222</sup> Qiu, Zhiliang, and Lifei, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 7-8.

<sup>223</sup> Qiu, Zhiliang, and Lifei, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 7-8.

<sup>224</sup> Qiu, Zhiliang, and Lifei, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 8.

<sup>225</sup> Qiu, Zhiliang, and Lifei, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 8.

<sup>226</sup> Hongxi Li, "The Extreme Secrecy of the Japanese Army's "Comfort Women" System," *Chinese Studies in History* 53, no. 1 (2020): 35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094633.2019.1682376>.

went to conceal the truth. Instead of restricting their soldiers' sexual desires, the Japanese government enacted various policies to appease them.

Although Tanaka earlier highlighted the Japanese Army's brutal scorched-earth strategy, involving the deliberate destruction of resources and communities, Li's work uncovered a different facet of the Japanese military's extreme measures. As the war approached its conclusion, the Japanese military implemented a policy of silencing comfort women to maintain secrecy, "Women were sent into caves and machine-gunned down, some were gassed to death in groups, and some were thrown into wells or buried alive."<sup>227</sup> These brutal acts revealed the lengths they went to conceal the crimes of the Japanese officers, aiming to protect Japan's global image. Japan's failure to acknowledge its immoral actions has resulted in countless women experiencing humiliation, societal ostracization, and immense physical and psychological pain as comfort women.<sup>228</sup>

Li's insights, particularly the Japanese government's efforts to conceal the truth, aligned with Professor Edward Wang's 2020 article "The study of "comfort women": Revealing a hidden past—introduction." Wang's research illuminated the Japanese government's reluctance to apologize and provide fair compensation to Chinese comfort women, mirroring the themes explored by Li. Wang emphasized Japan's denial of involvement in the establishment and management of comfort stations, a point that resonated with Li's exploration of the implicit cooperation between the Japanese military and government. Within his research, Wang noted ongoing scholarly debates regarding whether comfort women had volunteered and received compensation or if they had been deceived and coerced into service. Wang suggested that the latter scenario was more likely, as it

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<sup>227</sup> Li, "The Extreme Secrecy of the Japanese Army's "Comfort Women" System," 35-36.

<sup>228</sup> While some right-wing Japanese leaders continue to deny the comfort women system, other Japanese politicians, such as Miyazawa Kiichi, Murayama Tomiichi, and Kono Yohei, have all admitted that the Japanese military and government indeed carried out the comfort women system. See Li, "The Extreme Secrecy of the Japanese Army's "Comfort Women" System," 28-29.

led to a heated debate across East Asia, considering the women's victimization and loss of freedom.<sup>229</sup>

In light of what scholars have written on Chinese comfort women, for the most part, they have largely overlooked *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*. This collection of letters, taken from Minnie Vautrin's diary and published in 2008, provides a summary of her experiences in Nanjing, China, during a critical period. Among the academics mentioned throughout this paper, only Professor Ikuhiko, in his 2018 work *Comfort Women and Sex in the Battle Zone*, has ventured to include a miniscule acknowledgment of American Missionary Minnie Vautrin concerning the Chinese comfort women. He not only emphasized the significant presence of Chinese women among the enslaved prostitutes held in the so-called "comfort stations,"<sup>230</sup> but referred to Vautrin guarding the girls "the way a hen guards her chicks."<sup>231</sup>

Vautrin's significance in this analysis lies in the fact that historians have previously overlooked her contributions to the comfort women issue. Most historians have only looked at Vautrin's account in reference to the Rape of Nanjing and wartime atrocities, glancing over the primary issue at hand. This recount imparts that her diary has yet to be looked at to gain a more robust understanding of Chinese comfort women. However, these sources can provide important insights and fill a void in the general public's understanding of Chinese comfort women. Analyzing *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing* can enhance existing understanding and offer new perspectives on the extreme brutalization, family dynamics, and sisterhood that emerged among Chinese comfort women during this catastrophic time. Vautrin's scholarly contributions have been instrumental in illuminating the

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<sup>229</sup> To further support his argument, Wang referenced historian Zhiliang Su, an influential voice for researching and speaking about the sufferings of Chinese comfort women in China and beyond. By referencing Su's article "New Evidence of the Wartime Sex Slave System Implemented by Japan: Reading the Archives on the 'Comfort Women' of the Kwantung Army," Wang provided insight into the Japanese army's direct involvement in running and recruiting comfort women. However, toward the end of World War II, the Japanese Army Headquarters ordered the destruction of documents related to the operation of comfort women, making further research challenging. See Edward Wang, "The study of "comfort women": Revealing a hidden past—introduction," 2-3.

<sup>230</sup> Ikuhiko Hata, *Comfort Women and Sex in the Battle Zone*, (Connecticut: Hamilton Books, 2018), 61.

<sup>231</sup> Hata, *Sex in the Battle Zone*, 65.

profound severity of the experiences endured by Chinese comfort women, and scholars have recognized this.

### Experiencing Brutality and Familial Love

Scholars Peipei Qiu, Zhiliang Su, Lifei Chen, and Hongxi Li have extensively explored the extreme brutalization faced by Chinese comfort women at the hands of the Imperial Japanese Army. In particular, Qiu, Su, and Chen underscored the unique brutality suffered by Chinese comfort women at the hands of the Japanese Imperial Army, while Li shed light on the extreme measures employed by the Japanese military to conceal its war crimes against them. Collectively, these scholars asserted that these unresolved historical issues from World War II serve as a significant precedent in understanding human trafficking and sexual violence. Having discussed the extreme brutality experienced by the Chinese comfort women, historians Qiu, Su, Chen, and Li draw attention to an essential theme in the recollections of Vautrin. The following selections from Vautrin's diary, spanning from December 1937 to January 1938, provide a greater perception of the horrendous acts committed by the Japanese soldiers, the constant fear endured by women, looting, and the general destruction caused by the war.

During World War II, Chinese women suffered greatly due to the escalating hostility between China and Japan. Japanese soldiers were untamed and indulged in wanton killing, violation of women, wholesale looting, and widespread burning.<sup>232</sup> Vautrin witnessed the monstrous atrocities committed by the Japanese Army. In a particularly degrading incident at Ginling College in January 1938, she observed Japanese soldiers treating Chinese women as objects by "mischievously herding them like cattle, back and forth, and putting stamps on their faces,"<sup>233</sup> during a registration process for "safe residence" papers. Even with these papers supposedly ensuring safety in designated areas, the soldiers' act of stamping faces during the war was a deliberate and dehumanizing attempt to strip away the individuality of Chinese women, reducing them to mere numbers or objects. By imprinting a mark on their faces, the soldiers aimed to erase their identities,

<sup>232</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, xi.

<sup>233</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 104.



reinforcing the perception of these women as subhuman entities. In this context, the soldiers' actions at Ginling College signifies intentional degradation, showing a lack of respect for both the individuals connected to the institution and the broader cultural and intellectual fabric of Chinese society. This incident reflects the broader atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers during that time.

The Japanese soldiers sought girls as young as twelve and women up to sixty years old to take to licensed brothels. When the soldiers found girls or women, they would rape them in front of their families or force hundreds of men to leave their bedrooms and pregnant wives at the point of a bayonet.<sup>234</sup> After assaulting the girls, the soldiers would take them away, often separating them from their families permanently. Young girls took desperate measures to protect their purity, disguising themselves as men by blackening their faces, cutting their hair, and wearing male or older women's clothing. By assuming a male identity, the girls aimed to leverage the perceived safety and authority linked to males in their cultural context, demonstrating their resilience, resourcefulness, and an acute understanding of societal dynamics. It also demonstrated their determination to navigate and challenge norms for protection, especially against sexual violence. Though these precautions did not guarantee women's safety from Japanese horrors, it offered them some respite from the fear of rape.

However, Chinese men, too, experienced their own form of brutality. As Vautrin recalled:

We found the pond. At its edge there were scores of black charred bodies and among them two empty kerosene or gasoline cans. The hands of the men were wired behind them. How many bodies there were, and whether or not they were machine gunned first, and then burned, I do not know, but I hope so. In a smaller pond to the west were perhaps 20-40 more charred bodies. The shoes I saw on several men looked like civilian shoes, not soldiers. All through the hills are unburied bodies.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 83.

<sup>235</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 136.

This recounted experience by Vautrin vividly depicts the brutalities Chinese men faced at the hands of the Japanese soldiers during this period. Essentially, male civilians were not safe from the severity of Japanese aggression. Women disguised themselves as men to avoid rape, but they remained susceptible to being tied down and immolated by Japanese soldiers. This story emphasizes that neither gender nor civilian status provided immunity from the extremities of violence, shedding light on the profound impact of both male and female civilians who found themselves caught in the crossfire of war.

Despite Ginling College being declared American property, Japanese soldiers, under the guise of searching for Chinese soldiers, infiltrated the campus on December 1937. In a deceptive maneuver, they ordered the foreigners to stand or kneel outside while conducting a mock trial. Unbeknownst to the foreigners, the soldiers were actually searching for women. As the foreigners were ordered to kneel, they heard screams, believing the Japanese soldiers were taking male helpers. Only later did they realize the deception, as twelve women were taken through a side gate while the responsible individuals were kept at the front gate.<sup>236</sup> The Japanese soldiers were unquestionably strategic in conquering young girls and women. Vautrin recalled thirty girls taken from the Language School, and just the night before, she documented numerous heartbreaking stories of girls taken from their homes—one as young as twelve.<sup>237</sup> Regardless of where women sought refuge, Japanese violence persisted, instilling fear and terror within the Chinese women. Vautrin described, "I was frantically called to the old Faculty House where I was told two soldiers had gone upstairs. There, in room 538, I found one standing at the door, and one inside already raping a poor girl."<sup>238</sup> These scenarios paint a picture of unbounded horror and suffering. The Japanese soldiers treated the Chinese women as sexual objects, taking them at will to satisfy their lustful desires, completely disregarding their humanity.

As the Second Sino-Japanese War concluded, Vautrin reflected on the dreadful conditions of the city whilst walking through the streets of Nanjing. In her diary, she described "overturned buses and cars,

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<sup>236</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 85.

<sup>237</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 82.

<sup>238</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 87.

scattered dead bodies, looted and destroyed houses and shops."<sup>239</sup> Vautrin's personal narrative vividly portrayed the extensive devastation and despair in China. In summary, Vautrin contributes to the existing scholarship of knowledge on the severe hardships endured by Chinese comfort women. Nevertheless, her account also illuminates the immense love and familial bonds during this chaotic period.

