

# 琉球大学学術リポジトリ

## 沖縄におけるアメラジアン你的生活権・教育権保障

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## 6. Korean Amerasians' Past, Present, and Future

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### Introduction

More than ever before, the world is redefining the race issue with the United States leading the way. "Everyday, in every corner of America, we are redrawing the color lines and redefining what race really means."<sup>1</sup> Currently, in the U.S., there are 1.3 million intermarriages, and the number is rising. The children of intermarriages in the U.S. and around the world are, according to Time magazine, "The poster children for 21st century globalization."<sup>2</sup> It goes onto report that, "Today, Eurasians are the flavor du jour, not only in the U.S., where mixed-race citizens personify the American melting pot, but even more so in Asia, where race-conscious policies are often encoded in law."<sup>3</sup> However, the children of American serviceman and Asian woman, i.e., Amerasians, are looked upon as anything but the flavor du jour in Korean society. If Korean society keeps the attitude of ignorance and not accept Amerasians as "full-Koreans," as supposed to half-Koreans, the Amerasian issues will only create further misunderstanding.

In this writing, the term "Amerasian" is specifically focused on the group of people born between the intermarriages of Korean women and American serviceman, and subsequently left behind by their father. And thus, living with experiences of discrimination and poverty due to their biracial identity and their low economic and social status. This writing, in the context of fatherless Korean Amerasians, will focus on three areas-mainly, the past situation, the present situation, and their future.

### I. Past Situation

The U.S. military presence in Korea began soon after WWII, when Korea got its independence from Japan. But, it was not until the Korean War that the wide spreading of U.S. bases occurred. Thus, the roots of Korean Amerasians are the legacies of two wars. The presence of U.S. military bases have been giving birth to Amerasians for over 56 years now and will continue to do so as long as they exist on the Korean peninsula. "[Amerasian Children's]

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<sup>1</sup> John Meacham, *Newsweek*, "The New Face of Race." September 18, 2000, 36.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Beech, *Time*, "Eurasian Invasion." April 23, 2001, 34. U.S. and Europe were not always in favor with mixed-race people. "Mixed breeds are ungovernable," declared French psychologist Gustavo Lebon in *Race: A Study of Superstition*, 1965, and American sociologist Edward Reuter wrote, "The mixed blood is an unjust person" in *Race Mixture*, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Eurasian, i.e., half Asian and half Caucasian.

existence is a direct outcome of the massive U.S. military presence, with over 100 bases and installations in this nation, one-fourth the size of California. This presence includes institutionalized sexual and non-sexual servicing of military personnel in areas surrounding the bases established specifically for that purpose referred to as *Kiich'on*, or GI town."<sup>4</sup>

### Discrimination and Racism

This is a very sensitive area for many Amerasians born during and right after the Korean War. For the most part it is true that the relationship between the serviceman and the clubwomen were the roots of their existence. The clubwomen came to the U.S. military base trying to make some kind of living in a poverty-stricken society due to three years of war. These clubwomen were from all over Korea. Not only were they trying to support themselves, but were also trying to support family members that they had left behind in their hometowns. This trend continued throughout the 60s and 70s when the Korean economy was still in the weak stage.

The clubwomen who became mother to the Amerasian children faced heartbreaks as the Korean society alienated their children. Not only was the Korean society not accustomed to seeing mixed-race children, their Confucian-based conservatism, which dominated much of the social ethics, could not accept them as Koreans. It is well illustrated in the book "Ten Thousand Sorrows" how Amerasians in Korea were treated in the 50s and 60s. Elizabeth Kim writes:

Several people stood outside one of the nearby cottages, raising tea bowls to their lips after their long day's work. The cups stopped midway. The casual chatter was stilled. There was silence, then I heard the spitting begin. I was the first to be hit by a pebble; I felt it sting me in the back, below my shoulder blade. I didn't cry, nor did I look behind me. Omma (mother) did not shield me. We said nothing. She squeezed my hand tighter and we walked on, a little more quickly but still staring straight ahead, without any show of weakness. The next pebble hit me on the cheek, then a volley struck us both: back, arms, legs, and faces.

