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# Resisting the Orientalization of the Enemy: Korean Immigrants and Racial Profiling on the Homefront during World War II

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## [Abstract]

This essay examines the ways in which Korean Americans fought back against being mistaken for “Dirty Japs,” as Japanese Americans were derogatorily called, on the homefront during World War II. Not unlike what happened to Muslims and the people of Arab descent after 9-11, Korean immigrants and Americans in Hawai‘i and the continental United States were often mistaken for Japanese after the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and faced psychological, verbal, and physical abuses. Furthermore, because Japan had colonized Korea since 1910 and, thus, Korea did not exist as an independent nation when the United States declared war on Japan, Koreans on the homefront were legally classified as “enemy aliens” along with Japanese immigrants on the homefront. In examining Korean Americans’ responses to their strange predicament of being lumped together with the Japanese, whom they despised for colonizing their motherland, and also to their being targets of racism by the larger public, I argue that the U.S. construction of all Asians as “Orientals,” who were historically viewed as inferior to whites, limited Koreans’ efforts to officially

gain a friendly alien status and contributed to their being implicated in the racism that was directed at the Japanese enemy and the people of Japanese ancestry in the United States. Thus, by vocally protesting and insisting that they are Koreans, Korean Americans resisted what I call the Orientalization of the enemy—the process by which Japanese-looking Asian Americans were assumed to be and subsumed under the category of the exotic Oriental foe—during World War II.

**Key Words:** Korean immigrants, homefront, World War II, resistance, Orientalization, racism, enemy aliens

## 1. Introduction:

### The War Comes to Hawai‘i and the United States

“WAR! WAR! WAR!” These were the words that Sung-Hark Kang, a Korean picture bride living in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, heard on the radio on the fateful morning of 7 December 1941. “My heart dropped to the ground and I started shaking but I did manage somehow to grab the kids and run into the house,” Kang recounted. “Out of the windows we could see Japanese airplanes whizzing by and heard guns everywhere” (Kang 28). For Cheeda Yue, a second-generation Korean American, that evening was supposed to be spent celebrating his seventeenth birthday. “The big party never happened,” he recalled, “and because the blackouts started that night, nobody had any parties for the next few years” (Treadgold, “Oral History Interview with Cheeda Yue” 25). In the chaos of the immediate aftermath of the Japanese surprise bombing of Pearl Harbor, Korean Americans in Hawai‘i received the news with mixed emotions. One Korean woman best captured the bittersweet sentiments

when she explained why she cried when she first heard the news. “Some tears were for joy and some for sadness,” she explained. “I was first of all happy because America was at last on our side against the Japanese; and then I was sad thinking about the boys who were being killed” (qtd. in Eubank 58).

While Americans coped with the shock of the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Korean Americans in Hawai‘i and the continental United States saw it as the confirmation of the Japanese imperial ambitions and brutality they knew all too well. After many years of failed attempts to fight off Japanese imperial power, Korea had been officially colonized by Japan in 1910. Responding to the social, political, and economic realities unfolding in Korea, over 7,000 pioneer Korean immigrants who came to Hawai‘i as sugar plantation laborers beginning in 1903 mobilized to advocate for a sovereign Korea well before the Japanese annexation of Korea. Thus, the long history of Japanese colonialism in Korea and the official annexation of Korea powerfully shaped the lives of Koreans in Hawai‘i and the continental United States. Performing the backbreaking labor of working on sugar plantations in the punishing heat of Hawai‘i, Koreans dreamed of one day returning home to Korea. Not surprisingly, the news of Japanese annexation of Korea devastated the pioneer Korean immigrants in Hawai‘i, for they had become stateless and found themselves in the territory of a country that did not welcome them. Koreans no longer had a nationality that the United States would recognize. Nor would the U.S. grant them citizenship affording them political power.

In this context, the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent U.S. declaration of war on Japan marked a turning point for Koreans in Hawai‘i and the continental United States: the possibility of the U.S. defeat of the Japanese represented the best promise yet for Korean liberation. Ironically, however, the U.S. declaration of war against the Japanese had some unforeseen devastating

consequences for Koreans. Because of their status as Japanese colonial subjects, Koreans in Hawai'i and the continental United States were legally classified as "enemy aliens" along with Japanese Americans, and were subjected to a number of enemy alien restrictions, which included everything from not being able to possess cameras to having an earlier curfew under Hawaii's martial law that was declared after Pearl Harbor. By tracing how U.S. officials and the general public treated Korean Americans as "Orientals" and lumped them together with the Japanese despite their obvious and demonstrated hatred for the Japanese and accusing Korean Americans of having loyalty to Japan, I argue that Korean Americans resisted what I call the Orientalization of the enemy—the process by which Japanese-looking Asian Americans, such as Korean Americans, were assumed to be and subsumed under the category of the exotic Oriental foe—by vocally protesting and insisting that they were Koreans. In their demand to be recognized as Koreans and not Japanese subjects, Korean Americans refused to be viewed as "Orientals" without a distinct history, culture, and transnational belonging.

In this essay, I examine the history of the pioneer Koreans' immigration to Hawai'i, where they found themselves in the company of Chinese and Japanese immigrants who, like them, had arrived there as sugar plantation laborers. These earlier years of Korean immigrants' lives as sugar plantation laborers are instructive in understanding the context in which they began developing their national and ethnic identity as Koreans outside Korea. The sugar planters demonstrated their belief that all Asian workers were "Orientals" and shared racial solidarity, and, thus, they specifically try to pit each ethnic group against another by using different ethnic group workers as strikebreakers, and went so far as to physically separate their living quarters to discourage unity among different Asian nationalities. Leading up to the eve of Pearl Harbor, there were strong anti-Asian sentiments in California directed at

the Chinese and Japanese who came before Koreans as well. Koreans' similar physical appearance made them indistinguishable from the Chinese and Japanese in the eyes and minds of the dominant culture. And nowhere in the history of Asian Americans, did this collapsing of different Asian ethnicities pose a greater problem for non-Japanese Asian Americans than following the Pearl Harbor attack when the emotions ran high against the Japanese and anyone who was perceived to be one. Korean Americans were often mistaken for "Dirty Japs," and these incidents of mistaken identities revealed as much about the burdens of the immigrants of color as the realities of the rampant racial profiling that Americans engaged in during the time of heightened hatred against the Japanese.

