

Narratives Through Old Photographs: A Norwegian Family in Shanghai

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摘要

本文採用質性研究法，研究者探討柯爾（Koren）家族，一個挪威家庭1902-1912年在上海的生活敘事，從中了解到東西文化交會的情況。柯爾先生是一個國際航線的船長，因為工作的需求，他在1902年把家庭（本人、太太、長女）從挪威搬遷到中國上海，當時他的長女二歲，其後又生了二個兒子。經過十年，一方面是因為長女從國際小學畢業，要返回挪威上寄宿中學；另一方面因為柯爾太太有外遇，導致柯爾夫婦離婚，所以家庭成員陸續搬回挪威。這十年之間，柯爾家族在上海或挪威拍了很多照片。研究者藉由老照片的視覺符碼和參與者訪談，探討柯爾家族的生命故事，並了解到柯爾家族在異國的天空下有快樂的回憶，有異質文化的衝擊，也有不能回首的難過。

關鍵字：Koren家庭、老照片、上海、視覺文化

Abstract

With the use of qualitative method, the researchers explored the life narrative of the Korens, a Norwegian family living in Shanghai in 1902-1912 through visual signs of old photographs and participant interview to understand visual cultural connection between Eastern and Western. Mr. Koren was an international shipping captain. He relocated his family from Norway to Shanghai in 1902 when his daughter was two years old. The family decided returning to Norway when the daughter turned 12 and was preparing to enter boarding school. Meanwhile, Mr. Koren divorced his wife, Gyda in 1912 due to her affair with another man. Part of the family began returning to Norway in that same year. In the 10-year span, the Korens took many photographs in both Norway and China. The researchers inquired the life stories through visual codes in the family's old photographs and participant interviews, which indicated the family's happy memory, cultural impact and sad emotion altogether under the foreign sky.

Keywords: Koren family, old photographs, Shanghai, visual culture

The Beginning of Adventure

When I was writing my book “Bridal dress traditions and changes: Narratives through the Taiwanese old wedding photograph” in 2012, I went to Fashion Archives & Museum at Shippensburg University, Pennsylvania to seek historical bridal dresses for references. While there, I had the pleasure to meet the museum director Dr. Karin Bohleke (Karin).

Karin is from Norwegian heritage. Karin and her mother immigrated to Canada in 1967. Karin went to USA for graduate study and received a Ph. D at Yale University. After getting married, she resided in Pennsylvania and has been working at the museum.

Karin showed me some of her family historical photographs that were taken in Norway and China. I am interested in old photograph narratives, and asked her if I could use these photographs as my next

research subject and have her being my interviewee and co-author.

Adventure in Shanghai: Koren Family’s Life Story

The material of this study was provided by Karin. For narrative convenient, the first generation surname Koren was used as the family name. Research object mainly focuses on the second and the third generations. Study material includes family photographs taken in Norway and China in 1902-1914, participant interviews (face to face and emails), information written in the albums and some family implements.