The catcalls began: "*honhyol*," a despicable name that meant nonperson, mixed race, animal. After each insult, the rock-throwers would spit, as if to cleanse their mouths of the word.<sup>5</sup>

Amerasian children were ostracized by the Korean society from the beginning and continue to be to this very present day. Jun Kwan Woo of the Korean Herald writes:

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<sup>4</sup> Margo Okazawa-Rey, "Children of GI Town: The Invisible Legacy of Militarized Prostitution in South Korea," 2.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Kim, Ten Thousand Sorrows, 18.

To Amerasians, mostly born to American soldiers and Korean women, living a life in this homogenous society may be nothing more than sticking it out.

"Christ returns home from school, complaining tearfully of his classmates mocking his racial difference one day, less than a week after being admitted to his elementary school," his 31-year-old Korean mother said.

The Korean woman is working at a bar for American soldiers in Uijongbu, north of Seoul, to support her 7-year-old son Christopher and herself, virtually abandoned by her American husband, who had returned to the United States after his military service. In Schools, where children initially experience social life, Amerasian children soon find themselves jeered or even cursed by peers due to their distinctively different complexion.<sup>6</sup>

### The Birth and Growth of Amerasians

The first birth of an Amerasian was in 1947<sup>7</sup>. It is recorded that four Amerasians were born that year. Right after Korea got its independence from Japan (August 15, 1945) U.S. soldiers were stationed in Korea. On September 8th, 1945, about 45,000 soldiers were in Korea. Eventually, they all left Korea, leaving but only 500 soldiers in 1949. During the 50s, the birth of Amerasians grew. During the Korean War (1950-53), about 327,000 U.S. soldiers were stationed in Korea. During the 60s, the Amerasian population went down, but in the 70s, it went back up again. During the 70s, 3rd generation Amerasians were being born for the first time. Marriages between American soldiers and Korean women were also on the rise during the 70s and continued until the 80s. The peak of Amerasian births came during the 80s and went back down drastically in 1990s.

According to the Pearl S. Buck Foundation<sup>8</sup> Korea, 4,500 Amerasians were registered under their social care starting in 1964. But, there were also, many Amerasians who weren't

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<sup>6</sup> The Korean Herald, "Amerasians still oppressed at school, workplace." March 29, 1996, 3.

<sup>7</sup> In 1982, The Public Health Welfare defined mix-bloods (Amerasians) as 2nd and 3rd generation children born to Americans and Korean women after 1950.

<sup>8</sup> Pearl S. Buck Foundation (PSBF), a social work organization, was founded by Nobel Prize winner Pearl S. Buck in 1964. Pearl S. Buck Foundation was changed to Pearl S. Buck International in 1999. According to Pearl S. Buck International Korea, "The purpose of the Foundation is to publicize and eliminate injustices and prejudices suffered by children who, because of their birth, are not permitted to enjoy the educational, social, economic, and civil privileges normally accorded to children. This foundation shall not act solely or primarily, but only incidentally, as a distributor of direct relief to deprived children until they are trained, educated, and given opportunities to sustain themselves. It seems wise, however, to work with one group at a time until successful methods to relieve this situation are established. I am compelled to the conclusion that the most needy children in the world today are those born in Asia, whose mothers are Asian but whose fathers are Amerasian. Our present project, therefore, is the Amerasian" ("Founder's Statement" in Pearl S. Buck International Korea homepage).

registered with Pearl S. Buck Foundation and who were not accounted for. Therefore, nobody knows for sure how many Amerasians were born in Korea during the Amerasians' 54 year period. There are few reasons why nobody knows the exact number of Amerasians living in Korea. Many Amerasians are reluctant to reveal themselves to the public, social organization, and to the government. According to the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, about 600 Amerasian were registered with them in 1996. However, the actual number of Amerasian living in Korea in that year may have been higher. "Concerning the reason for the wide gap between the actual and registered figures, Pyun Chang-nam, chief of the foundation, cited Amerasians' unwillingness to reveal themselves in public. 'Amerasians tend to remain uncovered or being holed up for fear that they should be despised or ill-treated by other Koreans who look down on them,' he said"<sup>9</sup>

### Poverty and Poor Conditions

Not only was ill-treatment by the Koreans a big factor that Amerasians had to face in the past years, poverty was another problem that they had to face. The combination of racial prejudice and poverty has made it impossible for Amerasians to live a "normal" life. The Korea Times wrote:

One of the biggest problems the Amerasians are faced with is poverty. More than 82 percent of them live in rented slum houses with one, or at best two rooms.

