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Cultural Mobilization for Korea's Independence:
An Analysis of a 1942 Stage Performance in Wartime Hawai'i

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Abstract

This article examines a stage performance by Koreans in Hawai'i on August 30, 1942, to explore how cultural events served political purposes during the Pacific War. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 propelled the United States' entry into World War II, severely straining U.S.–Japan relations. These circumstances raise questions about whether Korean Hawaiians–marginalized both as Japan's colonial subjects (1910–1945) and as a racial minority–leveraged their status by aligning with the United States against their shared enemy, Japan. Analyses of local newspapers and archival sources reveal that Koreans organized this cultural event in collaboration with other ethnic groups, excluding the Japanese, to present Korea's traditional music and dance to African American servicemen from the 369th Infantry Regiment. This event exemplifies ethnic Koreans' strategic efforts to forge cross-racial and cross-ethnic solidarity–while deliberately excluding the Japanese–to assert their cultural identity and advance their ultimate goal: Korean independence.

Keywords

Korean Hawaiians, Pacific War, African American servicemen, Korean independence movement, traditional Korean music and dance, wartime performance

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Introduction

This article examines a stage performance by Koreans in Hawai‘i on August 30, 1942, to explore how they used performances for political purposes. According to a *Kungminbo* article dated September 2, 1942, the event was a collaborative effort by Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and Hawaiian ethnic groups, and it was overseen by the Morale Section of the Military Governor’s Office in Honolulu. The performance, held at the Honolulu Academy of Arts (presently the Honolulu Museum of Art) at 3:00 p.m., welcomed approximately 200 African American servicemen to an afternoon program of music and dance (*Kungminbo*, September 2, 1942c). Key terms such as “combined efforts,” “Morale Section of the Military Governor’s Office,” and “African American troops” prompt important questions: Who initiated these united efforts? What roles did the Morale Section and African American troops play? What performances were presented, and by whom? What was the ultimate goal of the event? This article explores these questions by examining the background, content, and significance of the 1942 performance within the context of the Pacific War.

A surprise military strike by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service against the U.S. naval base in Hawai‘i on the morning of December 7, 1941 led to the U.S. entry into World War II. After two hours of bombing, 18 U.S. ships were sunk or damaged, 188 U.S. aircraft were destroyed, and 2,403 people, including 68 civilians, were killed. The American people were outraged. The surprise attack united the American people in a massive mobilization for war and heightened military alert status. Wartime propaganda in combination with hatred toward the Japanese exacerbated underlying racism. The war against Japan until August 1945 featured a degree of savagery unmatched by the war being fought simultaneously against the European Axis. Japanese became dehumanized, to a much greater degree than Germans or Italians, in the minds of American combatants and civilians (Weingartner 1992, 54). For Korean Americans, the United States’ entry into World War II signaled the potential realization of Korean liberation. This fervent hope was especially intense

in Hawai'i, home to the largest and oldest Korean diaspora in North America. Ethnic Koreans in Hawai'i closely followed the unfolding events, quietly harboring a sense of anticipation.

In Hawai'i, although racial discrimination manifested in the "Yellow Peril" mentality, the fear that Asian immigrants would inundate white American society and threaten every American institution, was less pronounced (Bailey and Farber 1994, 26). Asian immigrant groups, including Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Koreans, constituted over eighty percent of plantation workers in Hawai'i during the early twentieth century. Among them, the Japanese constituted the largest single ethnic group in Hawai'i. It is probably fair to say that before the Second World War, community ties between Hawai'i and Japan were, on the whole, closer than those of West Coast communities (Stephan 2011, 11). However, the situation completely changed as Japan revealed its ambition to control the Pacific area.

Amidst fears of another Japanese invasion, martial law was declared just hours after the attack. The government did consider mass incarceration in Hawai'i, as was implemented on the mainland. However, it was ultimately deemed impractical; the Japanese American citizenry and the immigrant population in Hawai'i made up over one third of the islands' total population, and their labor was needed to sustain the economy and the war effort in the islands. The Enemy Alien Control Program in Hawai'i led to the internment of 1,202 individuals of Japanese ancestry, as documented in case files within the Records of the Office of the Provost Marshal General (National Archives 1942–1946). These individuals–deemed genuine security threats–constituted less than one percent of the Japanese population in Hawai'i (Allen 1950, 134). The military government in Hawai'i, instead of implementing the mass internment of Japanese Americans, issued hundreds of orders (e.g., curfews and restrictions on traveling, possessing communication devices, and financial dealings) applicable only to persons of Japanese ancestry and enemy aliens.