## 2. Early Korean Immigration to Hawai'i

Korean immigration to the United States was part of a larger international Asian labor migration. Nearly a million people from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and India immigrated to the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century (Chan 3). The first Korean immigrants came to the United States in 1883 following a period of political unrest after a failed attempt to overthrow the Korean monarchy by pro-Japanese liberals (W. Kim 3-4). But the first major Korean immigration began in 1903 with the recruitment of workers for Hawaiian sugar plantations. Like the Chinese and Japanese before them, Koreans came to Hawai'i as plantation field laborers. Hawai'i, prior to becoming a territory of the United States, was successful in obtaining a treaty allowing it to export sugar to the United States duty-free. Sugar production jumped from 9,392 tons in 1870 to 31,792 tons ten years later, to nearly 300,000 tons in

1900. Between 1875 and 1910, sugar plantation acreage multiplied nearly eighteen times, from 12,000 to 214,000 acres. By 1897, Hawai'i boasted a \$15.4 million sugar export industry (Takaki, *Strangers* 24). In the face of this kind of dramatic growth in production, planters scrambled to find sources of cheap labor.

It is worthwhile to consider how each of the Asian groups was recruited as sugar plantation laborers for the purpose of our discussion of how Korean immigrants were simultaneously lumped together with the Chinese and Japanese as “Orientals” and were pitted against them depending on the needs of the planters. The first Asian group to arrive in Hawai'i was the Chinese. Enduring a 55-day trip to Hawai'i by ship, 195 Chinese men arrived in 1852. Their contract called for five years of employment as sugar plantation laborers at \$3 per month, plus room, board, and the costs of the voyage. Initially, the importation of Chinese laborers was hailed by planters as a welcome experiment. With the tremendous growth of the sugar industry, 17,937 Chinese were recruited to come to Hawai'i by 1884.<sup>1)</sup> As the Chinese made up the majority of the laborers, the sugar planters began to agitate for a different source of cheap labor, fearing they were becoming too dependent on one ethnic group of workers (Takaki, *Strangers* 25). For the purpose of effective control, it was to their benefit to diversify the workforce, for they believed laborers “stick to their own kinds.” As an 1883 issue of the *Planters' Monthly* declared, planters needed a new source of cheap labor, “especially as an offset to the Chinese; not that the Chinese are undesirable—far from it—but we lay great stress on the necessity of having our labor mixed.” “By employing different nationalities,” the *Planters' Monthly* continued, “there is less danger of collusion among laborers, and the employers . . . secure better discipline.” Furthermore, bringing a new ethnic group as laborers was also advantageous, it advised, “in keeping down the price of labor” (*The Planters' Monthly* 177, 245-47; Takaki, *Pau Hana* 24-25).

To supplement the Chinese, the planters turned to the Japanese. The first Japanese contract laborers arrived in Hawai'i in 1885. Their ship, the *City of Tokyo*, carried 676 men, 159 women, and 108 children. Their contract committed them to a three-year term, with monthly wages of \$9 for men and \$6 for women, working six days a week, ten hours a day. Subsequently, twenty-six shiploads of roughly 29,000 Japanese laborers emigrated to Hawai'i between 1885 and 1894. Between 1894 and 1908, approximately 125,000 more Japanese laborers crossed the Pacific to try to make a living in Hawai'i, and they eventually surpassed the Chinese in numbers (Okiihiro 25-37). Japanese laborers, like the Chinese before them, were commended at the outset as good workers by the planters, but they proved more difficult to keep in line. After 1900, many Japanese workers, after completing the term of their contract, moved to the continental United States in search of higher wages. The number of Japanese migrating to the West Coast increased dramatically. In 1902 almost a thousand Japanese left for the West Coast; two years later almost 6,000 departed Hawai'i; and in 1905, more than 10,000 left for California. The massive exodus of Japanese laborers from plantations to the West Coast and other cities did not please the planters (Wakukawa 136).

Furthermore, unlike the Chinese, Japanese plantation laborers were strike prone. They did not hesitate to demand higher wages and better treatment from the lunas (plantation managers). Between 1890 and 1897, twenty-nine work stoppages occurred among Japanese laborers, and in the last months of 1900 alone, Japanese workers went on twenty-three strikes (Okiihiro 41-43). Planters, as well as the federal commissioner of labor, saw these strikes as racial actions, not class conflict. They considered the strikes not so much as attempts by Japanese field workers to better themselves economically, but more as their way of resisting cruel lunas and getting back at them for harming or harassing one of them. For example, in June 1893, all

two hundred and fifty Japanese workers at Kukuihaele plantation walked off the field to attend the trial of a luna, accused of shooting and wounding a Japanese worker. In June 1896, two hundred Japanese workers at Waianae plantation struck over the arrest of two fellow Japanese who had refused to work. Similarly, in November 1897, eighty-one Japanese workers at Ewa plantation struck to protest against a luna who had broken a worker's arm (Okiihiro 42). Calling such strikes "blood unionism," the federal commissioner of labor claimed that the Japanese "[did] not feel any hostility toward employers or capitalists as a class," and that the frequent strikes stemmed from "intense race solidarity" (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 136-37). As historians have shown, however, the source of Japanese labor activism was not solely located in ethnic or race solidarity, for the Japanese laborers understood their initiatives for strikes as a class-specific struggle.<sup>2)</sup>