Their poverty is no wonder at all because it is almost "impossible" for them to get satisfactory jobs due to their outstanding appearances.

They also tend to be deprived of chances to get adequate education because of financial problems.

Such circumstances have forced most of them to resort to peddling and other "odd" jobs to earn their livelihood. And many of them are working at night entertainment spots.<sup>10</sup>

And according to The Korean Herald, "...less than 2 percent of Amerasians in Korea enjoy a 'successful' career. The lion's share of the employed are in temporary occupations, confined to being peddlers, waiters or waitresses at restaurants or bars in and around the U.S. military bases."<sup>11</sup> A statistic done by the Pearl S. Buck Foundation in 1994 showed that the 70 percent of Amerasians lived in one-room rented houses, and that 30 percent of Amerasians were

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<sup>9</sup> The Korea Herald, 5. In 1969, there were 2,300 Amerasians registered with Pearl S. Buck Foundation, and 1973, 1,601, in 1980, 1,297 and in 1994, 625. Currently, it is estimated that about 300 Amerasians are leaving in Korea.

<sup>10</sup> Jae Yun Shim, The Korea Times, "Amerasians suffering from constant poverty, prejudice." Date and page not given.

<sup>11</sup> The Korea Herald, 3.

unemployed.

## Social and Religious Organizations, Korean Government, and U.S. Congress

Recognizing the Amerasians suffering, the social work organization Pearl S. Buck Foundation was established in 1964 and numerous other social and religious organizations through out the year, which are now mostly not operating. And Korean government did what it can to help. "In the mid-1970s, the Korean government began giving a monthly stipend to registered Amerasians through the local government offices...full tuition for middle and high school students is paid by the government."<sup>12</sup>

The biggest and most profound help came from the U.S. Congress, which allowed Amerasians to immigrate to the U.S. and eventually, become U.S. citizen. However, the Amerasian Immigration Law did not apply to all the Amerasians. The Korea Times writes:

The U.S. Congress passed PL 97-359 (Amerasian Immigration Law) in 1982, from when the Korean Amerasians began to move to the U.S. In 1984, some 1,400 Korean Amerasians went to the U.S. under the law which gives certain Korean and Thai Amerasians preferential consideration in immigration to the U.S.

Excluded under this law are Amerasians born before 1 January 1951 and after 22 October 1982, as well as all Amerasians born in the Philippines, Taiwan and Japan.

But the law virtually prohibits the Korean mothers of the adult Amerasians from immigrating to the U.S., forcing family separation. It is very difficult for Korean mothers of Amerasians to get visas from the U.S. government, even if they are invited by their children living there.

A prerequisite to their immigration is to find sponsors to help them settle in the States.<sup>13</sup>

The 54 years of the Amerasians' journey in Korea has been marred by discrimination and poverty. Many have fled Korea hoping for a better future in the U.S. And few have stayed, hoping that Korean society will accept them as Koreans.

## II. Present Situation

Korea, following the mainstream societies around the world, is making every effort to ex-

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<sup>12</sup> Jae Yun Shim, The Korea Times, "Most Amerasians Long to Immigrate to United States." Date and page not given.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. "The U.S. Congress approved and President Ronald Reagan signed the Amerasian Immigration Act of 1982 (U.S. Public Law 97-359, 96 Stat. 1716), designed specifically for Amerasian children abandoned since 1950 in Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea and Korea." Mark Goniwiecha, Asian Week, "Can Junior Come Home? America's Forgotten Asian War Orphans," January 21, 1994.

ercise globalization. Seeing foreign people on the street is not difficult to do in Korea. It was not too long ago that one had to go near the U.S. military bases to see foreigners. Studying English has become a new phenomenon in Korean society. And record numbers of elite students are going over to U.S. universities to receive degrees in higher education than ever before. The trend of going over to the U.S. for education has spread down to elementary students as well.