Because Korea was colonized by Japan from 1910 to 1945, Koreans in Hawai'i were classified as enemy aliens (Macmillan 1985, 180). This designation caused deep humiliation within the community. In addi-

tion, Koreans encountered "unexpected and devastating legal and practical consequences," as their physical appearance often led to misidentification as Japanese (L. M. Kim 2003, 80). Given the long history of Japanese colonial rule over Korea and the persistent Korean resistance both within Korea and abroad, it is unsurprising that Korean communities in the United States in 1941 deeply resented being conflated with the Japanese (L. M. Kim 2003).

This study can be seen as an extension of recent scholarship that approaches the history of the Korean independence movement in the United States from diverse perspectives. In particular, recent studies focusing on Korean women's organizations and the activities of specific individuals within the Korean American community have made noteworthy contributions (e.g., M. Lee 2012; J. Park 2012; S. Park 2016; Y. Hong 2017; J. Park 2017; Chang 2019). Previous studies on Korean activities in Hawai'i during the Pacific War have shown that Korean political refugees and multigenerational Korean immigrants contributed to the war effort through activities such as war bond rallies, enlistment in the armed forces, and work in the defense industry (Shin 1972; A. S. Choi 2003; L. M. Kim 2003; D. Kim 2004; D. Kim 2007; Cha 2010; R. S. Kim 2011; Jang 2020; Jang 2021). These studies have demonstrated how Korean immigrants navigated the complex task of proving their loyalty to the United States while simultaneously advocating for Korean independence. However, the history of the Korean diaspora's cultural activities during the Pacific War remains largely unexplored. Only recently have scholars revealed cultural events in which the Asian local population in Hawai'i shared their own culture under the auspices of the local authorities as a means to facilitate the ethnic groups' assimilation into the host society (P. M. Choy 2000; R. Lee 2017; H. Choi 2020; H. Choi 2021a). To my knowledge, Choi Heeyoung's recent Korean-language article appears to be the only existing research on Koreans' musical performances during the war years (H. Choi 2024). Choi demonstrates that ethnic Koreans actively staged performances for U.S. military forces and political figures as a means of expressing both their collective desire for Korea's independence from Japanese rule and their aspirations for American citizenship.

However, as Choi herself noted, the 1942 event warrants further in-depth analysis.

Thus, this study aims to examine the event's background, content, and implications by analyzing local newspaper articles and records from the Hawai'i War Records Depository (HWRD) at the Archives and Special Collections Department of Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (HWRD 1941-1947). As demonstrated below, the wartime mission of the Korean diaspora community-to seize a golden opportunity for Korea's independence by demonstrating unwavering loyalty to the United States-extended to their musical activities. Their strategic approach involved uniting Hawai'i's multiethnic and multiracial communities, excluding the Japanese, while asserting a distinct Korean identity.

Ethnic Koreans in Hawai'i and Their Commitment to Korea's Independence

According to the 1940 census, 6,851 Koreans were residing in Hawai'i (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1943a), a figure more than four times greater than the 1,711 Koreans living on the U.S. mainland during the same period (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1943b). The first large wave of Korean immigration to the United States began in 1903, when Korean laborers arrived in Hawai'i to work on sugar plantations. Between 1903 and 1905, an estimated 7,291 to 7,600 Koreans immigrated to Hawai'i as contract laborers, although the precise figure varies by source (Baik and Murabayashi 2011, 78). Most of them were single males in their twenties and thirties. They were followed by "picture brides" who came to Hawai'i from 1910 onward. The picture bride system used photographs of Korean women to arrange matches with Korean males living in Hawai'i as plantation workers (Patterson 2000, 80-99). Until the United States government enacted the Immigration Act of 1924, which completely prohibited immigration from Asia, around 1,000 Korean picture brides arrived in Hawai'i (Y. Hong 2017, 3).