Nonetheless, the planters sought yet another source of cheap laborers to undermine what they considered the Japanese labor monopoly in Hawai'i. As a local newspaper noted: "The peril is obvious. The more these Japanese get, the more they want; and unless they are stiffly curbed they will do great damage to the sugar interests of Hawai'i." (*Pacific Commercial Advertiser* [23 May 1905]) As sociologist Andrew Lind points out, behind this call to diversify their workforce was "the early recognition that the desired control over the workforce could be more readily exercised if it did not consist exclusively of a single ethnic group" ("Immigration to Hawai'i" 13). Contrary to such a belief and subsequent actions to pit one ethnic group against another, however, historical sociologist Moon-Kie Jung offers a different interpretation and argues that through rearticulation of race, various ethnic Asian groups were able to achieve an interracial labor movement in Hawai'i (*Reworking Race*).

In the meantime, growing resentment against Chinese workers in the United States



had led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, banning immigration of all Chinese laborers to the United States. After Hawai‘i became a territory of the United States in 1900, planters could no longer recruit new Chinese laborers. Therefore, in their search for new laborers, planters recruited from a variety of ethnic groups, including Germans, Portuguese, Norwegians, Italians, Puerto Ricans, and even “a few hundred Negroes” from New York (Patterson 13-14). As Lind explains, factors determining whom and where planters recruited were “the costs involved in recruiting and transportation and their amenability and efficiency as plantation laborers” (“Immigration to Hawai‘i” 11-12). None of these new recruits turned out to be as efficient or diligent laborers as the planters hoped. Thus, planters still needed a different source of cheap, reliable plantation workers. This is when they turned their eyes toward Korea.

### 3. Architects of Korean Recruitment to Hawai‘i

Dubbed “the Hermit Kingdom” by Westerners, Korea was a very homogeneous country. Notwithstanding constant efforts to conquer it, Korea shielded itself from outside influences. As historian Bruce Cumings wryly puts it, “Korea said in effect, ‘We have nothing and we need nothing. Please go away’” (87). Thus, to secure governmental approval and convince the people of the Hermit Kingdom to emigrate would require more than simple push and pull factors. In recruiting Korean laborers, the Hawaiian Sugar Planters’ Association (HSPA) found its key ally in Horace Allen, United States Minister to Korea. Trained as a doctor, Allen first went to Korea as a Presbyterian medical missionary in 1876. He quickly won the confidence of King Kojong when he was asked to treat the injury of an important government official.

Afterward, Allen served as an unofficial advisor to the King, who did not perceive the West to be as threatening as the ever-growing menace of Russia and Japan. Indeed, King Kojong wished to elicit U.S. intervention through his friendship with Allen (Patterson 20). Finding politics to his liking, Allen left missionary work and became the United States Minister to Korea in 1897.

Eager to foster U.S. business interests in Korea, Allen first met with the HSPA in March 1902 to discuss the possibility of sending Koreans to Hawai‘i as plantation workers. After their initial meeting, Allen enthusiastically agreed to help sugar planters recruit Korean laborers. According to historian Wayne Patterson, Allen’s positive response to the HSPA’s plea for help was “hardly surprising, as his entire diplomatic career in Korea had been devoted to obtaining franchises for American businessmen” (21). Allen agreed to serve as a liaison between the planters and the Korean government, and gave the planters an encouraging prediction that “Koreans would go,” and that “they would be good workers” (qtd. in Patterson 23). In his letter to Governor Sanford B. Dole of Hawai‘i, Allen pointed out why it would be advantageous for Hawai‘i to acquire Koreans as laborers. Making vast generalizations, he wrote, “The Koreans are a patient, hard-working, docile race; easy to control from their long habit of obedience. They are usually very keen on getting a foreign education.” Comparing Koreans to the Chinese in a favorable light, Allen added, “The Koreans are a more teachable race than the Chinese” (To Governor Sanford B. Dole). Dole was delighted with the idea. “The matter of the emigration of the Koreans is of great interest to Hawaii,” he wrote back (To Horace Allen). In the meantime, back in Korea, Allen took full advantage of his influence with Emperor Kojong.<sup>3)</sup> Appealing to the Emperor’s national pride, Allen convinced him that it would be wise to allow Korean emigration, for Koreans would be welcome in Hawai‘i when the Chinese were not.

Once the Emperor gave the green light for Korean emigration, Allen turned his attention to establishing recruitment offices in Korea. A prominent American businessman, David Dashler, agreed to finance and to oversee recruiting. He set up the East West Development company, recruited interpreters, and established branch offices in major port cities such as Inchon, Mokppo, Pusan, Masan, Wonsan, Chinampo, as well as Seoul and Pyongyang. The recruitment advertisements appealed to the Korean desire for better educational and economic opportunities, and highlighted other positive aspects of living in Hawai'i:

WE HEREBY ANNOUNCE THE FOLLOWING BY THE ORDER OF THE  
TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENT OF HAWAII, U.S.A.