### Racist Notion and negative Images

Korean people's conceptions about foreigners have changed for the better over the years, but the racist notion toward Amerasians hasn't changed much. The unfair Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and continuing violence against Koreans by the U.S. military men have brought strong anti-American sentiment. All this anti-Americanism has caused Koreans to keep their racist notion toward Amerasians.

"[SOFA] agreement, which contains many provisions regarded as 'unfair' by the Korean side, was first signed in 1951 and revised twice in 1967 and 1991 in the direction on alleviating Seoul's concerns. However, experts here believe the agreement still hasn't reached a desirable level, at least to the level of the U.S.-Japan SOFA, revised in 1995 following U.S. soldiers' rape of a Japanese school girl in Okinawa...Seoul wished to expand the scope of crime types subject to the transfer of custody at the time of indictment, Washington wanted to limit it." <sup>14</sup>

The Washington Times also reported that, "Anti-American demonstrators, led by leftist students, want the U.S. military to leave South Korea. They have stepped up activities in the aftermath of an historic mid-June summit between Kim Jong-il, leader of communist North Korea, and Kim Dae-jung, president of the democratic South." <sup>15</sup>

Even though GI towns are now overflowing with clubwomen from the Philippines and Russia, and increase in marriages between U.S. servicemen and Korean women has taken place, Amerasians are still viewed as offsprings of Korean clubwomen.

Ironically, obviously to most Koreans, two cities where the biggest military bases are located (besides Seoul), Songtan and Tongducheon, were voted the two worst cities in Korea. Songtan and Tongducheon have the second and third highest Amerasian population in Korea, Seoul being the first. Songtan is located about 2 hours south of Seoul and Tongducheon is located about 2 hours north of Seoul. Whenever anti-military sentiment

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<sup>14</sup> Author not available. The Korea Times, "Korea Faces Compromise or Another Delay in Status of Forces Agreement Revision," March 19, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Author not available. "New Horizon: Rising Anti-American Sentiment in Korea (II)," in The Korea Times, July 26, 2000.

mood is reported by the mass media, Songtan and Tongducheon have been in the forefront-being ridiculed.

(Figure 1) Population research done by Pearl S. Buck Foundation. 1994/4. (—ongducheon Tongducheon and Songtan are located in Kyonggi Province).

City / Province	Seoul	Incheon	Pusan	Kyonggi	Kangwon	Other Cities
Population	126	33	55	249	24	138
%	20.16	5.28	8.80	39.84	3.84	22.08

In this present situation, some Amerasians are still living under the poor economic conditions, but many of them are beginning to support themselves. Amerasians who are registered with the Pearl S. Buck Foundation receive monthly stipends of about \$28 dollars. Even though, many adult Amerasians are confined to peddling and hard labor "odd jobs," one can overcome the poor economic condition. The Korean government continues to help the younger Amerasians with the middle and high school tuition. Unlike the 50s, 60, and even well into 90s, Amerasians are beginning to come out of the poor economic condition and are beginning to live in a somewhat stable living condition as Korean wage levels have improved.

There aren't many adult Amerasians around in Korea. Many have fled to U.S. under the Amerasian Immigration Law looking for the "American dream." And many Amerasian children have left the country to U.S. as well, in some cases to Europe, through adoption programs. What present Amerasians are facing is not merely as difficult as what Amerasians in the 50s through the 80s were facing. Though no tangible discrimination against Amerasians exists, a sense of being alienated from society is still felt by many Amerasians.

It is true that Korean society has become more receptive towards Amerasians and their issues. But it is still a very strenuous place for Amerasians to live a "normal" life.

(Figure 2) The questions were asked to 21 Jr. High and High School Amerasian students in Korea.