In the early stages of Korean immigration to Hawai'i, Korean pic-

ture brides accepted the male-dominated Korean community and patriarchal family structure on plantations in exchange for financial support and the promise of a stable life in the host society. This was largely due to the fact that the plantation environment constrained their social interactions to fellow Koreans and other Asians. However, following the Japanese labor strike of 1920, many Korean picture brides migrated to urban areas. With this move came diversification in residence, workplaces, and occupations, enabling them to form relationships with people from a wider range of racial and class backgrounds than before. Upon arriving in cities, Korean picture brides entered peripheral sectors of the labor market out of necessity-for their own survival and their families' livelihoods. These occupational choices reflected their continued subjection to racial hierarchies. Nevertheless, the urban environment offered access to linguistic, cultural, and educational capital, which allowed Korean picture brides to form new social networks beyond the male-centered Korean community. Their increased participation in economic activities also brought changes to familial relationships (for more information, see Noh 2021a; 2021b).

The original cohort of married immigrants grew at a fast pace during the first two decades of their stay in Hawai'i. They drastically multiplied as Korean immigrant couples were mostly at the peak ages for reproduction. Korean Hawaiians were largely Korean-speaking foreign-born adults with an increasing number of Hawai'i-born children (Yu 1977, 129-130). In the early 1940s, approximately two-thirds of Koreans were American citizens, most of whom had been born in Hawai'i (Bureau of the Census 1943a; Baik and Murabayashi 2011, 94-95).

During and shortly after the period when the picture brides moved to Hawai'i, about 900 Korean students, intellectuals, and political exiles arrived in the U.S. territories (Kwon 2003, 29). Some of those who finished degrees in the mainland moved to Hawai'i. These individuals, as political leaders, launched national independence movements with Korean immigrants. They were distinctly different in personal temperament, educational backgrounds, and strategies for Korean independence (H. Kim 2002). Such divergence within the movement bred personal rival-

ries, which consequently led to divisions within the organizations of Korean immigrants in America. In Hawai'i, the schism between those advocating for Pak Yong-man (1881-1928) and those supporting Syngman Rhee (1875-1965) was pervasive.

As the Kungminhoe (Korean National Association; hereafter the KNA) had one of its headquarters in Hawai'i, Rhee and Pak initiated political activities in Hawai'i beginning in the mid-1910s. Rhee advocated a diplomatic approach to freeing Korea, calling for independence activities through the Korean Commission to America and Europe. Rhee's diplomatic strategies were opposed by advocates for Pak, whose focus was on strengthening military build-up. While in Hawai'i, Pak established the Korean Military Corps in 1914, while Rhee founded educational facilities for young Koreans (Tikhonov 2009, 4). Rhee's continuing disagreement with using funds for the Korean Military Corps led to its shutdown in 1917. After Rhee was appointed as the President of the Shanghai-based Korean Provisional Government (hereafter the KPG) in 1919, a scandal over allegations of Rhee's abuse of power brought about a more intense dispute. Rhee left the KNA and organized the Tongjihoe (Comrades' Association) in Honolulu in 1921 to reinforce his position vis-à-vis the KPG. As a result, political divisions within the Korean communities in Hawai'i became increasingly pronounced (for further details, see D. Kim 1998; S. Hong 1998; S. Hong 2016).

Shortly before the war broke out, Koreans in the United States and Hawai'i made a concerted effort to join the forces of the divided Korean political organizations. As a notable example, Korean political refugees in the United States established the United Korean Committee in America (hereafter the UKC). In April 1941, fourteen representatives from nine Korean nationalist organizations, including the Tongjihoe and KNA, convened in Hawai'i and agreed to establish the UKC (R. S. Kim 2011, 136). The purpose of the UKC was to merge all the largest Korean immigrant political organizations in pursuit of the unification of all Korean groups in the United States in light of the growing political and military crisis in the Pacific. The UKC's objectives included the support of the KPG in China, the presentation of a united front of all Koreans for anti-

Japanese resistance, and active diplomacy to win recognition by the U.S. government (Cha 2010, 95).

The first-generation Koreans, most of whom came to Hawai'i as plantation workers and picture brides, had been a primary source of political funding since their arrival in Hawai'i. Despite the low wages that Korean immigrants received for their labor—the average daily wage of a Korean plantation worker was 65 cents in 1905-the Korean immigrant community raised substantial funds for overseas political activity in the United States as well as in other Korean diasporic communities in Mexico, China, Japan, and Siberia (B. Choy 1979, 123). Korean political refugees became unified in their hatred of the Japanese colonizers and their fervent hope for Korean emancipation at the onset of the war. In the wake of Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the ethnic Korean population in Hawai'i, including children of plantation workers and picture brides, cooperated with martial law in Hawai'i and contributed to the war effort (L. M. Kim 2003, 82-85).