1. We announce that we are pleased to offer various benefits to those who want to go to the Hawaiian islands by themselves or with families.
  2. The climate of Hawaii is temperate and delightful throughout the year. So it will please everyone.
  3. School education is very liberal and every island has an educational system in order to teach English, free of charge.
  4. For the farmers, it is very easy to find jobs throughout any season and especially for those who are healthy and well-conducted, there are steady jobs available and (all persons) shall be protected by law.
  5. Wages shall be \$15.00 per month by American gold (30.00 yen by Japanese gold or 57.00 won by Korean money) and working hours will be ten hours everyday except Sundays.
  - 6 Lodging, fuel, water and medical expenses will provided by the employers.
- (Qtd. in Moon 47-48)

Responding to such advertisements, more than 7,000 Koreans immigrated to Hawai'i between 1903 and 1905.<sup>4)</sup>

But is the promise of better economic opportunities enough to persuade someone to leave everything behind and make a fresh start in a new, unfamiliar place where they don't speak the language? According to Patterson, people with the least to lose ventured to Hawai'i, and, thus, most of the pioneer immigrants came from "the lower fringes of Korean society." Although a few Korean immigrants came from Yangban (elite, upper class) families, the majority of the pioneer Korean immigrants were still laborers, former soldiers, artisans, peasants, and unemployed men in Korea (Patterson 103-13).

The introduction of Christianity in Korea, which contributed to modernization as well as the consumption of Western goods and ideals, played a crucial role in convincing Koreans to immigrate to Hawai'i. American missionaries often brought with them products that Koreans had never seen before and came to desire, such as sewing machines and kerosene lamps. Bong-Youn Choy argues that some missionaries openly engaged in business activities of importing and selling the goods to Koreans with the justification that they were helping Koreans "obtain benefits of Western civilization" (55-56). The appearance of modern amenities, such as railroads, electricity, and other products of industrialization, made Koreans more open to the influence of Western culture and society, piquing their curiosity about Hawai'i and the United States. American Christian missionaries had considerable success in Korea, much more so than in China or Japan, a fact that Choy contributes to Allen's skillful job of protecting the missionaries from persecution. As a result of relatively widespread Christianity, Koreans already had a favorable impression of the West and believed that Hawai'i would be a more conducive environment for Christianity than Korea.

Clearly, there was a strong stigma attached to emigration in Korea. In emigrating, one left behind the spirits of ancestors and clan members (Son 62). To overcome this

psychological obstacle, Reverend George Heber Jones of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Inchon and a personal friend of Horace Allen encouraged his congregation to immigrate to Hawai'i by describing Hawai'i as a land of Christianity. Heeding the Reverend's advice, the first group of Koreans departed for Hawai'i on 22 December 1902. With the hope of a better life, Koreans departed from Chemulpo (Inchon) harbor. The journey across the Pacific Ocean, stopping in Japan, took over twenty days, and the first group of 100 or so Koreans on board the *S.S. Gaelic* arrived in Honolulu harbor on 13 January 1903.<sup>5)</sup>

How Koreans came to Hawai'i would dictate the terms of how free Koreans were to leave the sugar plantation work if they so choose. The journey to Hawai'i was not only long and grueling, but also expensive. As the recruiting and financial representative of the HSPA, Dashler paid for the trip for each Korean laborer and made sure each passenger had fifty dollars. This pocket cash was to give the appearance that these Koreans were free and willing emigrants in order to pass the immigration inspection. Contract laborers were indentured to an employer for a set number of years, but this practice had been outlawed in 1885 in the face of growing pressure from trade unions that wanted to protect native workers against low wages and foreign competition. Even though Koreans never signed any contracts, Dashler, Allen, the HSPA—all parties assisting Korean immigration to Hawai'i—were breaking the law by recruiting and transporting Koreans as essentially contract laborers. After arriving in Hawai'i, Koreans returned the pocket money of fifty dollars to Dashler's agent in Hawai'i. Patterson speculates that Koreans might have had to repay even the expenses for the passage to Hawai'i, which was about fifty dollars, by having them deducted from their wages (99-100). Given that their wage was a mere sixty-seven cents a day, this was a lot of money to repay. Having to pay back the transportation cost to Hawai'i would force Koreans to remain in the

plantations for a couple more years beyond their “contracts” (Choy 95).<sup>6)</sup>

Korean immigration to Hawai‘i came to a halt in 1905. After learning of the harsh conditions and treatment of Korean immigrants in Mexico, the Korean government decided not to issue any more passports. In addition, the Japanese government discovered that Koreans were used as strikebreakers to replace Japanese workers and put pressure on the Korean government to halt emigration. Out of more than 7,000 pioneer Korean immigrants, a total of 721 laborers and their family members subsequently returned to Korea. Striving to get rich quickly and returning to Korea proved to be an elusive dream for many immigrants, if not for economic reasons, then later for political reasons as Korea was officially annexed by Japan in 1910.

#### 4. Life in Hawai‘i as Plantation Laborers

How Koreans came to see themselves in multiethnic Hawai‘i is very important in understanding their identity formation process in response to their experiences of being treated as “Orientals” in subsequent years. Pioneer Korean immigrants found themselves in the company of Native Hawaiians, as well as other ethnic groups of plantation laborers who came before them, such as Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Puerto Ricans. While they all worked in the sugar plantation fields, contact with other ethnic groups did not come easily or frequently. As Lind explains, “Part of plantation strategy in securing effective control over their workers was to place them in work crews and segregated communities or ‘camps’ of those with similar ethnic backgrounds.” Given that the majority of the plantation laborers were Asians, Lind notes that “none of the traditional hallmarks of race—skin color, facial appearance, and stature—were very effective in distinguishing clearly between groups, since these

tended to shade imperceptibly from one group to another.” Hence, planters tried to “perpetuate and emphasize differences in language and culture as long as they were meaningful” (Lind, “Race and Ethnic Relations” 134-35). Furthermore, planters did not hesitate to pit one ethnic group against another. When Japanese strikers demanded higher wages, planters brought in Hawaiian, Chinese, Koreans, and Portuguese as strikebreakers for much higher wages than they paid the Japanese as a way to discourage the Japanese workers from going on strikes (Okiihiro 52).