Contrary to prevailing stereotypes perpetuated by public opinion in the United States, the story extends beyond the perceived preference for male children in China, shedding light on a nuanced exploration of familial bonds. While the portrayal of China often centers on instances of female infanticide, baby abandonment, and preferential treatment of boys in food and health, it is essential to contextualize these practices historically. The one-child policy, implemented in 1980, led to sex-selective abortions targeting girls due to social preference for boys which reinforced this perception.<sup>240</sup> Whereas China is often stigmatized as backward, it is important to note that child abandonment had occurred in Europe and pre-Civil War America for different reasons. Working-class Europeans who faced economic hardship and religious sensibility had to abandon their children.<sup>241</sup> Likewise, there have been episodes of female infanticide in pre-Civil War America, where mothers had taken the lives of their beloved children because there was no escape from slavery. They loved their children too much to see them suffer the cruel fate of chattel slavery.<sup>242</sup>

Despite these stereotypes, westerners carry around a disparaging view that the Chinese do not love or care for their

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<sup>239</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 89.

<sup>240</sup> Kristal Sotamayor, "The One-Child Policy Legacy on Women and Relationships in China," February 05, 2020, Independent Lens in Beyond the Films, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/the-one-child-policy-legacy-on-women-and-relationships-in-china/>.

<sup>241</sup> Julie Hardwick, "Parenting in Hard Times: Child Abandonment in Early Modern Europe," Not Even Past, January 27, 2014, <https://notevenpast.org/parenting-in-hard-times-child-abandonment-in-early-modern-europe-2/>.

<sup>242</sup> Sarah N. Roth, "'The Blade Was in My Own Breast': Slave Infanticide in 1850s Fiction," *American Nineteenth Century History* 8, no. 2 (2007): 170-172, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664650701387896>.

daughters. A rationale for this belief might stem from the fact that when China enforced the one-child policy, parents had to pay high fees to legalize their second child if they were not content with their first child being a girl.<sup>243</sup> Moreover, the practice of leaving daughters at the doors of missionary compounds was not uncommon, as Chinese parents believed that such an action would afford them a better life.<sup>244</sup> This understanding has led many to believe that China sought no hearing after World War II regarding the violation of their women because they did not care about the women themselves. While prevailing scholarship has focused on the extreme brutalization of Chinese comfort women, a compelling counter-narrative emerges as scholars have also uncovered the profound and intricate familial bonds within this dark and tragic episode. Shifting the focus beyond stereotypes illuminates the resilience, love, and sacrifices characterizing familial relationships amidst historical complexities.

An example of familial bonds is evident through the accounts of historians Qiu, Su, and Chen, who narrated the story of Zhou Fenyng, a former comfort woman. Due to extreme poverty, Fenyng's parents were unable to care for her and had to let her go. When Japanese soldiers established comfort stations in Rugao in March 1938, Fenyng was kidnapped and taken to one of the military comfort stations in the area.<sup>245</sup> As her parents already had four sons and struggled with starvation, they hoped that giving Fenyng away would increase her chances of survival. However, finding a family willing to take a girl,

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<sup>243</sup> This article discusses the proclivity of domestic students to link Chinese inability to keep their daughters with backwardness rather than poverty. See Maria Cristina Zaccarini, "Examining Gender Roles in Modern China through Mindful Cross-cultural Dialogue in a College-level History Class," (Publication, Adelphi University, 2018), 10.

<sup>244</sup> Maria Cristina Zaccarini describes the story of Mary Kao, adopted by missionary Ailie Gale, who was brought to an orphanage by her parents who likely believed doing so would give their daughter a better life. Dr. Ailie Gale went on to adopt Mary Kao, one of the babies left at the doorstep of the mission compound. While it was unusual that Kao was adopted, missionaries understood that the Chinese left their children out of desperation with the hope that they could have a better life. See Maria Cristina Zaccarini, "Chinese Nationalism and Christian Womanhood in Early Twentieth Century China: The Story of Mary Kao (Kao Meiyu)," in *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity, and Social Mobility*, ed. Jessie Lutz (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, Publishers, n.d.), 351-370.

<sup>245</sup> Qiu, Su, and Chen, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 91-92.

especially in rural areas that preferred boys for farm work, was challenging. Girls were unwanted and frequently called "money-losing goods" since they would eventually marry and require expensive dowries. In a desperate attempt, Fenying's parents left her by the roadside in the early morning, hoping someone would find her and take her home.<sup>246</sup> Fenying's parents, aware of their economic constraints, recognized their inability to provide a comfortable life for her. They hardly had enough to feed her, nor could they afford to pay her dowry when the time came for her to get married.

In the brief time she spent with her family, Fenying gave no implication of being ill-treated by her parents. In a poignant recollection of that challenging time, she recalled an old woman in the neighborhood who recognized her and took her back to her parents. Upon reuniting, she described a heartfelt scene, saying "holding me tightly, my parents cried their hearts out."<sup>247</sup> This moment not only reflects the economic hardships her family faced, but also accentuates the deep emotional bond between Fenying and her parents during their difficult decision to part ways. After reclaiming her for a short duration, her parents continued to grapple with financial challenges, and ultimately made the tough decision to sell her at the age of five to become a "child daughter-in-law,"<sup>248</sup> a common practice at the time.<sup>249</sup> Above all, Fenying's parents did not desert her because they lacked love for her, but because they could not afford her. Her parents demonstrated one of the most honorable and courageous acts parents could ever make: sacrifice. Fenying's recount exemplifies the circumstances faced by numerous women thrust into sexual slavery. It highlights that such dire situations were not a result of being unloved

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<sup>246</sup> Qiu, Su, and Chen, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 90-92.

<sup>247</sup> Qiu, Su, and Chen, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 90.

<sup>248</sup> In Chinese culture and history, the term 'child daughter-in-law' (小儿媳, xiǎo ér xí) refers to a young girl married into a family. She continues to live with her parents until she reaches an appropriate age for marital life. This practice, prevalent in traditional Chinese societies, allows the young bride time to grow before fully integrating into her husband's household. Upon reaching the appropriate age, she moves in with her in-laws, assuming the responsibilities of a married woman. See Xie, "Regarding men as superior to women," 12-16,

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12290499/>.

<sup>249</sup> Qiu, Su, and Chen, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 90.

or neglected by their families, but rather, that economic hardships often compelled parents to make agonizing decisions.

Conversely, Professor Tanaka provided significant insight into Li Xiumei's story, elaborating how she was forcibly taken by Japanese soldiers at the age of 15 from her home in Lizhuang village, Yu prefecture, in September 1942. Even with Xiumei's mother present, she was unable to physically prevent the soldiers from abducting her daughter. Xiumei was then brought to Jingui village and held captive with two other girls in a dwelling cave, a common practice in the region.<sup>250</sup> The Japanese soldiers assaulted Xiumei daily within the cave, at least two or three soldiers, sometimes ten. Chinese collaborators closely guarded the cave, preventing any escape.<sup>251</sup>

In recounting her experience, Xiumei further disclosed that she was also forcibly taken to an officer's room in the fortress, where she was subjected to rape. After about five months, she gained the courage to refuse the commander, who had been "particularly wild and ferocious in his treatment of the girls."<sup>252</sup> Dissatisfied with her noncompliance, the commanding officer administered corporal punishment utilizing his waist belt. He specifically directed the buckle toward her right ocular region, resulting in enduring visual impairment. He also administered forceful physical impact, leading her to descent to the ground and subsequent incapacitation, accompanied by intense and agonizing suffering. Later she was sent back home

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<sup>250</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 46.

<sup>251</sup> Often, local administrators collaborated with the Japanese invaders to "recruit" and kidnap women. In fact, without the help of the Chinese men, the Japanese would never have been able to carry out large-scale abductions and rapes. Evidence is presented on the direct link between local Chinese governments and the establishment of comfort stations. Documents from Chinese archives, such as a 1939 document from Wenshui County Office, highlight the involvement of local authorities in drafting women for such purposes. See Lihua Wang, "No Empire Without Collaborators," review of *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies From Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves*, by Qiu, Su, and Chen, Wellesley Centers for Women, November 13, 2023,

<https://www.wcwoonline.org/Women-s-Review-of-Books-Sept/Oct-2015/no-empire-without-col-laborators>.

<sup>252</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 46.

because her injuries made her physically unable to serve the Japanese men.<sup>253</sup>

Upon her return, she discovered that her mother had committed suicide and her father had "gone mad."<sup>254</sup> To secure her release, the family paid the Japanese troops a ransom of 600 yuan—a large sum of money at the time—borrowed from relatives.<sup>255</sup> Tragically, Xiumei's mother took her own life upon learning that the money was insufficient to secure her release. The loss shattered her father's sanity, as he "became insane with the shock of his wife's death."<sup>256</sup> Although there are stories about girls whose families had to give them up out of desperation, this sentimental account showcases a family's immense sacrifice and unconditional love for their severely injured daughter. They were willing to endure hardship and face social stigma to ensure her well-being and reunion. Their devotion and unwavering desire for her return are undeniable.

In the documentary *Twenty-Two* by filmmaker Guo Ke, an unnamed former comfort woman shared her story, hesitant to disclose her name due to fear of societal rejection. In recalling her abduction, she described how her parents desperately called out for her, but they were powerless against the Japanese soldiers.<sup>257</sup> She mentioned "The soldiers wielded bayonets, guns, and sticks, ready to unleash their wrath. But my parents risked losing their lives if they fought back too much."<sup>258</sup> Despite their vulnerability, families fought to protect their daughters,

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<sup>253</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 46.

<sup>254</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 46.

<sup>255</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 46.

<sup>256</sup> Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 46-47.

<sup>257</sup> Guo Ke, *Twenty-Two*, (2015; China: China Lion Film Distribution, 2017), DVD.

<sup>258</sup> Guo Ke, *Twenty-Two*, DVD.

countering the notion of parental detachment.<sup>259</sup> In light of being unable to save her, they risked their lives in the attempt. In the face of enduring unimaginable atrocities during the war, the woman found solace in knowing that her parents loved her, allowing her to spend her final days in peace.

Filmmaker Ke further depicted the haunting memories of former comfort women, many of whom struggled to confront the traumatic events and attempted to block out unwanted memories. Some women exclaimed during interviews, "I can't remember," or "I don't want to remember."<sup>260</sup> Whereas others yelled out, "I am so old now. What is in the past, is in the past."<sup>261</sup> Still, the women spoke of their animosity toward the Japanese soldiers, whom they called "devils."<sup>262</sup> The women's hatred stemmed from the destruction of Chinese homes and the killing of their parents. The former comfort women further divulged "The Japanese soldiers went to the extreme of throwing the bodies of the murdered families, with bound hands and feet, into rivers. After kidnapping the Chinese girls, the soldiers not only raped them but subjected them to forced labor such as laundry and fruit picking."<sup>263</sup> Any resistance or complaints would be met with threats of violence, including bayonet stabbings, shootings, and knee strikes.