A major concern of Koreans in America was that they would not be taken into consideration by the U.S. in its post-war decisions regarding Korea. Many activities of the Koreans in America, therefore, were designed to convince the American government that Koreans should not be treated as Japanese and that they should be allowed to govern their own nation. They got involved in U.S. military training and provided financial support through the purchase of defense bonds. Additionally, they joined anti-Japanese war propaganda and defense industries with great enthusiasm, declaring their allegiance to the Allied cause. Stage performances during the war period were a means to prove the loyalty of the Koreans.

Emergence of Cultural Events Hosted by the Koreans for American Servicemen

Before the Japanese attack complicated the relations between the U.S. and Japan, there were various multicultural events where different ethnic groups in Hawai'i showcased their traditional music or dance at the Ho-

nolulu Academy of Arts, the Young Women's Christian Association (hereafter YWCA), and schools. Such cultural events were supported and highly acclaimed by haoles (white people or whiteness in Hawai'i) within the local authorities; these events aligned with their initiatives to represent Hawai'i as a "multicultural model of interracial solidarity and equality" while maintaining the status of the more privileged and dominant groups by obscuring the subordination and marginalization of minority groups (Okamura 2000, 125).

Ethnic Koreans in Hawai'i were most actively involved in cultural events during the late 1920s and 1930s, a period marked by the establishment of numerous Korean cultural organizations, most notably the Hyung Jay Club (Sisters' Club). Founded in 1927 as a YWCA-affiliated institution for second-generation Koreans in Hawai'i, the Hyung Jay Club played a crucial role in helping Koreans gain a foothold in Hawai'i's cultural scene. This organization continued to thrive until the outbreak of war. Ha Soo Whang (1892-1984), also known as Hwang Hae-su, who earned a sociology degree from Athens College in Alabama, played a pivotal role in the early staging of Korean cultural performances (for detailed information on Korean women students in the U.S. during the early twentieth century, refer to S. Kim 2011; H. Park 2015). Susan Chun Lee (1895-1969), referred to as Mrs. Henry Lee, a graduate of Ewha Woman's University, also played a significant role in promoting these performances (Van Zile 2007, 259). Despite having limited professional education and training in the performing arts, these elite women—Whang as the founder of the Hyung Jay Club and Lee as its teacher-took the lead in passing down traditional Korean performing arts to the second generation.

The first and representative piece by the Hyung Jay Club was *The Wedding Ceremony* based on the play script, *A Korean Girl's Cycle of Joy*. Ha Soo Whang dramatized the play by incorporating folk games, traditional Korean music, and dance into the tradition of Korean arranged marriage. The play, showing the old customs of a Korean wedding, which begins with the exchange of an offer of marriage between the parents of the couple via a broker, premiered in 1928 at local events like the

Korean Spring Festival. The festival was part of the Asian festival series hosted by the Honolulu Academy of Arts to introduce Asian holiday traditions to the multiethnic residents of Honolulu.

Hawai‘i’s unique multicultural setting was a crucial factor in how the Koreans–both the older and the younger generations–were so passionate about Korean music and dance. They shared a common ambition to present great musical performances alongside other ethnic groups at various multicultural events (P. M. Choy 2000; R. Lee 2017; H. Choi 2020). The musical activities of the Hyung Jay Club, which became a popular activity for the second generation, bridged the political divisions within the community and the generational division (H. Choi 2021b). It was inevitable that the local multicultural events disappeared during the years of military rule. However, Korean immigrants and their children never stopped presenting Korean music and dance during the war despite a huge decrease in local cultural events. On the contrary, they became more active in cultural activities, hosting–not merely participating in–musical events in Hawai’i; morale–boosting concerts and a banquet that Koreans hosted were an important conduit to manifest their political goals (H. Choi 2024).

It should be noted that even before the Pacific War, Koreans in Hawai‘i organized events to entertain servicemen. One such event took place on July 10, 1941, just three months after the establishment of the UKC. Hosted at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, the event was attended by more than 600 people, including 400 invited military personnel from the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps (*Honolulu Advertiser*, July 8, 1941a). According to a newspaper article, the audience enthusiastically cheered a performance presented by Honolulu’s Korean community. The entertainment featured “typical Korean songs, dances, and tableaux in authentic costume” (*Honolulu Advertiser*, July 11, 1941b). Figure 1, excerpted from the article, illustrates Korean women participating in the event. From left to right, Alma Shin, Clara Ahn, and Gertrude Lee are seated in the front row, while Eleanor Min, Lily Ahn, and Daisy Kim stand behind them. They were members of the Hyung Jay Club while attending high school and university in Hawai‘i.