While earlier scholars have dubbed Hawai‘i “The Last of the Magic Isles” and perpetuated its image as a paradise of racial harmony, immune from all social ills, especially those stemming from racism, the local newspapers painted disparaging and racist pictures of Koreans as an uncivilized and unintelligent people. In 1906, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* declared that “Korean laborers in Hawai‘i are drafted from the seaport scum” (28 July 1906). Another article said all Portuguese, Puerto Ricans, and Koreans were “social pariahs, moral lepers and religious fanatics in the country from which they hail . . . possessing no intellectuality and but little intelligence, [they] furnish a poor foundation for an intelligent American citizenship during the present generation and offer but little hope for many generations to come” (*Pacific Commercial Advertiser* [13 August 1906]). The newspapers also highlighted crimes committed by Koreans, portraying them as a people who resorted to violence and mob psychology to settle disputes. One highly publicized case in 1906 was that of Panna No Perk, who stole fifty-six dollars and a passport from another Korean. He was eventually tortured and killed by a group of Koreans who suspected him of the theft (*Pacific Commercial Advertiser* [27 March 1906]). The Hawaiian missionaries chimed in, offering a paternalistic and unflattering portrait of Koreans as immoral and hedonistic: “The Koreans on Hawaii are in a very needy condition and fearfully immoral influences prevail among them. Gambling and drinking are

common practices. The camps are infested with ring leaders in all bad things, so that as laborers they have lost caste among the managers, and their reputation is very bad indeed” (*Official Minutes of the First Session of the Hawaiian Mission* 22).

What these self-righteous, judgmental missionaries and journalists failed to mention in their publication was how dire the working conditions were for Korean sugar plantation workers. They endured long days of back-breaking labor that began with a 5:00 A.M. whistle. They took a half hour lunch break at 11:30 A.M. and their day ended at 4:30 P.M. Sung-Hark Kang, the same picture bride whose oral history interview provides the account of her reaction during the Pearl Harbor attack at the beginning of this article, recalls her husband crying while telling her stories of the hardships he experienced as a sugar plantation laborer prior to her arrival:

He told me that one time he was coming home from work carrying a bag of flour on his back. His hands were bleeding all over [from the sharp sugarcane leaves], and he was so weak and worn out that he threw down the bag of flour in the middle of the cane field and wept and screamed his heart out for sheer frustration. Eventually though, he got so hungry that he had to pick up the bag and trudge back home. (26-27)

After living on the plantation with her husband, Kang soon had her own experience of mistreatment to tell:

We suffered a lot of abuse. . . . [E]very morning at five they'd come riding into the village center on huge horses and start snapping their horsewhips. They'd just start beating with their whips. Men who weren't used to that kind of endless back-breaking work got exhausted quickly and would keep missing days. So in order to get everyone out in the fields, there was this law. You had to work at least twenty days out of a month. If you couldn't, you'd get thrown



off the plantation, and would have nowhere to go. (26)

Because planters sought strong, healthy laborers, pioneer Korean immigrants mostly consisted of single men in their twenties, and a few married men who came with their families. Most Korean American women in the first wave of Korean immigration came to Hawai'i with their husbands. (E. S. Yang 3-4; Yang Murray 205-13). Korean women also worked on the sugar plantation fields. Eun Sik Yang speculates that these Korean women were "undoubtedly housewives" in Korea prior to emigration (4-5). If so, to go from housewife to field laborer was a big adjustment, especially given that even those women who were not well-to-do could usually afford to have maids in Korea because of low wages paid to domestic workers. Not only were the workload and conditions grueling, but the harsh treatment they received from the more despotic lunas was not something Korean women were used to. A daughter of a pioneer Korean immigrant women remembered:

My mother had maids in Korea, but at Kipauhulu plantation she worked in the cane fields with my older brother and his wife. I remember her hands, so blistered and raw that she had to wrap them in clothes. One morning she overslept and failed to hear the work whistle. We were all asleep—my brother and his wife, my older sister, and myself. I was seven years old at the time. Suddenly the door swung open, and a big burly luna (overseer) bust in, screaming and cursing, "Get up, get to work." The luna ran around the room, ripping off the covers, not caring whether my family was dressed or not. I'll never forget it. (*75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Korean Immigration to Hawaii* 50)

Most often, however, Korean women worked as cooks for single Korean male laborers. Memoirist Mary Paik Lee's mother who came to Hawai'i with her husband and children in 1905, cooked for about thirty single men who worked in the citrus

groves, while Lee's father worked in the sugar plantation field. Her father did not like her mother doing this kind of work, especially when she was not used to working, but as Lee puts it, "it seemed to be the only way we could make a living for ourselves." Her mother got up at 5:00 A.M. to make breakfast for the men, packed their lunches, and cooked them dinner at 7:00 P.M. (M. Lee 14). Women who did domestic tasks for Korean bachelors earned a higher income than those working in the fields. Some women ran boarding houses, and this entailed the additional work of washing the boarders' clothes and cleaning the living quarters (E. S. Yang 5). But whether they worked in the fields or for other field workers, Korean immigrant women still attended to domestic chores at home, extending their waking hours even longer.

## 5. Orientalism and Anti-Asian Sentiments in California on the Eve of Pearl Harbor

Enduring the harsh working and living conditions, Korean immigrants dreamed of making enough money to go back home. But that dream proved an empty one for the majority of pioneer Korean immigrants. Not only could they not save enough money to go back but also the unstable political conditions and the eventual annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910 made returning to Korea implausible as well as unattractive. Gradually, a substantial number of Koreans migrated to the continental United States, where they sought railroad-construction and mining jobs with slightly better pay. Those who stayed in Hawai'i also moved out of plantations as quickly as they could afford to, and settled in cities like Honolulu. According to Choy, almost 1,000 Koreans left Hawai'i for the West Coast between 1904 and 1907, before President Theodore Roosevelt's Executive Order 589 in March 1907, which

specifically prohibited the migration of Japanese and Korean laborers from Hawai'i to the continental United States. They entered California through San Francisco and initially dispersed to rural communities such as Dinuba, Reedley, Delano, Lompoc, Stockton, Walnut Grove, Oxnard, Riverside, and Willows (Choy 95-105; Yim 519-22). In these small agricultural towns, Koreans found work on farms and moved frequently to follow wherever work was available. Farming and agricultural work provided an important source of employment and economic stability for Korean immigrants from the beginning of their arrival in California from Hawai'i until the 1920s (R. Kim, "Korean Tenant Rice Farming"). Korean Americans began to move to urban cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, which later would become the hub of Korean American social and political activities in the continental United States (Givens 22).