The third generation of Korens,

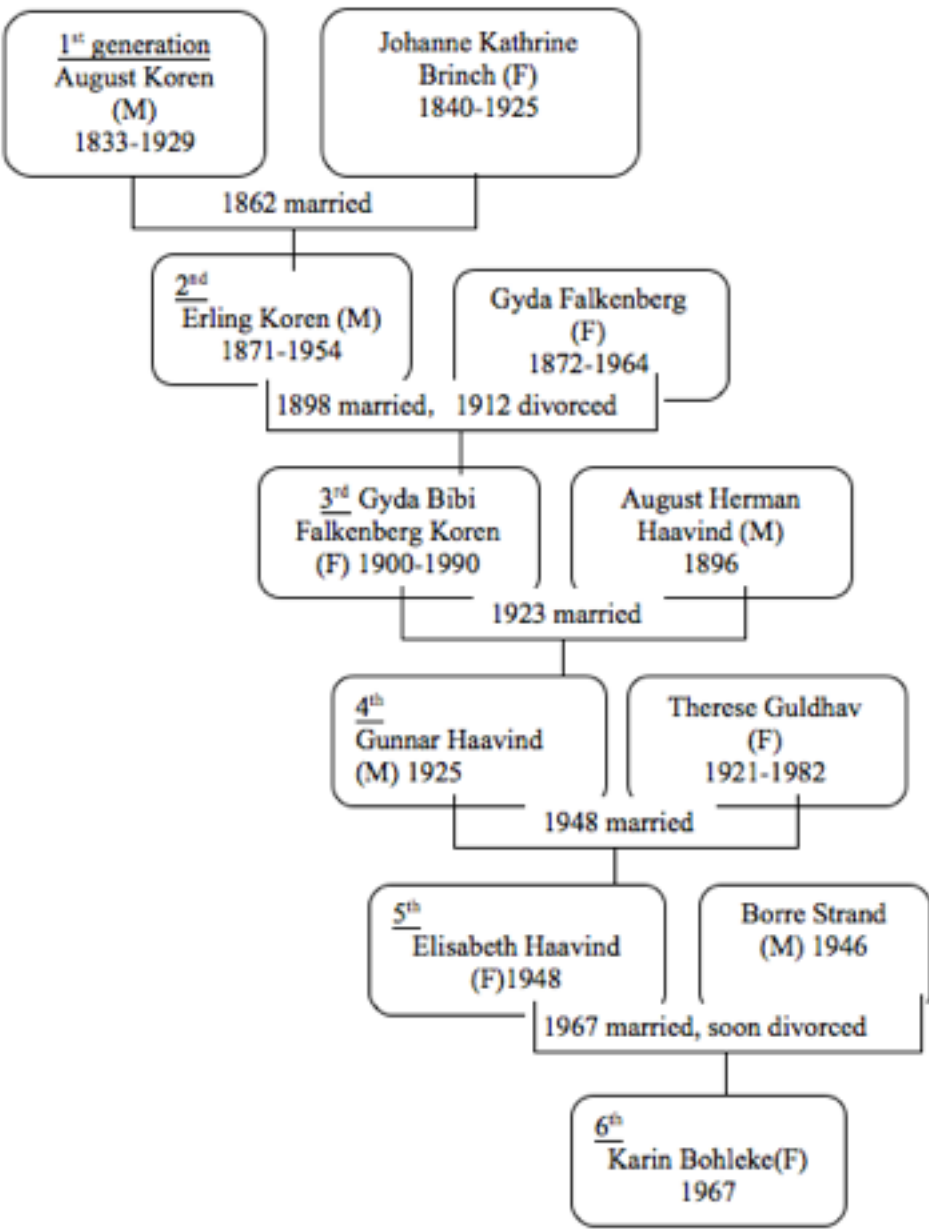


Fig. 1: Koren family tree

Gyda Bibi Falkenberg Koren (Bibi) (1900-1990) passed away when Karin was 23 years old. Because of the intimate relationship between Karin and Bibi and Karin's hobby of keeping historical objects, the Koren family gave most of the family photographs and daily implements to Karin after Bibi's passing.

The information provided was based on Karin's observation and conversation with the older generations; information written in the albums by her family; and sources from Koren family tree book, *Slekten Koren*, published in 1942 in Oslo.

Koren family tree is outlined in Figure 1.

The 2nd generation, Erling Koren (1871-1954) was a sea captain and "kontorsjef" (literally "office chief" in Norwegian). As a seaman eventually promoted to captain, he sailed on a number of vessels for a number of different shipping companies. Sometime before

Christmas 1894, he obtained a post on the newly built ship "Bogstad" under Captain Thorbjørnson, sailing out of Oslo. The ship belonged to the company of Fearnley & Eger.

For the next three years, he sailed to Japan and China and became the first officer on the ship "Oslo" that sailed to East Asia. In 1904, he was on the ship "Sentis," owned by Camillo Eitzen & Co., which was taken by the Russians in Port Arthur in 1904. The captain and the crew had to abandon the ship as there was no time for them to take all their personal belongings. Afterwards, he worked for the shipping agency Thoresen & Co. in Shanghai.