Figure 1. Korean Women Entertaining Servicemen in 1941
Source: *Honolulu Advertiser,* July 11, 1941b

The 1941 cultural event demonstrated that the UKC served as a unifying force in support of American defense. In collaboration with the Honolulu mayor's entertainment committee for enlisted personnel, this event marked the UKC's first joint initiative. Won Soon Lee (1890–1993), chairman of the UKC, stated that they planned to organize additional programs for Koreans serving in the Army, National Guard, and Selective Service, as well as for military officers. The Honolulu members of the committee are recorded as C. H. Taugh, S. W. Son, P. Y. Cho, Henry Kim, Y. S. Sim, H. N. Min, W. K. Ahn, S. H. Kang, Warren Kim, S. H. Char, S. W. Lim, and W. S. Lee (*Honolulu Star–Bulletin*, July 11, 1941c). Following the unexpected attack on Pearl Harbor a few months later, the UKC intensified its efforts to demonstrate solidarity with the American war effort. The 1942 stage performance exemplified this heightened engagement.

The 1942 Stage Performance for Korean Independence

The 1942 stage performances reflected Korean efforts to unite Hawai‘i’s multiethnic and multiracial communities–excluding the Japanese–while asserting a distinct Korean identity. Their ultimate goal was to advance the political cause of Korean independence.

Uniting Multiethnic and Multiracial Groups in Hawai‘i Except Japanese

On June 3, 1942, the UKC hosted a Korean fundraising concert for the American Red Cross, which was part of the UKC’s efforts to support the organization (*Kungminbo*, May 13, 1942a). The UKC expressed Koreans’ full support for the war effort, stating, “Koreans felt so pleased to know that the proceeds of the benefit concert would aid the Red Cross and serve as a driving force leading to the U.S. victory in the end” (*Kungminbo*, June 3, 1942b). At the event, second-generation Koreans performed Korean folk songs, as well as court and folk dances, for an audience composed primarily of white American Red Cross officials. Three months later, Koreans hosted another musical event in Honolulu, drawing attention to its unique participants and audience. A *Kungminbo* newspaper article provides insight into this performance:

> As a combined effort by the Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and Hawaiian ethnic groups of the Morale Section of the Military Governor’s Office in Honolulu, the Honolulu Academy of Arts invited about 200 African American troops to enjoy music and dance on August 30 at 3 p.m. Mrs. Noji Shon, supported by Chŏng-song Ahn, performed Korean court dance and *Sŭngmu* (Monk’s Dance), while young women presented *nŏl* (Korean see-saw), and Patra Pang sang “Arirang.” For the court dance, four females recorded as Suk-myŏng Ahn, Suk-sŏng Ahn, Hee-soon Lee, and Hee-yŏn Lee showed Korean traditional dance in *hanbok*

> (Korean traditional clothing), showing off their graceful movements. The Chinese provided snacks and desserts to the audience, and the Filipinos prepared their native rice cake for the event. This event was possible thanks to a generous donation from the American Methodist Church in Wahiawa and Honolulu, Korean St. Luke's Episcopal Church, and Korean Christian Church (*Kungminbo*, September 2, 1942c). Translated by the author.

The Morale Section was a subcommittee under the Military Governor's Office, established at the request of the U.S. military following the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was tasked with preventing racial and ethnic conflicts within the multiethnic, multiracial society of Hawai'i and promoting unity (Shivers 1946, 8–9). More specifically, the Morale Section aimed to act as a mediator between the military and civilian society on issues related to public morality, striving to maintain a unified and cooperative community. In other words, the establishment of the Morale Section was evidence of the U.S. government's concerted efforts to mobilize communities of all races for the war effort.