The "yellow peril," an umbrella term that expressed the general fear of growing "Oriental" power at home and abroad and its menace to the Occident, peaked at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>7)</sup> Citing military, economic, and cultural reasons, yellow perilists sought to curtail Asian immigration at home, and to strengthen military power to combat Japan's imperial power in Asia.<sup>8)</sup> Otherwise, the disastrous outcome, they argued, would be the "Orientalization" of the Occident. The yellow perilists in California devoted their energy to effecting changes in immigration policies as well as spreading general perceptions of "Orientals" as inferior, uncivilized people who must be feared and shunned. In the 1890s, journalists in the *San Francisco Chronicle* depicted the Chinese as prone to lying, hopelessly addicted to opium, morally deficient, and generally dangerous to the nation's economic and cultural soul. Other intellectuals, writers, and military officers chimed in with similar sentiments toward the Chinese. Anti-Orientalists attacked the Japanese in the same way they disparaged the Chinese. Strikingly, insulting images of the Japanese often

overlapped those of the Chinese: morally degenerate, unhygienic, cunning, “coarse and piggish,” and lacking in humanity towards their fellow beings (Thompson, *The Yellow Peril*).

Koreans, for the most part, were spared such racist remarks directed against them as a group, not because yellow perilists and other racists were more accepting of Koreans, but because their numbers in the United States outside Hawai'i were very small compared to those of Chinese and Japanese immigrants. As Choy has pointed out, by 1906, an estimated 110,000 Japanese and 45,000 Chinese made their home in California, the state with the highest concentration of Asian immigrants and the most intense yellow peril sentiments, while only just over 1,000 Koreans resided there (107). Not numerous enough to attract special attention, but nevertheless marked by their physical appearance as “Orientals,” Korean immigrants in California were readily subsumed in the larger negative images and perceptions of Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Because yellow perilists and other nativists did not always bother to distinguish among the different ethnicities of the “Orientals,” Koreans, whether identified as Koreans or not, were subjected to the same racist treatment as part of the growing problem of the “Oriental” population in the United States.

To be sure, Koreans faced the same resentment from white laborers who saw them as “Oriental” competition for jobs. In the early 1900s, in a racial attack known as the “Steward Incident,” a group of white farmers and workers threw stones and rocks at Korean orange pickers working on Mrs. Mary E. Steward's orchard in Upland, California, threatening to kill them if they did not leave the orchard right away. Mrs. Steward, coming to the Korean workers' defense, bought them guns to protect themselves and declared that “The minority Korean people in this great country of America have a right to live and work just as other nationalities, [and] therefore, your hostile attitude toward these people cannot be justified” (Choy 109).

Aside from being seen as taking away white Americans' jobs, Koreans and other "Orientals" were simply not welcome in California during the height of the yellow peril years. Lee-Wook Chang, a Korean intellectual who came to California as an anti-Japanese political refugee, was refused service at a restaurant in Los Angeles in 1908. A hostess told him, "We can't serve you lunch, because if we start serving lunch to the Orientals, white Americans will not come here" (Choy 110). Chang's ethnicity as a Korean probably did not much matter in scenarios like this. Against the backdrop of the racist yellow peril sentiments of the time, his "Oriental" appearance denied him service at the restaurant and subjected him to other manifestations of racism in California. But in any case, the bottom line of the yellow perilists' project in California was clear: Chinese and Japanese immigrants—and by extension Korean immigrants—were unassimilable, and thus should not be allowed to enter the United States as immigrants.

President Roosevelt's Executive Order 589 in March 1907 barring Japanese and Koreans from entering the continental United States from Hawai'i specifically addressed the fear and resentment of white Americans who believed that Japanese and Korean immigrants were taking jobs and farm work away from them. The Chinese laborers were already barred through the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In California, Japanese tenant farmers had enjoyed great success in the early decades of the twentieth century, and the competition they presented to white farmers generated strong anti-Japanese feelings. In May 1913, the California legislature passed the Alien Land Law that imposed a citizenship requirement to own land, which was a clever way to prohibit specifically Japanese immigrants and other Asian immigrants, who categorically were not allowed to become naturalized U.S. citizens, from owning land in California.<sup>9)</sup>

The anti-Asian sentiments reached a fever pitch that summer, and Korean laborers,

who were mistaken for Japanese farmers, encountered a racist incident that threatened their lives. Joseph Simpson and William Wilson, two farmers who needed extra help to pick apricots on their farm, had eleven Koreans come to their small rural town of Hemet, California to work. These eleven Korean workers arrived by train on 26 June 1913. After the news spread that a group of “Asiatics” had arrived in their town, “an angry mob of over 100 white men” who mistakenly thought that these Korean men were Japanese, threatened them to leave town immediately to avoid physical harm. Fearing for their lives, these Korean men took the next train out of Hemet (R. Kim, *The Quest for Statehood* 6).