During the war, daughters in China found emotional support from their familial structures amid Japanese soldier aggression. With limited power, these family members made efforts to shield and

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<sup>259</sup> In the context of this paper, "parental detachment" refers to the perceived societal notion that parents were indifferent or willing to sever ties with their daughters, particularly in situations involving the abduction of women by Japanese soldiers. The study challenges this notion by presenting instances where families resisted and fought to protect their daughters despite the imminent threat posed by the soldiers. It suggests that, contrary to the assumption of detachment, parents were emotionally connected to their daughters and took active measures to shield them from harm, even in the face of extreme adversity. This challenges the prevailing narrative of parental detachment commonly associated with such historical circumstances. See Johnson, Banghan, and Liyao, "Infant Abandonment and Adoption in China," 476-478.

<sup>260</sup> Guo Ke, *Twenty-Two*, DVD.

<sup>261</sup> Guo Ke, *Twenty-Two*, DVD.

<sup>262</sup> Guo Ke, *Twenty-Two*, DVD.

<sup>263</sup> Guo Ke, *Twenty-Two*, DVD.



support their loved ones as they coped with trauma.<sup>264</sup> The Vautrin letters demonstrate that family structures did attempt to protect their daughters and wives from sexual enslavement, offering a deeper understanding of the affection and devotion within the family unit. Explored within the letters from December 1937 to February 1938 are themes of motherhood, fatherhood, and the sacred bond between husbands and wives.

In December 1937, Vautrin detailed in her diary a story of maternal love. A distressed woman arrived at Ginling College, seeking assistance from her. She explained that she had entered the city on an errand but was unable to locate her twelve-year-old daughter, who faced challenges passing through the city gate and was presumed to be near Gwang Hwa Men, caught amid the devastating fighting.<sup>265</sup> Recognizing the impossibility of finding her daughter alone, the woman sought aid from Vautrin in a state of panic. Vautrin noted, "The mother whose little twelve-year-old girl was shut outside the city has stood outside our gate most of the day scanning crowds for some sign of her little daughter."<sup>266</sup> This account reveals the intense maternal emotions of love, protectiveness, and worry that consumed the woman as she searched for her daughter, challenging the notion that mothers

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<sup>264</sup> The Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory) centers on the dynamics of parental love, exploring its manifestations, consequences, and origins. Informed by an extensive examination of nearly 2,000 studies conducted in the United States and cross-culturally, the theory posits that children universally require acceptance, or love, from parental and other attachment figures. The absence of such acceptance has been consistently linked to a distinct form of psychological maladjustment reported by children across diverse cultural, gender, age, and ethnic contexts. Notably, individuals perceiving themselves as rejected demonstrate a heightened susceptibility to developing behavioral issues, depression, substance abuse, and various other mental health challenges. Moreover, both children and adults, regardless of cultural distinctions, tend to categorize their perceptions of acceptance-rejection into four primary classes of behavior: warmth/affection (or coldness/lack of affection), hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, and undifferentiated rejection. See Ronald P. Rohner, Abdul Khaleque, and David E. Cournoyer, "Parental Acceptance-Rejection: Theory, Methods, Cross-Cultural Evidence, and Implications," *Ethos* 33, no. 3 (2008): 299-334, <https://doi.org/10.1525/eth.2005.33.3.299>.

<sup>265</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 70.

<sup>266</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 74.

lacked affection for their daughters.<sup>267</sup> Her unwavering love and willingness to risk her life were evident throughout the ordeal. Each instance where mothers ventured out in search of their daughters was another opportunity for Japanese soldiers to perpetuate violence against them.

As Vautrin documented the profound expressions of motherly affection, her observations extended to encompass paternal love. In her diary, Vautrin noted, "Between 9 and 10 tonight Mr. Chen and I made a tour of the campus. Hu, the laundry man, and Tsu, his farmer neighbor, were both up. They are fearful of retreating soldiers tonight, for they have young girls in their families."<sup>268</sup> Even though these men were physically separated from their families, they felt a strong instinct to safeguard their daughters. The inability to shield their daughters from the Japanese, as Minnie observed, instilled within them a deep sense of guilt and unease. She expressed "Even when physically present on campus, their thoughts and concerns were directed towards the well-being of their daughters."<sup>269</sup> Vautrin also depicted the story of a father who wanted to bring food to his daughter, a refugee on campus. Even with the restriction on men entering the campus, the father insisted, stating, "I have only my daughter left now."<sup>270</sup> Here Vautrin acknowledged a father's deep concern for his daughter's well-being and longing for emotional connection. Regardless of the risks during wartime China, the father made personal and financial sacrifices to support his daughter.

Vautrin's diary entries extensively recorded occurrences where the significance of mothers' involvement extended beyond familial ties.

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<sup>267</sup> Historical and cultural factors, such as traditional gender preferences and societal structures, contributed to the perception of unwanted girl children in China, particularly evident in the practice of infant abandonment. Economic considerations and the preference for sons within birth quotas played a crucial role in the abandonment of daughters. The study underscores the significance of birth order and sibling composition in determining which girls were abandoned, citing economic hardship and fear of fines as prevalent reasons. Overall, the article highlights the complex interplay of cultural norms, economic factors, and government policies that contribute to the perception of Chinese girls and daughters as unwanted. See Kay Johnson and Huang Banghan and Wang Liyao, "Infant Abandonment and Adoption in China," *Population and Development Review* 24, no. 3 (1998): 472-479, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2808152>.

<sup>268</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 76.

<sup>269</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 77.

<sup>270</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 106.

In another passage within Vautrin's diary, a mother is depicted not only inquiring about her own daughter, but seeking information about two other girls. Vautrin reflected on a mother who brought in and begged her to receive three young girls. On February 1938, Vautrin elucidated: One is her daughter who went to the country in early December, the other two were country girls. They say it has been terrible in the country. Girls had to be hidden in covered holes in the earth. Soldiers would try to discover these hiding places by stamping on the earth to see if there were hollow places below. They said they had spent most of their days since December 12th in these holes.<sup>271</sup>

This mother brought these daughters from the countryside to Nanjing, seeking a safer haven for them, even though it meant being separated. Recognizing the harsh conditions in the countryside, she made the difficult decision to ensure their protection. The timeframe of December 1937 to March 1938 highlights the immense suffering and turmoil these women experienced while hiding in holes.

In a parallel scenario echoing prior events, mothers' also came to the rescue of other young women, even those unfamiliar to them. In January 1938, as part of the registration process for "safe papers," Japanese soldiers engaged in a discriminatory selection process where twenty women were chosen from a line and falsely labeled as ex-prostitutes. The criteria for selection were notably arbitrary and superficial, hinging upon physical attributes such as having curly hair or being well-dressed. However, the intervention of mothers and relatives proved pivotal in averting their forced placement into licensed brothels.<sup>272</sup> In doing so, they not only safeguarded and vouched for their own daughters, but also shielded other girls from being stripped of their dignity.

Vautrin's accounts provided nuanced insights into intricate family dynamics, accentuating the sanctified bond between husbands and wives in response to Japanese threats. Vautrin wrote, "Many women are faced with terrible dilemma to stay with their husbands and be raped by soldiers when their husbands are turned out of the house

<sup>271</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 173.

<sup>272</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 100-104.

at point of bayonet; to come to Ginling, and leave their husbands—the latter then runs the risk of being carried off and killed."<sup>273</sup> Struggling with the conflicting desire for protection from Japanese soldiers and the consequences of separation from their husbands, most women chose to seek shelter at institutions as a means of safeguarding themselves from the risk of violation.

Vautrin, delving into the intricacies of this narrative, brought to light women's conflicted feelings about leaving their husbands—a sentiment shared by husbands who adamantly resisted separation from their wives. Vautrin explained, "But I rather think men prefer to register here where some of their womenfolk can bear witness, in case they are taken for soldiers."<sup>274</sup> Men were strategic in deciding to remain near their wives—not just for emotional reasons—but also as a practical measure to navigate the challenging and perilous circumstances of war. The presence of their wives would act as evidence to verify their civilian status, protecting them from forced conscription.<sup>275</sup>

As the war ended, the women staying at Ginling were in search of their husbands and asked to write letters and petitions to help them. Vautrin acknowledged that many of the missing men were likely deceased. Nonetheless, Vautrin's admiration for "how the poor Chinese women grasped at every ray of hope of securing the return of their husbands or sons or brothers"<sup>276</sup> can be understood in the context of the challenges presented by the absence of their loved ones. This admiration illustrated the resilience demonstrated by these women, signifying a recognition of their fortitude in confronting uncertainty and significant loss.

### **Experiencing Collectivity and Sisterhood**

Stories of comfort women not only reveal familial and marital bonds but also highlight the sisterhood among Chinese women. Though popular culture and media in the United States and China often portray Chinese women as "faceless, quiet, and invisible," during the Second Sino-Japanese War, "Chinese women were anything but

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<sup>273</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 93.

<sup>274</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 103.

<sup>275</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 103.

<sup>276</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 185.

passive victims."<sup>277</sup> Prevailing stereotypes and portrayals of Chinese women as passive victims may have been perpetuated or reinforced to some extent by the narratives promoted in popular culture and media, which often emphasized heroism and valor in mobilizing national support, overshadowing the personal suffering and diverse experiences of women during the war.<sup>278</sup> Chinese women defied these stereotypes and developed strong connections, fostering a sense of belonging for the women who felt isolated. The sisterhood among comfort women defies simple description, as it played a crucial role in fostering acceptance among the women. It acted as a second family, enabling them to grow from their shared experiences. The solidarity among these women empowered them to persevere through the atrocities committed against them.<sup>279</sup> Professor Jing He's analysis of sisterhood in constructing modern Chinese nationalism and modernity highlighted that "sisterhood serves as a catalyst for women's awakening independence and self-discrimination."<sup>280</sup> Women, seeking peers who regarded them as equals, turned to each other. Professor Yun Zhu further clarified that "there is no female collective without its multiple others."<sup>281</sup> Women's attachment to one another symbolized the construction of their gender identity, allowing them to escape male-defined inferiority by celebrating their unique gender attributes

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<sup>277</sup> Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China*, (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>278</sup> Kyoo Lee, "Why Asian Female Stereotypes Matter to All: Beyond Black and White, East and West," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no. 1 (2013): 86-83, [muse.jhu.edu/article/501723](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/501723).