Koreans played a leading role in organizing the morale-boosting concert, with representatives from Chinese, Filipino, and Hawaiian communities also participating. Each of these ethnic groups was affiliated with the Morale Section of the Military Governor's Office. Given the tense U.S.–Japan relations at the time, one might assume that the Morale Section excluded ethnic Japanese from its interracial committee. However, its origins can be traced back to the Oahu Citizens Committee for Home Defense, an advisory group of Japanese Americans formed in 1941 to promote Japanese loyalty in Hawai'i and suppress subversive elements. This committee played a pivotal role in a broader loyalty program aimed at reducing ethnic tensions across the islands. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Morale Section of the Military Governor's Office replaced these advisory groups (Okihiro 1991, 201–202). Although the influence of the Japanese ethnic committee had declined, a significant number of Japanese Americans remained involved in the Morale Section throughout the Pacific War. Against this backdrop, the col-

laboration led by Korean groups–deliberately excluding Japanese–reflected ethnic Koreans' conscious effort to publicly align with the American war effort and, by extension, assert their commitment to Korea's independence from Japanese rule.

Intriguingly, the concert was not organized for the general armed forces of the United States but specifically for African American servicemen. Around 30,000 African American military personnel and war workers had been brought to the war zone from the mainland during World War II. However, Hawai'i had never really encountered what was called a "Negro Problem" because its multiracial and multiethnic communities barely acknowledged the presence of African Americans. In fact, fewer than 200 "Negroes of American birth" lived in Hawai'i in 1940 (Bailey and Farber 1993, 818). Among them were members of the Twenty–Fifth Infantry Regiment, who had arrived in Hawai'i in 1913. This regiment, the first African American unit deployed to Hawai'i after the annexation, had previously seen combat in both the Indian Wars (1860s–1890s) and the Spanish–American War (1898). Despite initial resistance from local government and business leaders who sought to prevent the stationing of African American troops in the territory, these servicemen were eventually accepted. They soon attracted public attention, notably through their baseball team, which was accompanied by a jazz band that performed between innings to entertain spectators (Pierce 2019, 117). Nonetheless, the relatively small African American population in Hawai'i remained largely invisible to the broader local community.

The war brought African American servicemen to Hawai'i, with the second group arriving in 1942 as members of the 369th Infantry Regiment (Ziobro 2017, 23–26). During World War I, the U.S. Army assigned the 369th Infantry Regiment to menial tasks, undervaluing their potential. However, when the regiment was transferred to the French Army, they proved their valor in combat, earning France's highest military distinction, the *Croix de Guerre*. Upon their return to the United States on February 17, 1919, they were celebrated with a grand parade along Fifth Avenue in New York City. Despite their heroic accomplishments, the regiment continued to face racial discrimination throughout the 1920s. Nev-

ertheless, they solidified their place in New York's social and military life. In 1937, their enduring legacy was further honored through a mural funded by the Works Progress Administration, which commemorated the contributions of "Negro Soldiers in American Wars" (Ziobro 2017, 24). The following year, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., assumed command of the regiment, and in October 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt promoted Davis to brigadier general, making him the first African American general officer in the U.S. Army.

As World War II loomed, President Roosevelt took steps to secretly aid Britain and prepare the country for potential involvement in the conflict, even while maintaining a stance of neutrality in 1940. Accordingly, the U.S. Army underwent significant changes, which had a profound impact on the 369th Infantry Regiment. On August 30, 1940, the regiment was reorganized and redesignated as the 369th Coast Artillery (Antiaircraft), before being inducted into federal service on January 13, 1941. The newly formed 369th Coast Artillery was stationed at Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York, before relocating to Camp Edwards, Massachusetts, in late summer 1941 (Ziobro 2017, 24). In the spring of 1942, the regiment moved west to California, where many soldiers found themselves stationed in the backyards of Los Angeles suburbs. Finally, on June 16, 1942, the 369th departed from the San Francisco Port of Embarkation, bound for Hawai'i (Ziobro 2017, 25).

The Korean concert on August 30 was likely held to welcome the 369th Infantry Regiment. By the time they arrived in Hawai'i, the regiment had built a reputation for resilience and for swiftly confronting racial slights and bigotry from White servicemen. Unlike the U.S. mainland, Hawai'i fell outside the formal boundaries of Jim Crow segregation, making encounters between White and Black servicemen unpredictable. Southern White soldiers, in particular, were frustrated by the absence of enforced segregation and often instigated conflicts by attempting to impose Jim Crow rules in a place where they had never existed (Pierce 2019, 117–118).