This incident, and many like it, demonstrates Americans’ inability, or even refusal, to see different ethnic groups of Asians as a unique nationality. Seeing only the physical appearances and grouping all Asian people under the rubric of “Orientals” or “Asiatics,” the angry mob of Hemet, California practiced what we would call racial profiling today. Korean workers’ “Oriental” bodies demarcated and signaled their enmity to white people. As historian Shelley Lee notes, Americans’ understanding of “Orientals” was based on “a presumption of difference,” and that difference translated into inferiority, unassimilability, and foreignness (S. Lee 23). In that framework, the power dynamic is always uneven, in favor of Americans, who assigned dehumanizing and demeaning characteristics to Asians as peoples and Asia as cultures. Here it is important to remember to condemn the racism behind the angry mob’s action. But the indiscriminate lumping of all Asian people as “Orientals,” in itself, too, is racializing people of Asian ancestry based on the historic meanings attached to being labeled “Orientals.”

## 6. Asserting Korean Identity to Resist the Orientalization of the Enemy

One can only imagine how many times Korean Americans were mistaken for Japanese during the heightened time of racism against Japanese Americans after the Pearl Harbor attack. The rampant racial profiling of Asian Americans intensified after the United States had declared war on Japan. Understandably, such incidents caused great anxiety and anguish for Korean Americans, not to mention actual verbal and physical harm. Marian Song, a second-generation Korean American living in Los Angeles during the war remembers that she “always felt like someone was watching” her whenever she was out in the public. She was riding a streetcar when a child with a mother kept staring at her, and suddenly the child shouted out, “She looks just like Tojo!” “I was already very embarrassed . . . but I will tell you I wanted to die right there” (Treadgold, “Oral History with Marion Song” 11). Some Korean Americans were much more defiant in their encounters of mistaken identity. Even though she felt “uneasy around [white] Americans during the war” as she received “a lot of dirty looks” in Los Angeles where she lived at the time, Mary Chun did not hesitate to confront people who gave her grief mistaking her for Japanese American. She was approached by a man who asked her why she was not in a (Japanese American Internment) camp. When she explained that she was Korean American, not Japanese American, he told her he could not tell the difference. “I told him I couldn’t tell the difference between a Jew and a Gentile,” she recalls, “but that I didn’t think it was any of my business anyway. He didn’t say anything else” (Treadgold, “Oral History with Mary Chun” 16). Similarly, Agnes Pakh Kwon was parking her car on the street in San Francisco when two women walked by her and shouted, “Get out of here, Jap!” Kwon’s husband was serving in the Army during the war, so this had

made her “really angry.” She immediately reacted to their comments: “I came out of the car, and I put my hands on my hips and I said, ‘Don’t you dare call me a Jap. My husband is fighting for you, and you are talking to me like that?’ I’m not a Jap to begin with, and even if I were I would not be disloyal!” (Chang, “Oral History Interview with Agnes Pakh Won”). Again, it is important to note that Kwon’s anger was not simply about being wrongly identified, but she also called out her perpetrators by challenging these two women’s wrong assumption that Japanese Americans were disloyal. Kwon did not just protest the hostile remarks and defended herself. But rather she defended the rights of Japanese Americans as well by challenging the perpetrator’s racism and assumptions.

Even though second-generation Korean Americans escaped the legal classification of “enemy aliens” based on their U.S. citizenship, they were not protected from the everyday abuses of mistaken identification as Japanese American during the war. They were, nevertheless, equipped with the power of the English language, unlike their first-generation Korean American parents who did not speak English well, to fight back. In the historical novel *Clay Walls* by Ronyoung Kim, the exchanges between the Korean mother and her American daughter aptly captured both the excitement that U.S. declaration of war on Japan brought the Korean American community and the significantly raised stakes of being mistaken for Japanese. The mother excitedly declares, “We’re going to get together. United Koreans to help the United States. Men are going to volunteer for the National Guard. People with money will buy bonds. And we’re going to wear badges saying we’re Koreans.” The daughter incredulously asks, “Badges?” to which her mother answers, “You don’t have to worry. You’re an American citizen. But we might be mistaken for Japanese.” But her daughter’s citizenship status would not necessarily protect her from the mistaken identity. The daughter muses, “That’s nothing new.” The mother



replies with a profoundly urgent truth, “The war is new. We don’t want people to think we’re our enemy” (R. Kim 261). Being mistaken for Japanese may have been a common occurrence before, but now more than ever, it carried grave consequences and occurred more than Korean Americans liked. It would require extensive measures to resist their forced identification with the Japanese.

Although they were not legally classified as Japanese like Koreans were, being mistaken as Japanese on the basis of their physical appearance was a concern and problem for all other non-Japanese Asian Americans living in the United States. *Time* magazine apparently took an authoritative role in the task of distinguishing different Asian Americans. In its 22 December 1941 article entitled “How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs,” it instructed its readers to look for distinctive physical characteristics and mannerisms of the person under question. It pronounced:

Virtually all Japanese are short. Japanese are likely to be stockier and broader-hipped than short Chinese. Japanese are seldom fat; they often dry up and grow lean as they age. Although both have the typical epicanthi fold of the upper eyelid, Japanese eyes are usually set closer together. The Chinese expression is likely to be more placid, kindly, open; the Japanese more positive, dogmatic, arrogant. Japanese are hesitant, nervous in conversations, laugh loudly at the wrong time. Japanese walk stiffly erect, hard heeled. Chinese, more relaxed, have an easy gait, sometimes shuffle. (“How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs” 33)

Its carefree (and careless) generalization about Japanese and Chinese people aside, the *Time* magazine article represented the effort to segregate different ethnicities and nationalities of “Orientals” as a direct result of the crisis of World War II. Even though World War II intensified the Orientalization of all Asian Americans who looked Japanese, it also simultaneously disrupted this process by prompting the need

to distinguish the Chinese who had suddenly become the “good Orientals” from the enemy Japanese.<sup>10</sup>) It is hard to imagine readers taking to heart the information in the *Time* article, but in the American tradition of essentializing people of color and oversimplifying their culture, this article may have provided much-needed help for those who wished to be able to tell the Chinese apart from the Japanese with more certainty. Its possible usefulness for the American public aside, as historian K. Scott Wong points out, the *Time* article greatly helped the morale of Chinese Americans on the homefront. Some members of the Chinese American community regarded such efforts to distinguish between the Japanese and Chinese as “a validation, a reason to hope that in the future Chinese Americans would receive better treatment” (Wong 76). Some Chinese Americans even tried to “stand taller so as not to look Japanese” (Philip Choy, qtd. in Wong 76).