Questions	Yes	No
Would you like to marry a Korean?	53%	47%
Is there racial discrimination against Amerasians in Korea?	97%	3%

### III. Amerasian's Future

Amerasian's future in Korea is uncertain one. It is unfortunate to say that, but even with the help of many social work organizations for many years, there hasn't been much success



in helping Amerasians establish themselves in the job market. The social work organizations were concerned with the present situation and the immediate needs of the Amerasians, they failed to have any concrete future plans. Many good outcomes did come out from the social work organizations working hard to improve the lives of Amerasians; for example, monthly financial support from the government, tuition support for middle and high school students, the Amerasian Immigration Law, and other benefits.

Another reason for an uncertain future for the Amerasians in Korea is that the either government (U.S. and Korea) or the social work organizations don't have any clear objectives for their future.

### *Honhyol (Mixed-blood)*

Sending Amerasians over to U.S. was looked upon as one way of solving Amerasian issues in Korea. But it hasn't solved any problems of discrimination and racist notions toward Amerasians. It is important for the Korean society to evaluate and define the concept of race for minorities. With the foreign workers presence from Southeast Asia, Arab countries, and Africa, Amerasian issues have been mixed up with mixed-race children's issues of foreign workers and Korean women.<sup>16</sup> This is unfair for Amerasians. For Koreans, it is much easier for them to just mix bi-racial issues into one big pot and just call all of them "*honhyol*"<sup>17</sup> meaning, "mixed-blood." Korean society needs to look at the Amerasian issues from the historical (and some cases from the political) point of view. Amerasian issues, if possible, should not be viewed on the same line with the "*honhyol*" issues of children of foreign workers and Korean women. The term "Amerasian" is unique in the sense that it is derived from the words "American" and "Asian." Amerasians wanted to be known as *Amerasians* (i.e. American and Asian), not just "*honhyol*."

The political, geographical, and economical shifts around the world have changed the perspectives on race. The civil rights movement in U.S., the rise of immigration and the wide spreading of cultures, deportation of racial minorities, and more recently, ethnic cleansing, all have their roots on political, geographical, and economical shifts that have occurred. It appears that the perspective on race was developed more when racism and discrimination was practiced most.

Korean society should no longer distinguish Korean race upon physical appearance of the person. But rather, Korean society should consider Korean race as a group of people classified

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<sup>16</sup> According to PSBF, there are 10,000 mix-race children born between foreign workers and Korean women. Among them, about 640 children are about to go into Korean elementary school. Most of these mix-race children have their father living with them.

<sup>17</sup> There are no words to describe "Amerasians" in Korea. Amerasians are called "*honhyol*." In Korean society, all mix-race people are called "*honhyol*."

together on the basis of common history, nationality, or geographic distribution. If this is so, Korean society needs to consider black and white Amerasians as Koreans: for they have shared common history and nationality for last 50 years as Korean citizens.

### Historical Perspective

The birth and the root of Amerasians and their issues were and are connected with political and geographical situations. For example, the U.S.'s interests in keeping democracy in the South East and East Asia from the threat of communism, subsequently, U.S. fought two wars (Korean War and Vietnam) over it and deployed a large number of military. That is why we need to look at the Amerasian issues from the historical perspective. Never again should Korean society look at Korean Amerasians simply as the children of clubwomen. The Korean society must dig deeper for the comprehensive view on Amerasians. And in doing so, must develop a program that will allow Amerasians into its society.

### Mass Media's Coverage on Amerasians

Lack of understanding and recognizing the perspectives on race on the part of the mass media, and in some cases, social work organizations, exploited Amerasians for their own benefits. Mass media has done its share of inflicting pain upon Amerasians here in Korea. Korean mass media, for the most part, is not aware of the sensitivity that is behind the Amerasian issues. Mass media has conveyed negative and stereotypical images to the Korean public about Amerasians and their mother. In a recent report, one of the Internet newspaper reported about Amerasian issues under the title of "Different blood...that was a curse" (literal translation).<sup>18</sup> For most Koreans, when they think of GI towns the words and images of honhyol, violence, rape, and clubwomen or prostitute comes to their mind. This is due to the stereotypical images and messages that mass media have reported over the years. Not like the past, the social work organizations (and even Christian workers), government, and mess media need to find a new way to help Amerasian without exploiting them or causing harm.