The arrival of this new group of servicemen during the war complicated the standard depiction of race relations in Hawai'i. Encounters be-

tween Black servicemen, White servicemen, and local Asian women at social gatherings–where local women were encouraged to fulfill their patriotic "duty" by serving as companions and dance partners for servicemen–were often fraught with racial tension (for more information, see Pierce 2019). For instance, many local women were reluctant to dance with African American servicemen (Pierce 2019, 109–110). These challenges were not unique to Hawai'i but were prevalent across the United States. A major issue was the lack of desirable recreational facilities for African American servicemen in nearby towns, forcing them to be transported to venues they would not have chosen on their own. Without community cooperation in providing adequate facilities, military officials believed that the only viable way to prevent conflicts between Black and White servicemen was through the extensive use of highly trained military police (Nalty and McGregor 1981, 161).

In this context, the 1942 Korean concert was a significant demonstration of ethnic Koreans' support for the American war effort. The event was initiated by Koreans specifically for the newly arrived African American servicemen, who had significantly fewer entertainment opportunities than their White counterparts. By organizing a gathering that brought together all racial and ethnic groups–except the Japanese–ethnic Koreans signaled their commitment to American patriotism. This proactive gesture also served as a strategic effort to dispel suspicions among U.S. officials that Koreans were potential enemy aliens with ties to Japan (L. M. Kim 2003, 80–81).

Asserting Koreanness

The performances of the Hyung Jay Club, which had represented Korea at local multicultural events since the late 1920s, were prominently featured in the 1942 morale-boosting concert. The young Korean Americans who participated were not professional performers but individuals specializing in other fields (for more information, see H. Choi 2021a). For example, among the four Korean dancers who performed at the 1942

morale-boosting concert, Suk-sŏng Ahn and Suk-myŏng Ahn-both daughters of Chŏng-song Ahn (1895-1989, also known as Mrs. Ahn Won-gyu), the event's Korean director—had majored in business rather than the performing arts. As nonprofessionals, both first- and second-generation Korean Hawaiians, including members of the Hyung Jay Club, participated in presenting newly adapted Korean traditional performances on stage.

Chŏng-song Ahn herself was not a professional performing artist. She arrived in Hawai'i in 1920 to marry Won-gyu Ahn, a key member of the KNA in Hawai'i (Cho 2023). Originally from Pyongyang, she graduated from Jeong-ui Elementary School, operated by the Pyongyang Methodist Church, in 1910. She then graduated from Ewha Women's School in 1913 and taught at a girls' high school in Pyongyang for two years. Afterward, she taught at Samil Girls' High School in Suwon, Gyeonggi-do, from 1914 to 1916. From 1916 to 1917, she studied at the Yokohama Women's School in Japan. Before moving to Hawai'i, she served as a dormitory supervisor and a teacher at Pyongyang Women's School. Despite her extensive educational background, Ahn had limited professional experience in the performing arts, much like Susan Chun Lee, who had earlier assumed leadership of the Hyung Jay Club. Given this, it is reasonable to assume that the dances performed were likely short, choreographed pieces adapted from traditional Korean dance, rather than full-length, authentic performances (Van Zile 2007, 259).

Time constraints at the event likely further influenced the adaptation of the performances. As a result, Koreans in Hawai'i presented quasi-traditional performances that roughly imitated the original forms. These performances, accompanied by Korean music and dance, appealed to predominantly non-Korean audiences who had never encountered such displays. Despite deviating from traditional Korean music and dance in their purest form, these performances effectively showcased Korea's cultural distinctiveness, allowing the audience to appreciate the uniqueness of Korean heritage within the context of the broader geopolitical narrative.

The performers who presented traditional Korean arts on the mo-

rale-boosting stage in 1942 were all women. This, however, does not imply that all Korean performers on early-twentieth-century stages were always women. In English-adapted plays frequently featured at multicultural events, men occasionally appeared in roles such as grooms or fathers, depending on the dramatic context. Furthermore, traditional Korean musical accompaniment was often provided by middle-aged men (H. Choi 2022). In short, while Korean men did participate in certain cultural performances, women predominantly led and enacted the traditional repertoire. Notably, the 1942 event featured concise programs of Korean music and dance-elements that had previously been incorporated into English-language dramatic formats-with women occupying the visible stage roles. Throughout the Pacific War era, including the 1942 performance, women-though not exclusively-were the primary performers in short-format presentations of Korean cultural arts.