After Shanghai opened the port in 1843, the commerce grew vigorously. In 1850, American Purvis & Co. had built the shipyard in Shanghai. Soon after, many companies followed. Gradually, Shanghai became the most important commercial port of China and the largest commercial

port in Asia at the end of 19th century (Liang, 2010). In maritime transport, the steam ship had already accounted for 86.9% of merchant ship in 1890s in Shanghai (Tang, 1996). A lot of merchant ship companies began to set up in Shanghai.

Erling located his family to Shanghai in 1902. They lived on Markham Road (麥根路, known as Moling Road now秣陵路), which was south to the Shanghai Railroad Station.

Figure 2 depicts Erling taken in Shanghai in 1904. On the bottom of the photograph is "Ying Cheong SHANGHAI."



Fig. 2: Erling, 1904, Shanghai

Ying Cheong (英昌), Pow Kee & Co. (寶記), Sze Yuen Ming & Co. (耀華), and K. T. Thompson (同生) was four famous photographic studios in Shanghai in the beginning of the 20th century (Cheng, 2013).

Erling married Gyda in 1898 in Oslo. Gyda was beautiful, elegant and had good taste in fashion. Gyda's personality was vivacious and attractive. Erling and Gyda had three children. The oldest one was daughter Bibi. The second and the third children were

both boys, Erling Falkenberg Koren (Erling II, 1904-?) born in Demark and Leif Falkenberg Koren (Leif, 1906-?) born in Shanghai.

Bibi was the only child of the family before her brothers were born, naturally she attracted a lot of attention and had many photographs taken with her family. (Figure; 3- Figure 6).



Fig. 3: Bibi and parents, 1902, Norway



Fig. 4: Bibi and grandfather August, 23 May 1903, Norway



Fig. 5: Bibi and mother Gyda, 1903, Norway



Fig. 6: Bibi and mother Gyda, 1903, Norway

Erling sailed over the world. He was always seeking exotic merchants from foreign countries to please his family. Fig. 7, Bibi wearing a kimono and posing with a Japanese doll.



Fig. 7: Bibi and Japanese doll, 1904, Shanghai

Right before the second child arrived Gyda took Bibi back to Europe. Bibi's brother Erling II was born in Copenhagen on 6 November 1904.

Fig. 8, Generations of Koren family holding photos, which became a funny scene of photos-in-photo. August and his wife are in the front row, with Gyda's mother Bestemor Falkenberg holding a baby on her lap.

Gyda is in the back row to the left, and Erling is in the back row to the right. Bibi is in the front row to the right.



Fig. 8: Generations with photos, 1904, Norway

After Erling II was born, the family went back to China again. Bibi received her early education at the international school in Shanghai, where she began learning English and French. Bibi also spoke Chinese, having learned it from the Chinese servants.

Bibi told Karin that her nanny had bound feet. She knew she could misbehave and

get away with it because she could run and her nanny couldn't. Fig. 9 is Chinese nannies with three children.



Fig. 9: Bibi, brothers, and nannies, 1906, Shanghai

Besides Japanese Kimono, Erling also brought Sami fur for his children (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Bibi and Erling II, 1906, Shanghai

Erling and Gyda took the children out for a carriage ride during Christmas in 1909. Two coachmen were Chinese men whom had long pigtails. At the time, many common Chinese male still had long pigtails. Fig. 11 is the first photograph taken outdoor in the

family albums. Some words are written on the left bottom of the photograph board "Ying Cheong, PHOTOGRAPHER, CANTON ROAD, SHANGHAI, CHINA."



Fig. 11: Koren family, 1909, Shanghai

Due to the unpredictability of life, Christmas in 1909 was probably the last holiday the Koren family spent happily together in Shanghai.

Fig. 12 is Chinese servants and their family taken outside of Koren's house in the winter.



Fig. 12: The servants, 1910, Shanghai

Fig. 13 is Koren children with Chinese children. Erling II and Leif wear Sami fur. The Chinese children wear traditional mandarin cotton-padded jacket. All of them are dressed up.



Fig. 13: Bibi and brothers with Chinese children, 1910, Shanghai

Erling spent much time away from his family at sea. As a result, when he was home, he wanted to stay in and spend all his time with his family. But Gyda had a different personality; she still wanted to go out and partied all the time even when Erling was there. The differences in personalities were part of the strains on their relationship.