<sup>279</sup> Sisterhood is a phenomena that can develop through all kinds of experiences that unify women. The Long March, like the Second Sino-Japanese War, unified women through the expedition of untold hardship, sacrifice and tragedy. The Chinese Communist Party actively sought to mobilize women throughout the war, especially peasants in the rural areas of China's interior provinces. Several pro-Communist, women-only paramilitary organizations were formed under Communist leadership to promote women's self-defense activities against the invading Japanese. See Fan Hong, "Iron Bodies: Women, War, and Sport in the Early Communist Movement in Modern China," *Journal of Sport History* 24, no. 1 (1997): 1-2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43609798>.

<sup>280</sup> Jing He, "Sisterhood across Cultures—With Reference to Chen Ran's and Amy Tan's Fiction," 2012, Intercultural Communication Studies, <https://web.uri.edu/jaics/files/12HeJing.pdf>.

<sup>281</sup> Yun Zhu, *Imagining Sisterhood in Modern Chinese Texts, 1890–1937*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 157.

through strong bonds.<sup>282</sup> Therefore, "sisterly intimacy becomes a place where women pursue an identity unbound by social constraints yet buoyed by 'mutual companionship.'"<sup>283</sup> During the war, Chinese women facing shared oppression under the Japanese military, found mutual support by forming a sisterhood that allowed them to experience freedom and equality during times of violence.

Sisterhood also established a collective identity among Chinese women who saw themselves in opposition to the Japanese "devils."<sup>284</sup> Historian Sara Park argued that in the sexual slavery system women were "subjected to intersectional violence both as women and as nationals in the colonized and/or enemy-occupied territories."<sup>285</sup> Vautrin's letters provide pioneering insights into the experiences of women who sought safety, protected each other, made significant contributions to the war effort, and instilled comfort and hope within other women. The following selections from Vautrin's letters from December 1937 to February 1938 further demonstrate the depth of this sisterhood fueled by anti-Japanese sentiment. Amid devastating conditions in the wartime countryside, women in China sought safety in numbers to protect themselves from Japanese soldiers. Vautrin recalled about one hundred women, including four who had been hiding in a fuel stack for weeks, gathering during the daily afternoon services, realizing the effectiveness of group actions for protection.<sup>286</sup>

In her documentation of the events from December 1937, Vautrin highlighted a specific condition set by the Japanese during their requisitioning of a hundred Chinese women prostitutes. The Japanese soldiers declared "if they found one hundred prostitutes among the refugees, they would open a licensed brothel and the soldiers would stop 'molesting' civilian women."<sup>287</sup> Vautrin, in her role as an administrator on the campus, allowed the search to proceed after the

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<sup>282</sup> Zhu, *Imagining Sisterhood in Modern Chinese Texts*, 157.

<sup>283</sup> Zhu, *Imagining Sisterhood in Modern Chinese Texts*, 157.

<sup>284</sup> Guo Ke, *Twenty-Two*, DVD.

<sup>285</sup> Sara Park, "Colonialism and Sisterhood: Japanese Female Activists and the 'Comfort Women,'" *Critical Sociology in Sage Journals* 47, no. 1 (2019): 135-137,

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920519876078>.

<sup>286</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 171-179.

<sup>287</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 93.

soldiers pledged "not to take any decent women."<sup>288</sup> Although the term "decent" lacked explicit definition in Vautrin's account, it suggested a distinction between those engaged in prostitution and women perceived as conventionally respectable. This decision should be interpreted within the challenging wartime conditions, where Vautrin may have prioritized preventing immediate harm to the women while navigating the limited options available to her "in the face of the soldiers' ruthless behavior."<sup>289</sup>

After searching for some time, they found twenty-one women who had been prostitutes. The Japanese officers believed there were more on the campus but that most hid or lied about their old profession. So these officers said that they planned on returning and searching again, terrifying the women refugees on campus.<sup>290</sup> In the identification of twenty-one women as former prostitutes by Japanese soldiers, it is crucial to recall the capricious and superficial nature of the criteria used in their selection process. Consequently, there exists uncertainty regarding the veracity of these identifications, as the criteria lacked substantive grounding and were not indicative of the actual circumstances or backgrounds of the women in question. Had the twenty-one women not stepped forward, however, the Japanese soldiers would likely have taken civilian women. Stepping forward, these so-called prostitutes were subsequently taken away by the soldiers, never to be heard from again. Notwithstanding society viewing them as impure, their act of protection for other young women was an extraordinary display of sisterhood.

The women did not victimize themselves but contributed to the war effort by engaging in sewing, knitting, and cooking to support their male counterparts fighting in the war.<sup>291</sup> Vautrin explained, "Six neighborhood women were in one room sewing on padded garments for wounded soldiers, and ten pupils were in the adjoining room also sewing."<sup>292</sup> By collectively working on garments for the protection of the Chinese men, the women earned a few dollars to support

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<sup>288</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 93.

<sup>289</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 93.

<sup>290</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 93.

<sup>291</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 205.

<sup>292</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 32-33.

themselves. Not only that, but Vautrin supposed that "many of the refugee women, especially wives and mothers, were deeply distressed from the Japanese abduction of their husbands and sons who had not yet returned."<sup>293</sup> She said, "Many of these women were left with little children and they had literally no means of support—nothing they could do but beg and even that is impossible now in a community so poor as ours."<sup>294</sup> Therefore, women found solace in each other's company, alleviating their worries and anxieties. Vautrin exemplified this support when, after receiving a basket of apples from the Shanghai unit, she threw a successful party for the women staff members. The event included tea, songs, and even continued in the basement during an air raid, highlighting the women's emotional support, reducing loneliness and fostering camaraderie.

In another scenario, Vautrin mentioned that sisterhood flourished as an anti-Japanese collective that united women from various social classes. Vautrin clarified, "If they can afford it [rice] they pay three coppers a bowl for it; if they really have no money their case is investigated and they are given a red tag which means free rice."<sup>295</sup> This information indicated that Ginling College housed women from different social statuses. Vautrin later corroborated this information by noting, "the staff members and the women have eaten together in the dining room of 400 and that has been a source of strengthening too—I mean all those who do not have families here."<sup>296</sup> Vautrin conveyed that the interaction between women of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds was facilitated by wartime conditions, fostering connections that might not have occurred otherwise.

Even as the war ended, Japanese atrocities persisted, but women were reluctant to leave the safety zones. Vautrin noted in February 1938, "At 5 pm about 200 young women came to kowtow and begged to remain."<sup>297</sup> These women confided in Vautrin, saying, "they would rather starve on campus than to be forced to go out."<sup>298</sup> This recount

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<sup>293</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, xxvi.

<sup>294</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 200.

<sup>295</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 147.

<sup>296</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 150.

<sup>297</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 159.

<sup>298</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 157.



underscores the importance of safety zones as not merely physical shelters but as vital symbols of solidarity, providing women with a sense of refuge amid the persisting threat of Japanese atrocities. These women remained too frightened to return to their homes, uncertain about what awaited them once they left campus. Some women shared with Vautrin the horrific conditions they encountered when attempting to leave the safety zone, leading them to return to Ginling. These women did not openly disclose their rape experiences, as they felt deeply ashamed, but they bravely shared their stories with Vautrin to secure housing for women on campus.<sup>299</sup>

### Conclusion

At the heart of this narrative lies the overarching theme of sacrificial endeavors amid the prevalent threats of violence brought about by the exigencies of war. Both maternal and paternal figures exhibited a voluntary commitment to jeopardize personal safety at significant personal expense to safeguard their daughters from the conflict. Simultaneously, the influential dynamic of familial love acted as a guiding force, precipitating the emergence of sisterhood during this period, thereby serving as a wellspring of hope for the women involved. This communal bond fostered unity and mutual support, inspiring collective perseverance in the face of adversities, surpassing individual afflictions, and instilling a shared sense of hope.

Minnie Vautrin offers a unique lens into the experiences of Chinese comfort women. This paper can contribute to understanding existing scholarship, as it illustrates the complexities of the sisterhood that formed among Chinese comfort women during the Second Sino-Japanese War. In turning attention to the academic realm of history, historians have explored Minnie Vautrin's role in the context of the Rape of Nanjing. However, the issue of Chinese comfort women merits further research. As the memories of these women fade with time, this work underscores the importance of academics revisiting and reevaluating this case to understand Japan's institutionalized role in sex trafficking. Shedding light on the experiences of Chinese comfort women aims to combat the trivialization of their history.

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<sup>299</sup> Vautrin, *Terror in Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing*, 155.

Often overlooked pieces of historiography reveal the significance of Chinese comfort women in the historical record and in fostering a sense of moral duty. This study transcends the perception of them solely as victims, recognizing their roles as daughters and sisters, thus addressing a significant historical issue and emphasizing the importance of human rights. Even though each woman's individual experience varied, their testimonies, as documented by scholars, reveal commonalities in emotional and physical trauma they endured.

The implementation of trauma memorial museums serves as a crucial defense against the fading memories of comfort women, offering a tangible connection to their experiences. By showcasing photographs, documentary films, audio recordings, and objects from the era, these museums provide a lasting testament to the suffering endured by these women. The displays foster empathy and community-building as individuals connect their contemporary experiences to the historical plight of comfort women. An illustrative example can be found in the portraits displayed at the Nanjing Museum of the Site of the Lijixiang Comfort Stations (see fig. 2).<sup>300</sup>

These monochromatic portraits tell a sentimental story of mistreatment and pain etched on the aged faces of the depicted women. The significance of such portraits lies in their role as indispensable tools for preventing the disappearance of these stories. While these museums can evoke emotions such as anger, their primary purpose is not to incite rage but to promote the concept of peace, acting as a powerful reminder to prevent the recurrence of similar historical events. This dual function is essential in preserving the memory of comfort women and encouraging a collective commitment to fostering a more peaceful future. This not only emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and learning from dark chapters in history but also raises critical questions about why certain events, particularly those involving women, are often overlooked. This intersection between gender, history, and memory invites a deeper examination of societal attitudes that shape our understanding of the past. In tandem with these reflections on

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<sup>300</sup> Siyi Wang, "Memorials and memory: The curation and interpretation of trauma narratives—using the examples of exhibitions on the theme of "comfort women" in East Asian Society," *Chinese Studies in History* 53, no. 1 (2020): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094633.2019.1682405>.

gender roles and historical narratives, the challenges confronted by nascent feminist movements in China, suppressed by the Chinese Communist Party, accentuate the broader struggle for women's rights and the complexities surrounding discussions on comfort women. It must be mentioned that the geopolitical complexities surrounding China's efforts to gain international recognition, exemplified by challenges in securing the UNESCO Memory of the World listing, resurfaces the diverse perspectives that shape the discourse on the historical issue of these women.<sup>301</sup> The Japanese military's comfort women system stands as an example of inhumane wartime violence. It is imperative to etch this historical chapter into the collective memory of humanity, offering an instructive lesson for future generations to avert the repetition of such atrocities. Amplifying the voices of these women honors their resilience and perpetuates a commitment to preserving their history, ensuring that the narrative remains an indelible part of collective consciousness.