It is important to note that Koreans were not the only group of women staging performances for U.S. armed forces during the war. Various racial and ethnic groups, predominantly women, participated in cultural activities throughout the war years. As documented in the Hawai‘i War Records Depository collection, both military and civilian populations collaborated to organize concerts and variety shows for enlisted men and defense workers on O‘ahu. Professionals and amateurs, adults and children, Honolulu residents, Mainland defense workers and military personnel all volunteered their talents without seeking personal remuneration. The emergence of new performance and dance groups as part of military morale-boosting entertainment programs during this period is noteworthy, especially considering that these groups were often organized along racial lines. For instance, the USO Scrapbook records the formation of women's organizations that participated in entertainment visits to U.S. military units. Among these were the all-white "Flying Squadron" and "Hui Menebune," a group composed of women of color. Both of these groups debuted during this era, engaging in joint dance performances with servicemen.

The 1942 performance underscores how Korean Hawaiians distinguished themselves through their initiative and active engagement, de-

spite their small population and limited professional artistic resources. In order to persuade U.S. officials of their political objectives, Koreans emphasized their cultural and ideological distinctions from the Japanese. By presenting traditional Korean performances at the event, they reinforced their identity as a community separate from Japan, aligning their cultural expression with their political agenda.

Conclusion

The musical activities of the Korean diaspora in the early 1940s stand in stark contrast to those of professional performers in colonial Korea, whose activities were tightly controlled by the Japanese government. These performers were compelled to participate in staged events organized by colonial authorities to demonstrate their support for Japan's imperialist military efforts. Korean court musicians, for example, were forced to perform at events commemorating the 2600th Anniversary of the Japanese Empire, including playing the Japanese national anthem, "Kimigayo" (君が代), and the militaristic song "Umi Yukaba" (海行かば), at the opening ceremony (Hood 2001, 166).

Korean entertainers under Japanese colonial rule were regularly mobilized to perform at morale-boosting concerts for the Imperial Japanese Army and at political events promoting the colonized people's support for Japanese pan-Asianism. The Japanese military rigorously censored these performances, ensuring that they aligned with Japan's militaristic objectives. The use of foreign languages—particularly English—and American cultural symbols-such as baseball, cafes, music, and Hollywood films-was strictly prohibited in all forms of entertainment. For Korean performers, participating in such activities was a painful and humiliating experience, as they were forced to contribute to Japan's imperialist narrative.

In stark contrast, free from the constraints of Japanese colonial rule and situated within U.S. territory at war with Japan, ethnic Koreans in Hawai'i—including second—generation U.S. citizens-used the stage as a

platform for articulating their political aspirations. The 1942 performance before the 369th Infantry Regiment, a unit of African American servicemen, is a striking example of this approach. The inclusion of diverse communities–excluding the Japanese–along with the African American audience emphasized solidarity among various ethnic and racial groups, providing Koreans an opportunity to advocate for their political cause of independence. This cultural presentation, showcasing traditional Korean music and dance, was part of a broader strategy to promote Korean heritage to Americans and establish a place for Korea within the global geopolitical discourse of the era.

What, then, were the consequences when Koreans in Hawai‘i excluded Japanese and instead collaborated with other ethnic groups in their performances? It is clear that through their diasporic cultural activities, Koreans in Hawai‘i sought to expand their social position, carving out a place for themselves within the host country while simultaneously engaging in the resistance movement for their homeland. However, these efforts did not result in tangible political or diplomatic gains for Korean Americans. Despite their active participation in the war effort, they continued to be excluded from U.S. immigration laws. While the revision of immigration policy in 1943 granted Chinese immigrants access to citizenship–and later extended labor immigration to Filipinos, Indians, and others in 1945, 1946, and 1949—Koreans were not allowed to apply for U.S. citizenship until 1952 (U.S. Congress 1952). From this perspective, the 1942 performance ultimately failed to construct a successful public image of Koreans as both loyal to the United States and committed to independence from Japan within the racial hierarchy of Asians in America.

This study provides new insights into the intersection of ethnic identity, diaspora politics, and cultural diplomacy within the broader context of the Korean independence movement. However, it has yet to fully address the complexities of American racial discrimination, traditional minority cultures, and dominant gender norms in Hawai‘i. In particular, a more in–depth analysis of racially and ethnically segregated women’s morale–boosting units—including the briefly mentioned “Flying Squadron” and “Hui Menebune”—remain a critical subject for future research.

Such studies will provide a more nuanced understanding of the racialized class structures, ethnocultural traditions, and prevailing gender norms within wartime Hawai'i, long idealized as a paradise.

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