### Empowerment and Education

It is tragic that Amerasians are still having a hard time finding their identity in Korean society even though they have been part of Korean history as Korean citizens for over 50 years now. Measuring all the present circumstances, it is hard to say that Amerasians will have a better future at any time soon. Creating a better future for Amerasians does not depend on whether Korean society will change their attitude towards Amerasians per se. But it will very much depend on how Amerasians are equipping themselves. Amerasians need to

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<sup>18</sup> Son, Won-je, The Hankyoreh 21: Weekly News Magazine, May 31, 2001.

do their part-empowering themselves with education-if they want to integrate into Korean society.

Education will play an important role in their future. By obtaining a higher education, Amerasians can form a positive racial identity for themselves. This writer believes that English education for Amerasians can be very useful, because the ability to speak English is a valuable tool in Korean society. This can give an "edge" over others in Korea. There is a school in Tongducheon City, where the U.S. military base Camp Casey is located, called Amerasian Christian Academy (ACA). The school was established in 1999 to meet the needs of Amerasian children by providing education in English. Korean society is fascinated by English studies. From toddlers to adults, after-school English academies and English institutes are flooded with students from early morning to late at night. English academies and institutes are always looking for English teachers. And if Amerasians can train themselves so that they can speak fluent English, finding a job as an English teacher will not be difficult at all. Therefore, the ACA has very important role in the lives of Amerasian children's future.

### Amerasian Population

It is safe to say that there are less than 300 Amerasians<sup>19</sup> in Korea. Will the population of Amerasians in Korea decrease in the future? As long as U.S. military bases are stationed here in Korea, Amerasian children will exist. And it is likely that they will stay here for a long time even after the reunification. The Washington Times reported that, "The status of the 37,000 U.S. troops based in the South [Korea] will not change soon, despite the warming of ties between democratic South Korea and communist North Korea." And it went on to write, "South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, however, has said U.S. troops should stay in Korea as guarantors of regional security even if the peninsula reunifies."<sup>20</sup> Whereas in the 80s and 90s, many Amerasians had a chance to immigrate to the U.S., in the future, more and more Amerasians will be excluded from the immigration law, which applies to the Amerasians born between January of 1951 to October of 1982. Thus, the Amerasian population will rise once again.

(Figure 3) 1969 ~ 1994: Research done by PSBF.

Years	1969	1973	1980	1987	1994	2001
Amerasian population	2,300	1,601	1,297	801	625	207

<sup>19</sup> There are conflicting reports to how many Amerasians are currently living in Korea. In 1996, The Korea Herald reported that there were some 600 Amerasian were registered with the PSBF. In the same year, The Korea Times reported that some 800 Amerasians were registered with the PSBF. Currently, there are 207 Amerasians registered with the PSBF.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Torchia, "Protest refocuses scrutiny on U.S." in The Washington Times, June 23, 2000, A11.

## Conclusion

Dealing with Amerasian issues in Korea is very complex. The issues are not just rooted in one factor. We must trace the issues back to the Korean War. We must have sympathy for Amerasian mothers who had to work as clubwomen in order to survive the devastated economic condition. It is true that Amerasian issues are fused into a political, economic, and social context. And these contexts are blended into militarism, militarized prostitution, sexism, class oppression and more. But it is important, if possible, to separate these negative connotations with Amerasian issues. Rather than making Amerasians the victims of militarism that is portrayed so negatively by Koreans, it is wise to deal with Amerasian issues on its own sphere.

There is a tendency that Amerasians will be looked upon as "perpetual foreigners" by the Korean society, never allowing them to fully absorb into Korea's "mainstream." And it is true that racial abuses over the period of time has made the many Amerasians thinking and feeling that they are inferior. In order for Amerasians to survive in the Korean society and have a chance to live a "normal" life, two things have to happened: Mothers of Amerasian children must endure socioeconomic sacrifices to give their children a better chance of getting higher education. In return, the children must put all their efforts in to getting a higher education. When these two things have happen, Amerasians will have a better chance of finding their own voice.

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