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<sup>301</sup> Edward Vickers, "China's appropriation of comfort women activism," East Asia Forum Economics, Politics and Public Policy in East Asia and the Pacific, May 2023, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2023/05/24/chinas-appropriation-of-comfort-women-activism/>.

Figure 1. Minnie Vautrin (center) and members of the faculty of Ginling Girl's College in Nanjing. (See "The Nanjing Safety Zone," December 10, 2018, "Facing History and Ourselves," <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/nanjing-safety-zone#:~:text=Subject&text=The%20Nanjing%20Safety%20Zone%20included,embassy%2C%20and%20various%20Chinese%20buildings.>)



Figure 2. Portraits displayed in a "comfort women" exhibit at Nanjing Museum of the site of the Lijixiang Comfort Stations. (See Memorials and memory: The curation and interpretation of trauma narratives—using the examples of exhibitions on the theme of "comfort women" in East Asian Society," January 1, 2020, "Japanese WAM," <https://wam-peace.org/en/about>.)

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# Regression of Female Representation in the Films of Ernst Lubitsch:

*Lubitsch's portrayal of female agency from World War I to post World War II*

KATHERINE (KATIE) TERRELL

Society assumes that, with time, the representation of women progressed and offered more equality on screen. However, the films of the German-American filmmaker Ernst Lubitsch provide a fascinating case study, as his earlier films offered women liberation from societal norms, and his later films were more restrictive and conformed to societal expectations for women. Why do we see a regression in representation instead of progression in his films? This essay deals with concepts of female representation in cinema through their visual liberation on the screen (breaking free from restrictive social norms) and their agency (their ability to make choices and take action) in the film's narrative.

The first part of this essay addresses one of Ernst Lubitsch's favorite actresses, the fabulous Ossi Oswalda, and her visual liberation on the screen in the film *The Oyster Princess* (1919.) This section explores how ideas of the New Woman influenced Oswalda's performance. The New Woman ideology refers to independent women seeking radical change in social spheres; this Lubitsch film (and much of his early cinema) encourages independent women. The second part of this essay addresses the film *Cluny Brown* (1946) and how it removed agency from female characters and urged women to conform to more traditional societal roles. This section examines this ideological shift from independence to conformity and how Lubitsch conformed to Hollywood's expectations for women with this film. Ernst Lubitsch's movies initially display a progressive portrayal of women by visually freeing them on the screen. However, they eventually devolve into depicting women's societal roles as restrictive due to their limited agency.

Focusing on one specific director's filmography can provide a more in-depth understanding of their artistic vision, style, and thematic

concerns, or in relation to this essay - their representation of women throughout their career. This essay highlights the works of the German-American film director Ernst Lubitsch, who was a prominent figure in the early and classical Hollywood eras. Born in 1892, Lubitsch began his career in silent cinema in Germany and later transitioned to Hollywood (and eventually sound cinema.) Lubitsch was a major director in his time, enjoying critical and commercial success. He directed various genres, including historical dramas, musicals, and romantic comedies. Some of his notable works include *The Love Parade* (1929), *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940), *To Be or Not To Be* (1942), and *Heaven Can Wait* (1943.) His impact on the film industry can be seen not only in the success of his individual films but also in the lasting influence of his directorial style on subsequent generations of filmmakers. For example, many acclaimed directors have cited Lubitsch as an influence on their work. Filmmakers like Billy Wilder,<sup>302</sup> Alfred Hitchcock<sup>303</sup>, and later directors like Woody Allen<sup>304</sup> have all admired Lubitsch's directorial style. His influence during the birth of Hollywood and classical cinema, as well as his influence on later directors, makes him a vital director to discuss.

In Lubitsch's oeuvre, his female characters are complex, often intelligent, witty, and possess agency. For example, this can be seen in all of Lubitsch's early films, including the lead actress Ossi Oswalda, but also in the character of Rischka in *Die Bergkatze* (The Wildcat, 1921), Lily in *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), and Gilda Farrell in *Design For Living* (1933). These women are all presented by Lubitsch as strong, independent, and liberated. Furthermore, they also often reject conventional norms. Lily is a pickpocket who lives life on her own terms,<sup>305</sup> Gilda chooses to maintain a relationship with two men rather

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<sup>302</sup> Billy Wilder had a sign in his office that said “How would Lubitsch do it?” - Yogerst, Chris. “Review | A Forgotten Filmmaker Who Influenced Alfred Hitchcock and Billy Wilder Gets His Due.” *Washington Post*, July 5, 2018.

<sup>303</sup> Alfred Hitchcock also counted Lubitsch as an influence on his work. - Yogerst, Chris. “Review | A Forgotten Filmmaker Who Influenced Alfred Hitchcock and Billy Wilder Gets His Due.” *Washington Post*, July 5, 2018.

<sup>304</sup> Jones, Kent. “Interview: Woody Allen.” *Film Comment*. Accessed November 21, 2023.

<sup>305</sup> Lubitsch, Ernst, director. *Trouble in Paradise*, Paramount Pictures, 1932. 1 hr 23 min.

than settle down with one,<sup>306</sup> Rischka leads a group of bandits,<sup>307</sup> and Ossi Oswalda, rejects the passive, demure female archetype.<sup>308</sup> Because so many of Lubitsch's early female characters are liberated, *Cluny Brown* stands out so much more. As the last film Ernst Lubitsch completed, *Cluny Brown* departed from the rest of Lubitsch's filmography. However, this likely isn't because Lubitsch changed his beliefs; instead, it's likely because of the pressure put on him by a changing society.

As this essay examines female representation in his films, it's crucial to recognize the limitations imposed by the casting practices of his time. This essay primarily focuses on the representation of white women in Lubitsch's works, which reflects the racial biases inherent in the classical Hollywood eras. Women of color faced significant barriers to entry, and their opportunities were severely limited. As we appreciate Lubitsch's legacy and the contributions to white actresses in his films, it is crucial to recognize the omission of women of color. This omission, rooted in historical racism, highlights a broader issue of representation and the need for more inclusive storytelling.

Female representation in cinema is crucial and reflects the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the recognition of women's experiences, perspectives, and agency. This essay offers an interesting case study because Ernst Lubitsch's films show regression at the very end of his career instead progressing forward and offering a better representation of female characters. Analyzing the complexities of female representation in past films can significantly impact the future by informing and shaping the way female characters are portrayed in future films. By studying this, we can gain insight into how cultural attitudes towards gender roles and expectations have evolved and how these attitudes have been reflected in cinema and film history. This analysis can help us identify patterns of representation that perpetuate stereotypes and harmful gender norms and inspire future filmmakers to create more diverse, complex, and empowering representations of women on screen.

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<sup>306</sup> Lubitsch, Ernst, director. *Design For Living*, Paramount Pictures, 1933. 1 hr 31 min.

<sup>307</sup> Lubitsch, Ernst, director. *Die Bergkatze* (The Wildcat,) Projektion-AG Union (PAGU), 1921. 1 hr 19 min.

<sup>308</sup> Lubitsch, Ernst, director. *The Oyster Princess*, Projektion-AG Union (PAGU), 1919. 1 hr.

## *The Oyster Princess* and Ossi's UNPrincess-like Performance

Ernst Lubitsch was perhaps best known as "the Lubitsch touch," his cinematic trademarks and style of directing. Many scholars have spent pages of academic text arguing about his touch and how it's incorporated into this film or that one. Instead of focusing on that aspect of Lubitsch's films, this section focuses on the performance of one of his favorite actresses of his silent cinema period: Ossi Oswalda.

In 1919, Lubitsch frantically produced films at an astonishing rate. He had 11 films in production; seven were released that year, with three more in the works for 1920. Most of his 1919 releases were shorter comedies (running about forty minutes to just over an hour,) and three of them included the outstanding Ossi Oswalda. In the 1919 films, she took the lead in *My Wife, the Movie Star* (presumed lost), *The Doll*, and, of course, *The Oyster Princess* (*Die Austernprinzessin*.)

*The Oyster Princess* was Lubitsch's second feature-length comedy and was released during economic and political crises.<sup>309</sup> This comedy is a silent black-and-white film with German intertitles. Kurt Richter designed the set decorations, Kurt Waschneck led the technical direction, and Theodor Sparkuhl was in charge of cinematography. The film was loosely based on an operetta by Leo Fall entitled *Die Dollarprinzessin*, which features the coal mogul Couder, his snobbish daughter Alice, and her lover Fredy Wehrbuch. The main narrative of the operetta is that an impoverished but proud man (Fredy) refuses to let himself be bought by a woman (Alice) who is just as proud but also rich.<sup>310</sup> This plot contrasts Lubitsch's production of *The Oyster Princess* since Pince Nucki seems perfectly happy to be pulled out of his financial problems by his rich bride.

*The Oyster Princess* stars Ossi Oswalda playing the pampered daughter of the Oyster tycoon; after reading about a wedding in the papers, she declares that if the daughter of the shoe-polish king can

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<sup>309</sup>Hake, Sabine. *Passions and Deceptions: The Early Films of Ernst Lubitsch*. Princeton University Press, 1992.

<sup>310</sup>Hake, Sabine. *Passions and Deceptions: The Early Films of Ernst Lubitsch*. Princeton University Press, 1992.

marry a count, then she can marry a prince! In typical Lubitschian fashion, the plot proceeds with a plethora of problematic blunders caused by deception and misunderstanding. Instead of marrying Nucki, a penniless prince, she marries his long-time valet, the perplexed and unprince-like Josef. A wedding and one foxtrot epidemic later, Ossi meets the real Prince Nucki. She falls for him (more like fights for him, given the boxing match she participates in) and learns that (surprise!) she’s already married to this man since Josef signed Prince Nucki’s name on the wedding certificate.

Although the film is humorous and Lubitschian, it is also drenched in modernity. Lubitsch makes fun of the aristocracy in the scenes with Prince Nucki and his false throne room while also demonstrating the weight titles still hold since Ossi desperately wants to marry a prince only so that she can be a princess by name. She already has the riches traditionally associated with royalty, but her father is part of the new rich. He may be called the “Oyster King,” but he’ll never actually hold the title of king; instead, he’s more similar to a tycoon, mogul, or robber baron. But Ossi, the character, feels the need to marry nobility; to turn her “Oyster Princess” position into the genuine title of Princess Ossi. But still, throughout the film, she never actually acts like the proper princess. Although Ossi is vain and cares about her beauty, like a princess, and has the financial ability to dress as one, she’s never calm, contained, graceful, or peaceful. This film suggests a new form of what a princess might look like in modernity, and as Ossi’s performance implies, the modern princess might also be a New Woman.