Gyda met Thorvald Hansen (Thorvald), a Danish Consul-General for Norway in China. They went out together a lot.

Fig. 14, Gyda riding astride instead of using lady's side-saddle. This is a sign she was a very progressive woman. At that time, many women still rode side-saddle and would not wear divided skirts because they were too much like men's pants.



Fig. 14: Gyda and Thorvald, 6 Mar. 1910, Shanghai

In China, gardens used to be owned by the royalties or wealthy families and were not opened to public. There were no public gardens until Westerners began to build gardens in their concession in the late Ching dynasty. At the time, the Chinese were not allowed to be in concession garden (Chang, 2007).

Since Thorvald was an embassy staff, he was well-off materially and enjoyed his leisure time. He went out with rickshaw and spent time at many gardens (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15: Thorvald at rickshaw, Shanghai

Fig. 16 was a gift Gyda gave to Thorvald. There are some words wrote down by Gyda "To my dearest friend Thorvald. Your Gyda. Vedbaek, 1 August 1910" on the back of photograph. According to these words, Karin guessed Gyda was probably already having an affair with him at this point. Koren family was about to break. Gyda brought

her children home ward-bound from China in 1910.



Fig. 16: Gyda to Thorvald, 1910, Vedbaek, Denmark

Fig. 17 was taken in Copenhagen Denmark. Gyda looking sad and three children have complicated moods on their faces. It is obviously different with the previous happy joyful photographs. For children, they left China and their parents would be separated soon, their life would be much different thereafter.



Fig. 17: Gyda and children, 1911, Denmark

For Bibi, happy childhood was coming to an end. She graduated from the international school in Shanghai. Some photographs in the album were taken as she and her mother were returning to Norway to put Bibi into Thorvaldsens boarding school (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18: Bibi in boarding school, 1913, Norway

After her divorce from Erling in 1912, Gyda married Thorvald on 3 June, 1913. The wedding announcements are in the album. The translation of the French on the wedding announcement: Madame Gyda

Koren, born Falkenberg, has the pleasure to announce to you her marriage with Mister Thorvald Hansen, Consul-General of Norway in Shanghai and Consular Judge for China. The marriage took place in Paris.

After Gyda and Thorvald married, they went back to China and stayed at Thorvald's residence. The house they stayed most likely belonged to the Norwegian government since he was the Consul-General for Norway (Fig. 19).



Fig. 19: Shanghai House I

The building is western style. The foreign people in Shanghai used to gather up in concession territory. They did not contact with the ordinary Chinese people often except nannies or servants, so they still kept their lifestyles as they were in their motherlands.

Happy time was short and goes fast. After Gyda and Thorvald married for half a year, Thorvald developed heart disease and became very ill (Fig. 20).



Fig. 20: Thorvald sick, 4 Jan. 1914, Shanghai

Thorvald passed away soon after (Fig. 21). Gyda married Erling with very different personalities for 14 years (1898-1912). Gyda remarried Thorvald and was much happier, but the time was so short. She became a widow at the age of 42.



Fig. 21: The flowers at Thorvald's funeral, 1914, Shanghai



Fig. 22: Shanghai House II

Most likely due to Thorvald's death, the national flag of Norway at his house was at half -mast (Fig. 22).



Fig. 23: Gyda mourning, 1914, Shanghai

Gyda looking sad (Fig. 23). Gyda went back to Norway after Thorvald's death; she probably had to move out from the Shanghai residence so the new Consul-General could move in. Before the three children grew up, they stayed with Gyda.

After the divorce, Erling stayed in Shanghai alone. He came back to Norway in 1915, where he worked henceforth as a department head for A/S Den chemical company in the Northern Maritime Department. He retired in 1940. He never remarried.

At the beginning years spent in Shanghai, the Koren family had a wonderful and happy life. They were financially well-off, had rich manpower at a foreign land. After Gyda and Erling divorced and children grew up, this family was like birds flying into different directions. The life in Shanghai became collective memory of the family who had cultural abundance as well as

impact, and both happy and sad emotion under the foreign sky.

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