

^ Mom & Daughter Publish Girl in the Gold Dress to honor Korean culture



Christine Paik Photo from Imagilore Publishing

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Photo from Imagilore Publishing

By Shruti Rajkumar, AsAmNews Intern

Every now and then, author Christine Paik jotted down potential story ideas for a book, but nothing struck a chord. In April 2019, she took her children to South Korea for the first time and was inspired by the way her daughter connected with their cultural heritage.

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“There was this one key moment where we went to the marketplace in Seoul, where my husband’s grandmother used to sell hanbok fabrics, and my daughter bought a hanbok at that same marketplace. It was just a really full circle moment, and [was] meaningful. So when I got back from that trip, I thought, ‘Okay, I need to write a story that connects this dress to the history somehow,’ and so that’s how the idea was born,” said Paik.

On May 2, Paik published her debut children’s book called *The Girl In The Gold Dress*, which was illustrated by her mother, Jung Lin Park—a collaboration that had always been on her bucket list.

Paik said she had a desire to work with her mother on a book after seeing her put her art aside for the American dream. Park said she had been studying art in Korea, however due to tuition cost, she stopped and immigrated to the United States for a better life.

“There wasn’t that many books related to our culture, so I’m so excited to publish this book, said Park. “These days, so many children they’re [on the] screens, not reading a book. So I thought it’s really nice to make it [so that] boys and girls can grow [up and say] ‘Oh, what a beautiful dress.’”

^ see the book you want on the shelves, write it," Paik decided to create a book so that kids could see themselves reflected in books.

The Girl In The Gold Dress is about a young girl named Hannah who is fearful and ashamed about performing a dance in a traditional Korean hanbok dress for a school talent show. The story, which follows Hannah's journey in learning about the dress and her family's past in Korea and embracing pride for her culture, was inspired both by Paik's daughter as well as her own experiences.

When Paik was younger, she said her mother had her go to Korean language and culture school every Saturday, where she learned Korean fan dancing. She recalls always feeling nervous about wearing a traditional Korean dress on culture days at school because she was the only Asian American in her class.

"Just that push and pull, right? You're nervous about putting yourself out there and you're not sure if the audience will understand or appreciate the culture and the beauty of what that dance is, but at the same time, being proud to represent Korean American culture that way and to share it with others. So definitely, that's an aspect of Hannah that is part of me," Paik said.

Similarly, some of Hannah's journey was inspired by Paik's daughter and the way she learned about her family's history during their trip to Korea, said Paik. Paik recalls a scene in which Hannah learns that her great-grandmother had to wrap fabrics around her body in order to carry them while escaping during the Korean War.



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“That all actually happened. My husband’s grandmother...she made a living through those fabrics, and she would wrap them around her body because she couldn’t carry everything as she was trying to make a better life. So there’s a lot of elements that are true, or that are part of our family. And then there’s obviously fiction and links between all the different elements,” Paik said.

Park said she was very excited to hand paint scenes from her culture and country. In depicting the war scene, she was intentional about the colors she used. She used more sketch and less detail when depicting the war so that readers know it’s a memory, and when painting the dress and fans, she used vibrant colors and more details. This was done to emphasize the darkness of the war and contrast it with the brightness of modern times, said Paik.

“I do like to paint with oil, but oils are hard to express details sometimes, so that’s why I choose acrylics,” said Park. “It was a dark moment, during the war. I was born after the war, but I heard from my mom that [it] was really gloomy and dark. But [now] we are here in all this bright, vibrant color.”

The timing of the book was very purposeful, with the rise of anti-Asian rhetoric at the beginning of the pandemic and the recent hate crimes, said Paik. From her work in K-12 education, Paik realized the importance of education in preventing people from growing up to be

^ sed to books like these in early grades, you grow to be a person who appreciates, understands, and respects, other cultures,” Paik said.

Park said that she also hopes that children read this book and learn about different cultural backgrounds. “It’s very important for them to know, that other people have other cultures and they have to respect each other and enjoy together and celebrate together,” said Park.

Paik, hopes that children read this book and see Hannah’s story as inspiration to be brave, proud, and resilient of who they are, and that being different is something to be celebrated rather than embarrassed about.

“But [also] this whole appreciation and connection to those who came before you. They sacrificed so much so that we didn’t have to struggle. So I just wanted to pay homage to our grandmothers and capture that as well,” said Paik.

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