Although Scott Eyman doesn’t believe Lubitsch was particularly aware of politics and explains that “Lubitsch’s friends never thought of him as being politically aware...”<sup>311</sup>, this doesn’t mean political undercurrents aren’t present in Lubitsch’s films. Femininity in the Weimar Republic in Germany began to shift with the emergence of the idea of the New Woman. She symbolized nonconformity and a progression toward ‘modernity.’ This new modern society wasn’t just characterized by new technology and growing consumerism, as the author, Sabine Hake, of the book *Passions and Deceptions: The Early Films*

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<sup>311</sup>Eyman, Scott. *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise*. (Page 205) New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

of Ernst Lubitsch might have one believe, it was also a time of freedom for young women. These women were often sexually free females ready to begin an independent life in a Germany of economic and political opportunities. In 1919, the same year *The Oyster Princess* was released, women were finally allowed to vote and hold office. Additionally, in Germany, a year before the film's release, more than 11 million women were employed, which accounted for 36% of the workforce.<sup>312</sup> The New Woman was also welcome to wear outfits of her choosing, such as a masculine-tailored blazer, shorter skirt, or even pants!<sup>313</sup> These bold and liberating fashion choices were accompanied by loosening patriarchal social norms. Women were free to have careers of their choice, travel alone, or even initiate romantic relationships.

Many films of the era incorporate New Woman ideology, such as the 1920 film *Why Change Your Wife?*<sup>314</sup> This film follows the wife's progression, Beth, from a traditional woman to a New Woman. Beth begins the film moderately dressed and reserved (both in her statements and actions/gestures on screen.) It's not until her husband leaves her for a younger woman that Beth evolves. She abandons her old traditional way, adopts the style of the New Woman, and learns to let loose and enjoy fun leisure activities. Towards the film's end, Beth and her now ex-husband meet again, finally reconnect, and fall in love. This movie is just one additional example (not from Lubitsch), but plenty of other films from the same era incorporate the same New Woman ideology.

If Lubitsch was aware of politics and changing social norms involving women, then the decisions he made regarding women in his films aptly depict them as unchained. But if Lubitsch was unaware of politics or social changes, as Eymann would have us believe, then Ossi Oswalda is chiefly responsible for her performance as a New Woman in *The Oyster Princess*. But since there is no real evidence to support one

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<sup>312</sup>Facing History and Ourselves, "Women in the Weimar Republic," last updated May 12, 2020.

<sup>313</sup>Roos, Julia. "The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany Katie Sutton." *Women's History Review* 22, no. 6 (2013): 1042–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2013.785117>.

<sup>314</sup>DeMille, Cecil B., director. *Why Change Your Wife?*, Paramount Pictures, 1920. 1 hr 30 min.

side or the other, it's just as likely that both actor and director influenced the liberated performance of Oswald's character in the film.

Regardless of whose idea it was, the film would be nothing without Ossi Oswalda. The German press had claimed Oswalda as their own Mary Pickford, but on screen, Oswalda was defiantly her own woman. In Lubitsch's films, she's vivacious, humorous, spunky, assertive, and independent. She's liberated from the confines of traditional womanhood. Although Sabine Hake spends much of her time discussing the materialism and consumerism of *The Oyster Princess* and a brief amount of time on the woman as spectacle, another reading of the film is possible, that of the liberated free woman that Oswalda embodies through her performance.

Most of her performances for Lubitsch show Oswaldai as unchained and free in her desires; if she doesn't want to act like a lady, then she doesn't. She doesn't politely shake hands; she jerks them. She throws objects with her entire body and cannot be contained to the frame the camera attempts to confine her to. During the foxtrot scene in *The Oyster Princess*, she asks a server if he knows how to dance, and instead of politely removing the tray from his hands, she smacks it at full force. Her performance style is wild, loose, and as if she has been emancipated from the constraints of society. Nowhere is Ossi's liberation from the limitations of her gender more evident than what is illustrated in lavish glory during the boxing match scene.

This sequence begins with an organized group of women, "The Association of Millionaire's Daughters for the Prevention of Dipsomania," holding a breakfast. All the women in attendance compose themselves with the highest consideration for proper conduct. The women are elegant, with their legs crossed, and each contained to their space—the traditional perfect woman. But the audience gets a hint that looks can be misleading when the women raise their fists in the air, which is not very ladylike; instead, it's quick, jerky, and forceful. This punch in the air hints towards the movement we'll see in the upcoming shots of the boxing match. As the breakfast concludes, the women move into the auditorium-like space to hold their patient consulting hours. A brief shot depicts their "patients," who are the woozy male drunkards picked up from the night before. The women revert to their original programming as they file into the auditorium in



prim fashion. Taking their seats, they immediately cross their legs and clasp their hands together in their laps. None of the ladies filled the entire space provided by the chairs; each was isolated and confined to the seat's limits (Figure 1). The shot cuts to a drunk Prince Nucki being brought to the ladies' association by carriage. He takes up the entire floor of the vehicle, sprawled out, masculine, and taking up all available space.



Figure 1: Ladies at their association meeting, confined and separated - Scene from *The Oyster Princess* (1919)

The next shot is of the first patient being brought in to see the Association. The ladies banter with one another and don't seem to help the man before he is dragged away by the men in uniforms. The shot cuts to Prince Nucki once again, and we see him unbalanced and swaying from left to right. Thrown through the gate into the ladies' auditorium, he collapses to the floor. The prince's presence grabs the ladies' attention, and they dart up from their seats. They run down to help Prince Nucki to his feet, and as they do so, they jostle him across the frame. The ladies engulf and encompass Prince Nucki, and we begin to notice the women's harsh and unrefined actions (Figure 2). In this sequence, they forcefully pull his arms, and at one point, Ossi slaps him. After enough shaking, Ossi says, "Alright then - we'll settle the matter with a boxing match." This statement leads all the women to

drop Prince Nucki and storm off towards the door and presumably the boxing arena.



Figure 2: Women engulf Prince - Scene from *The Oyster Princess* (1919)



Figure 3: Wide stances during boxing match - Scene from *The Oyster Princess* (1919)

As the fight sequence ends, we see the women hobble out of the room, clutching their legs, arms, and backs. Their hair has fallen from their meticulously crafted hairdos. Ossi and another woman are the last fighting pair left; the two characters are sprawled across the entire frame and are physically pictured as larger than Prince Nucki. As Ossi lands the final blow, she takes a masculine stance, with her legs spread apart and her arms flexed to show her muscles. (Figure 4) As she realizes she has won the match, she quickly throws her arms up into the

air and declares her victory. This form is the most space Ossi has taken up on the screen, yet in a glorious X shape, as she occupies the most space she possibly could (Figure 5).



Figure 4: Ossi in a masculine pose - Scene from *The Oyster Princess* (1919)

Figure 5: Ossi in X shape occupying lots of space - Scene from *The Oyster Princess* (1919)



Ossi's liberation, depicted by her performance, is most evident when discussed in relation to Iris Young's article "Throwing Like a girl." Young's article discusses how women and girls tend to inhabit space differently from their male counterparts. Young suggests that women "wait for an object to come within our bodily field rather than move out toward it."<sup>315</sup> Her statement is true in many circumstances, but not in this scene, as we watch Ossi and the other women run towards Prince Nucki and then proceed to jostle and take him for themselves. Young also mentions, "Women often approach a physical engagement with things with timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy."<sup>316</sup> Ossi is none of these things during the sequence (and she's also the one who suggested the boxing match in the first place!) Instead, she's confident, self-assured, and assertive with her actions. Young also proposes that "the woman's motion tends not to reach, extend, lean, stretch, and follow through in the direction of her intent."<sup>317</sup> Essentially, the space available to move is constricted. This statement is evident in the auditorium shot, where the women have societal constraints put on them as well as physical. They behave like ladies because that's what is expected of them, so they move deliberately, cross their legs, and clasp their hands in their laps. They are also physically constrained by the chair in this shot. But not during the boxing match. The bodies of the women, and Ossi specifically, are dynamic and thrown into motion. Ossi takes up space, especially at the end of the sequence, where she consumes as much space as possible (her x formation) to demonstrate her enthusiasm and success (Figure 5).

Furthermore, Young proposes that there is a specific way that girls perform actions, "the whole body is not put into fluid and directed

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<sup>315</sup>Young, Iris Marion. "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Compartment Motility and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 137–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20008753>.

<sup>316</sup>Young, Iris Marion. "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Compartment Motility and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 137–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20008753>.

<sup>317</sup>Young, Iris Marion. "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Compartment Motility and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 137–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20008753>.

motion, but rather...the motion is concentrated in one body part."<sup>318</sup> But this isn't the case with Ossi; she flings herself into things. Ossi's actions are forceful and jerky. When slapping or throwing a punch, we don't smoothly see the shoulder moving, then the elbow, then the hand. The motion isn't graceful, and the boxing match is the epitome of aggressive movement as the terms in boxing indicate; "blow," "jab," "punch," and "hook." While the boxing match literally shows Ossi taking up space with her non-fluid movements, it's not the only incident in the film. It's worth mentioning that the foxtrot epidemic at the wedding before the boxing match is also ungraceful, as dancing couples bounce up and down jerkily to the music. Ossi is seen dancing the foxtrot alone when her father comes up and tells her, "not so exuberant," but Ossi ignores his suggestion and proceeds to bounce up and down even more exuberantly and now with her arms raised to the sky (Figure 6). She continues to ignore society, occupy space, and do whatever she desires.

Although Ossi's performance is by no means that of a "princess" (one who is the embodiment of what it means to act ladylike or "throw like a girl"), Ossi is the queen of occupying space on the screen. She's fierce, self-assured, and assertive about who she is. *The Oyster Princess* is a story of the New Woman, the new version of what it means to be a princess in the modern era, and the new liberated free woman that Ossi embodies through her performance in the film.



Figure 6: Ossi dancing foxtrot with arms raised - Scene from *The Oyster Princess* (1919)

<sup>318</sup>Young, Iris Marion. "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Compartment Motility and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 137–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20008753>.

*The Oyster Princess* is an embodiment of the social ideology of the early twentieth century. The New Woman demanded equal treatment and took her independence. She also tended to physically change her appearance (for example, how Ossi wore shorts in the film). Cinema reflects society's ideology, so in the 1920s, Lubitsch's films depicted a more independent woman (one that mirrored the women in the audience of his films.) We can't know if Lubitsch took the film in a more liberated direction or if Ossi herself pushed for a more liberated character. Still, either way, Lubitsch's film *The Oyster Princess* portrayed an independent woman. Thus, this correlation depicts the direct influence of society on cinema.

For the most part, Ernst Lubitsch consistently portrayed liberated women throughout his career. For example, in his early transition to Hollywood, the film *The Marriage Circle* (1924) focuses on women's independence and how the female characters navigate societal expectations and assert their desires.<sup>319</sup> I've already briefly mentioned the film *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), where the character of Lily is a cunning and liberated woman who engages in witty banter and participates in elaborate cons, thus embodying the spirit of the New Woman.<sup>320</sup> As well as *Design for Living* (1933), where the character Gilda rejects traditional relationship norms and challenges the expectations of monogamy.<sup>321</sup> But there's also *Heaven Can Wait* (1943), Lubitsch's penultimate completed film.<sup>322</sup> Although it's primarily focused on the main male actor, the women in the movie are still given essential roles. Martha is positioned as a traditional wife, yet she has a mind of her own and pushes back against Henry's (her eventual husband's) beliefs and wishes. She's also fiercely resilient in the face of adversity. Although she is a lover, a wife, and a mother in this story, Martha is a multifaceted character. Lubitsch also avoids clichés in this film and instead embraces a more realistic portrayal of a woman navigating the complexities of marriage and life. Although she is presented physically as a more traditional female character than some of Lubitsch's other

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<sup>319</sup> Lubitsch, Ernst, director. *The Marriage Circle*, Warner Bros, 1924. 1 hr 32 min.

<sup>320</sup> Lubitsch, Ernst, director. *Trouble in Paradise*, Paramount Pictures, 1932. 1 hr 23 min.

<sup>321</sup> Lubitsch, Ernst, director. *Design For Living*, Paramount Pictures, 1933. 1 hr 31 min.

<sup>322</sup> Lubitsch, Ernst, director. *Heaven Can Wait*, 20th Century Studios, 1943. 1 hr 52 min.

more liberated women, this film still contrasts his last completed film, *Cluney Brown* (1946).

### **"Squirrels to the Nuts:" The Hypocrisy of *Cluney Brown* in Relation to Women's Societal Roles**

*Cluney Brown* attempts to support women and their right to do what they please, yet falls short of its goal. The story depicts a young woman who is told, all her life, to conform to society's expectations. The intended message of "Squirrels to the Nuts" is that she should break free from expectations and follow her dreams. But the film *Cluney Brown* (1946) from Ernst Lubitsch's sound era is not quite the unchained masterpiece that is his silent film *The Oyster Princess* (1919.) In the first section, I discussed Ossi Oswalda and how her performance in *The Oyster Princess* embodied the New Woman mentality sweeping Germany in 1919. In *Cluney Brown*, a similar situation occurred where beliefs from the contemporary period seeped in and influenced the film. Unlike *The Oyster Princesses*, which seeks to liberate women, this later Lubitsch film, *Cluney Brown*, encouraged women to conform to more traditional societal roles.<sup>323</sup>

*Cluney Brown* was adapted from a book written by Margery Sharp and published in 1944. Later, 20th Century Fox acquired the movie rights, and Darryl Zanuck, the studio head at Fox, chose Ernst Lubitsch to direct<sup>324</sup> unlike many of Lubitsch's films where Lubitsch specifically chose the base play or book. This time, the base narrative was selected for him. Next, the screenplay was written by Samuel Hoffenstein and Elizabeth Reinhardt. Until this point, all of Lubitsch's female characters were entirely written by men, marking Reinhardt's role the first time a woman partially wrote a female character in a Lubitsch film. The movie starred Charles Boyer and Jennifer Jones and was the last film Lubitsch completed before his death in 1947. Although it was not well received at the time, it has since been viewed in a more positive light and considered his farewell to cinema. As Scott Eyman, the author of *Ernst*

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<sup>323</sup> Lubitsch, Ernst, director. *Cluney Brown*, 20th Century Studios, 1946. 1 hr 40 min.

<sup>324</sup> Eyman, Scott. *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise*. (Page 339) New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015.



*Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise*, writes, in the 1940s *Cluny Brown* struck audiences as mild, satisfactory entertainment but no more.<sup>325</sup>

The film *Cluny Brown* revolves around the main character who is a plumber's niece. She struggles to find her place in society as men look on with disdain at her career choice as a plumber, a traditionally masculine profession. This includes her uncle, who, to teach her to stay within her social station, sends Cluny to work as a maid in the house of Sir Henry Carmel and his wife, Alice. Cluny soon finds herself torn between her passionate attraction towards Adam Belinski, a political refugee staying as a guest in the house of Henry and Alice, and the prospect of a stable marriage with stuffy Jonathan Wilson, a chemist. It must be acknowledged that the film's premise is set before World War II but released after it. Given the later release, the film's attitude towards women aligns more with contemporary beliefs from the late 1940s. Right before and during World War II, many women were actually encouraged to follow careers, so had this film accurately portrayed the time, Cluny would've been accepted as a plumber. However, given the negative attitudes of the late 1940s towards working women, the film more closely aligns with those beliefs. Thus, the movie has many subtle messages about the (primary) role domesticity should play in a woman's life.



Figure 7: Norman Rockwell *Rosie the Riveter* (1943) - Saturday Evening Post cover May 29, 1943

302 Rosie the Riveter, Post covers, May 29, 1943

<sup>325</sup> Eyman, Scott. *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise*. (Page 341) New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015.





Figure 8: Famous Propaganda Rosie - produced by J. Howard Miller in 1943 for Westinghouse Electric

The film industry was booming in the 1940s, allowing films to reach more people than ever before, thereby spreading their encoded messages worldwide. American involvement in World War II profoundly changed American society, specifically for women. While men were sent to fight overseas, women were actively encouraged to take over their jobs, stepping out of the domestic sphere and into the public one. This encouragement took the form of promotional posters and advertisements. One of the most well-known symbols of the time was Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter, and she first appeared on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1943<sup>326</sup> (Figure 7).<sup>327</sup>

Rosie the Riveter offers many similarities to the figure of Cluny Brown in the film. During WWII, Rosie the Riveter offered the image of an emancipated woman, similar to Cluny's depiction at the beginning of the film. Cluny is like Rosie; she's working side by side with her uncle as a plumber (a typically masculine profession.) There's even a

<sup>326</sup>History.com Editors. "Rosie the Riveter." History.com. A&E Television Networks, April 23, 2010.

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/rosie-the-riveter#:~:text=For%20years%2C%20the%20inspiration%20for,Run%20Bomber%20Plant%20near%20Detroit.>

<sup>327</sup>Another version of Rosie was created earlier in 1942 but didn't gain popularity until after Rockwell's version. See Figure 8.

scene in the film where she rolls up her sleeves to get to work, similar to Rosie's visual depiction (Figures 9 and 10).



Figures 9 and 10: Cluny Brown as a plumber (sleeves rolled like Rosie, hair back, curl in front) - Scenes from *Cluny Brown* (1946)

But as the film progresses, Cluny's uncle forces her to abandon her passion to be a plumber and retreat to domestic work as a maid. After WWII ended, women, who had entered the workforce during the war, were either fired or expected to retreat to the domestic sphere once men returned home.<sup>328</sup> With the slight taste of freedom women were offered during the war by becoming working women, adjusting to post-war society was challenging. Women were now forced to address their identity, torn between the independent worker and the dependent housewife (and mother figure.)

This ideological shift was echoed in many films starting from 1945 and into the 1950s; working women had to choose between a career and a man. But men never had to choose; they could always have both. Moreover, during this period, several films didn't even present a career as a viable option for women, portraying them solely as homemakers. One excellent (non-Lubitsch) example of this is the 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life*.<sup>329</sup> The film explores the consequences of George Bailey having never been born and, essential for this essay, the

<sup>328</sup>Vergun, David. "Rosie the Riveter Inspired Women to Serve in World War II." U.S. Department of Defense, March 21, 2019.

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/story/Article/1791664/rosie-the-riveter-inspire-d-women-to-serve-in-world-war-ii/#~:text=In%20online%20with%20the%20E2%80%9CRosie.so%20the%20men%20could%20fight.>

<sup>329</sup> Capra, Frank, director. *It's a Wonderful Life*, Paramount Pictures, 1946. 2 hr 10 min.

film's depiction of his previously devoted wife's transformation into an unmarried librarian. As a wife, Mary Bailey is a loving mother and homemaker. She's fulfilling herself as a traditional housewife, but she's single and a career woman without her husband. The film depicts this not as another possible life path but as a negative change. Instead of being single, she's a spinster. This portrayal in *It's a Wonderful Life*, which was released directly after WWII and in the same year as *Cluny Brown*, reflects the expectations prevalent during that period, suggesting that a woman's purpose should be intrinsically tied to her role as a wife and mother. The film indirectly conveys the message that a deviation from this traditional path, such as embracing a single and career-focused life, is a negative outcome. It's worth admitting that Hollywood was not necessarily reflective of society but rather offered depictions of how society "should be."<sup>330</sup> Distorted images of women were (and still are) a powerful way of keeping mainstream ideologies dominant.

The connection to Rosie and women in the workforce of the 1940s is further exacerbated by Cluny's identity crisis in the film. Like women of the period, Cluny Brown is torn between different societal roles. At the start of the film, she wants to be an independent worker (plumber), considers becoming a dependent housewife in the middle (her relationship with the chemist,) and, as we are led to believe, she becomes a mother at the end. She "finds her place" in the arms of Adam Belinski and as a mother to their child. Cluny can't seem to have it all. Even if the dialogue and verbal messages in the narrative proclaim that she (or anyone) can be whatever she wants to be (you can even feed squirrels to the nuts if you wish), the narrative and visual depictions don't support this claim. The portrayal of Cluny and the subtle narrative arc becomes the encoded message, while the dialogue proclaims freedom of desire. Given Lubitsch's silent films that

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<sup>330</sup> Hoover, T. K. (2010). *The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Motherhood, Occupational Prestige and the Roles of Women in Hollywood Films of the 1940s and 1950s*. UC Riverside. ProQuest ID: Hoover\_ucr\_0032D\_10280. Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5f76gct. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/86z4c5j0>

"Although these jobs were intended to be temporary, after the war many women were reluctant to surrender their jobs, so the government instituted a new propaganda campaign, as part of the 'reconversion' process from military to civilian production, which encouraged women and to return to housekeeping in order to give up their jobs to the returning men."

supported the unchained and free New Woman (like *The Oyster Princess*.) this specific film is a significant step backward for the freedom of the female Lubitsch character. Instead of supporting women's liberation, as he did in earlier films, he now seems to agree with societal standards set for women.

Lubitsch is well known for using repetitive motifs throughout his silent and sound eras. In this film, the moral theme of the story is embodied by the humorous auditory phrase "squirrels to the nuts." It is a ridiculous phrase, and anyone who isn't in on the joke is perplexed when it is repeated throughout the film, yet it's a very Lubitschian thing to do. For example, in the earlier silent film *The Oyster Princess*, the father in the intertext consistently says, "This doesn't impress me at all," until he's finally impressed by the film's end.<sup>331</sup> This statement is an example of an extended joke made with silent dialogue. In comparison, the film *Cluny Brown* uses auditory dialogue for the same effect. The joke "squirrels to the nuts" is introduced at the beginning of the film and is extended throughout it. In contrast with the extended joke in *The Oyster Princess*, this phrase is not only humorous but also intended as the film's message.

The first instance the phrase is used is by Adam Belinski when he tells Cluny Brown, "No one can tell you where your place is. Where is my place? Where is anybody's place? I'll tell you where it is. Wherever you're happy, that's your place...In Hyde park, for instance, some people like to feed nuts to the squirrels. But if it makes you happy to feed squirrels to the nuts, who am I to say nuts to the squirrels?" The line "squirrels to the nuts" will become a motto throughout the rest of the film. Instead of following society's expectations (feeding nuts to squirrels), one should do their own thing (feed squirrels to the nuts.) This phrase would be a super powerful line about female liberation if only the plot/narrative backed up the idea. This film tells women to be free while visually depicting women with limited options. Then, instead of encouraging them to break free, this film encourages them to submit to their expected societal role. (Essentially, to be a helpless domestic housewife who needs a man to save her.)

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<sup>331</sup>Lubitsch, Ernst, director. *The Oyster Princess*, Projektion-AG Union (PAGU), 1919. 1 hr.

One of the most difficult scenes to watch in *Cluny Brown* shows a helpless, out-of-control Cluny, who is intoxicated and submitting to the whims of men. Even if this scene was socially accepted by audiences in the 1940s, the drunk scene in *Cluny Brown* is hard to watch in this day and age.

In the scene, Cluny is trying alcohol for the first time. It's her very first cocktail. Then, Adam Belinski, knowing that she's drunk already, tells her to "Have some more." The other man in the room questions that decision and asks, "Should she?" Belinski responds, "Definitely." Not only is Cluny drunk, but she is also moaning and squirming on the couch. This scene may have played more harmlessly if the film had been silent, but the direct connotation made with the moans is that of sexual acts. Those acts further imply the passionate desires of the men (specifically Belinski) to take advantage of Cluny. We cannot know how audiences reacted to this scene years ago when the film was first released, but it's currently difficult to watch now. In today's society, women have to fear accepting drinks from men for fear of men spiking their drinks.<sup>332</sup> So, this scene in *Cluny Brown* plays poorly today. Additionally, it appears even worse after the audience has seen the rest of the film since we know that Cluny does end up with Belinski, the same man who was trying to get her drunk (and potentially take advantage of her in this state.) This scene doesn't show a strong, liberated woman in control of what she wants. Instead, it shows Cluny as absolutely helpless and bending to the wishes of the

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<sup>332</sup> Jaffe, A.E., Blayney, J.A., Graupensperger, S., Cooper, R. & Larimer, M.E. (2022) Prepartying and incapacitated rape: Is drinking a risk factor or an outcome? *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 46, 447– 457. Available from: <https://doi-org.stanford.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/acer.14779>

According to one source, "unwanted sexual experiences are common among college students; up to a third of college women and a quarter of college men report an unwanted sexual experience. During college, the most common form of nonconsensual sex experienced by both women and men is when an individual is too intoxicated to consent due to substance use, known as incapacitated rape (IR)." But this is just one report, and additionally, many rape cases aren't reported. This source just shows that rape due to intoxication is fairly common and makes this scene difficult to watch given Adam Belinski's actions and dialogue; it seems likely that his intentions were to further intoxicate Cluny Brown to take advantage of her. Thankfully nothing happens and her Uncle arrives to save her from the situation, but date rape is still something many women fear, which makes the scene difficult to watch in today's time.

men in her life, so much so that she marries her intoxicator by the end of the film.

Compared to earlier Lubitsch films, it could be claimed that there's a drunk scene in *The Oyster Princess*. In the scene, Ossi loses all control and dances with her arms raised to the sky; it's a harmless "lose all control and just be yourself" kind of scene. No one is taking advantage of Ossi here, and she's entirely in control of her actions. (She even goes against her father's desires!) She may be tipsy, but she's not fully intoxicated. Ossi still controls what she wants, so this doesn't negatively affect how we view her role as a strong independent woman in the film. Whereas Cluny's depiction is submissive, weak, and that of a woman taken advantage of.

The film's ending is also problematic when considering the film is all about making your own place in the world; instead of doing that for herself, Cluny needs a man to swoop in and save her. In the scene where Belinski is leaving on the train, Cluny runs to him to thank him for the parting present. Belinski asks about the chemist, and Cluny informs him that they have had issues in the relationship. At a party, Cluny publicly fixed the bathroom's plumbing and embarrassed the chemist, although he is now willing to overlook this fault and continue with the relationship. Cluny understands and explains, "One can't be foolish and expect to have a place in life...." In this sentence, "foolish" represents her passion for plumbing; no one else has accepted her desire (they find it foolish), so Cluny is conforming to societal expectations. Belinski then tells her to "Get in" the train car, and Cluny willingly does as he's asked of her. The train leaves the station, and in Belinski's following dialogue, he explains that if he were rich, he would build her a mansion with an elaborate set of plumbing and show Madam Cluny Belinski off at ornate dinner parties. He then tells her that he will write a best-selling murder mystery to support the two of them. Her immediate response is, "But Mr. Belinski, what if there should be three of us." In the space of one scene, Cluny has gone from being helplessly stuck in a relationship with a chemist, to being saved by Belinsky, to then pondering motherhood. This end is a complete contradiction of the message. The film constantly repeats in the dialogue that you chose your own place in life, yet never visually or

narratively shows us that women can make their own way in life; instead, they are controlled by the whims of men.

The very last scenes in the film show her living a domesticated but rich life with Belinski. Given that in the scene, Belinski's second best-selling novel has been released, the audience is led to assume that the couple has a child.<sup>333</sup> (He said he would write a second bestseller if there were "three of them.") In the last scene, there's absolutely no indication that she's a plumber, as she's richly dressed and fully absorbed into high society (Figure 11). The audience also gets no depiction of her at work; instead, we're shown her as a conformed and domesticated woman. Passionate Cluny Brown, who loves plumbing at the start of the film, loses her own identity by the end, becoming the quiet, respectable, and domesticated wife with her child.



Figure 11: Cluny Brown as Madam Belinski (rich, fashionable, and domesticated)

Although Cluny is only ever herself when plumbing, and she's incredibly passionate about this, we get very few scenes of her happy and liberated in the film. Whereas Ossi demands her place in *The Oyster*

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<sup>333</sup>Since this is a period piece set before World War II, one can assume that by the end of the film, it's probably the late 1940s. In this decade, if a couple has a child, we believe they are also married. Although it is also suggested that she's married given the reference to Madam Belinski.



*Princess*, Cluny is apologetic about her desires.<sup>334</sup> Cluny embodies what society expected of women in the 1940s and 1950s. This film doesn't radically break down expectations of women as *The Oyster Princess* does; instead, *Cluny Brown* agrees with society's expectations of women. Cluny is apologetic, forgiving, hoping to find her place (not demand it for herself,) needs a man to save her, and accepts a romantically passionate but domestic life over a life as an independent free plumber. This film tells the characters (using sound devices like dialogue) that they need to find themselves. Yet, it doesn't actually show this positive change to the audience; instead, it visually sees a backward transformation. We are not shown her following her passion for a career. Like in many Hollywood films of this period, Cluny Brown has to choose between a man and her career; she can't have both.

Notably, this is an issue Ossi Oswalda never faced in *The Oyster Princess*, but Lubitsch also cleverly took care of this in the plot since she's a millionaire's daughter and would never have to work a day in her life. Instead, she simply hosts "The Association of Millionaire's Daughters for the Prevention of Dipsomania." So even if Ossi isn't depicted with a proper job, she's still doing something to "help" society. She has everything she could ever want in life, and if she doesn't, she will demand it. Ossi can have it all and never has to choose.

Cluny Brown doesn't demand what she wants, and she is not free or unchained like Ossi Oswalda, so this film, *Cluny Brown*, shows a backward trend for Lubitsch. His earlier films were radical and supported the messages of the New Woman movement in Germany in 1919. *Cluny Brown* doesn't quite succeed in being the liberating film it might have wanted to be in the 1940s with its use of liberating messages (feeding squirrels to the nuts.) Instead of shattering societal standards, *Cluny Brown* simply supports them.

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<sup>334</sup> An additional note that I didn't have anywhere else to put, but, whereas the character of Ossi asserted her freedom by wearing pants, Cluny is dressed in traditional long skirts. So that's just another subtle encoded message within the film.



## Conclusion

The regression of female representation in Lubitsch's films is startling when taken at face value, but after analyzing the historical conditions, it makes more sense. Because of the New Woman movement, women were more liberated on screen, and because of the pressure for women to return to the domestic sphere after WWII, women were also encouraged to return to the domestic sphere in films. By looking at these two films in conversation with one another and in the context of their historical time period, we can see how cultural attitudes toward gender roles and expectations have evolved and how these attitudes have been reflected in cinema. This is also key to understanding the director Ernst Lubitsch. Taking the title of this essay at face value, one could see him as a villainous figure in cinema history choosing to repress women, but that's not the case.

The regression of representation of women in his last film was more based on societal pressures than his own beliefs. As we can see in *Cluny Brown*, he wants women to follow their desires and repeats the mantra over the course of the film, and yet the ending is still less than desirable for Cluny Brown (as it's the ending expected of Hollywood films at the time.) By understanding that the contemporary ideas of society are reflected in cinema, looking back on Lubitsch, we can view him in a more favorable light.

Understanding the history of female representation in film is essential because it emphasizes the need for future filmmakers to create more varied, complex, and empowering portrayals of women on screen. By doing so, they can challenge and overcome prejudices perpetuated in cinema and promote a more equitable and inclusive representation of women.

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