Not numerous enough on the homefront and not important enough to matter in international geopolitics that favored the Chinese as the new Asian ally in the war, Korean Americans reaped no benefit from such racialist efforts to distinguish the “good Orientals” from the “enemy Orientals” on the homefront. And everywhere they went, no matter where they lived, their “Oriental” face subjected them to extra security measures. In the summer of 1942, Marian Song was stopped by officials when she got on the train to Los Angeles after visiting her brother in Oregon:

Some officials came to check my papers and then talked with each other for what seemed like a very long time. It was very apparent to all other passengers on the train that the departure was being held up by me. The train was finally allowed to leave, but I was still so uncomfortable that I don't remember moving from my seat or saying anything for the entire trip. I think I sat there and knitted the whole time. (Treadgold, “Oral History with Marion Song” 11)

In Hawai‘i, where martial law was immediately declared, the security was even tighter, and Korean Americans found themselves under suspicion based on their physical appearance. Sung-Hark Kang, who went to check on her seamstress shop at Pearl Harbor four days after the attack, recalled that she was met with guards who made “a huge fuss, glaring at [her] like they wanted to kill [her]” (26-27). The hardship of mistaken identity was both concrete and self-imposed. Even without verbal or physical abuse, Koreans were conscious, or fearful, that others must think that they were Japanese. One Korean woman in Hawai‘i explained the trauma she experienced in simple, everyday activities, such as riding the bus: “Everyone looks at me as though I’m Japanese and I feel so mad and guilty because I can’t change my face, and I have no way to tell them I’m just the opposite of Japanese” (qtd. in Eubank 83). Whether or not they were verbally or physically threatened, the constant fear of being mistaken for Japanese was something that became an everyday reality for Koreans on the homefront. And whenever they had the chance and to anyone who would listen to them, they said, “I’m just the opposite of Japanese.”

## 7. Conclusion

Edward Said has suggested that the discursive and ideological development of Orientalism is a Western imperial tool for cultural dominance. He argues that by creating the Orient with imagined geographical boundaries, Orientalists have created “us,” the Westerners, and “them,” the “Orientals” as the Occident’s Other. Orientalism, Said asserts, is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (2-3).<sup>11</sup> Thus, Orientalism began as a self-serving ideology, confirming “Western superiority” and “Oriental inferiority” (Said 42). At

the heart of Said's argument is the contention that the construction of Orientalism told more about the people defining than the people defined: "Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (12).

Koreans, trying to navigate the racialized terrain of the homefront before and especially after the Pearl Harbor attack, knew the cost of being seen and treated as "Orientals." They became targets of racism for looking the way do, for embodying "Orientalism." Even the branch of U.S. military intelligence offices closely surveilling Koreans for their anticolonial activism on the homefront referred to them as "a desirable section of the Oriental population," underscoring Koreans' relationship to the larger question about "Orientals" in the United States ("A Survey of the Koreans in the Territory of Hawai'i"). Koreans occupied a complicated place on the homefront during World War II. They were legally classified as Japanese subjects and "enemy aliens," and they were mistaken for Japanese in their everyday lives, all while fighting for decolonization of Korea and rooting for the United States' defeat of Japan. In this place of conflicting priorities and emotions, Koreans pushed back against the assumption, treatment, and label—legal and otherwise—that they were Japanese. In other words, they fought the Orientalization of the enemy that included them by association, by looks, and by their colonial history. Koreans resisted being lumped together with the Japanese and called out the racism and ignorance behind that effort. By vigorously resisting the unfair categorization of themselves, Korean immigrants demonstrated that they, even in their precarious position as "enemy aliens," would not accept an identity that was imposed upon them without their consent.

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**Notes**

- 1) Hawai'i was an independent kingdom from 1810 to 1893. It became a republic in 1894 and remained so until the United States annexed it in 1898. However, the laws of the United States did not begin to apply to Hawai'i until passage of the Organic Act in June 1900. Hawai'i remained a territory of the United States until it became the fiftieth state in 1959.
- 2) Historian Gary Okihiro has argued for a development of class-consciousness, rather than ethnic or racial solidarity, among Japanese plantation workers as a basis for their strikes. Japanese workers went on strikes frequently, particularly after the annexation of Hawai'i in 1900, because, Okihiro contends, "Japanese workers increasingly saw themselves in class terms and recognized that their strength lay in collective action." In July 1904, for example, Japanese workers of Waipahu plantation demanded the dismissal of a Japanese luna named Suyechiro, who had been especially difficult and cruel. The workers refused to accept the compromise of transferring him to oversee Korean workers. As one Japanese striker put it, "Does it behoove us . . . to force the oppression of this Suyechiro on these poor Koreans?" (Okihiro 42-44).
- 3) King Kojong was elevated to emperor in 1897 (Patterson 20).
- 4) According to both Bong-Youn Choy and Warren Kim, the exact number of Korean immigrants arriving on sixty-five different ships between 1903 and 1905 is 7,226. However, 479 of them failed the required physical exams and were sent back to Korea (Choy 76; W. Kim 10).
- 5) The exact number of the first group of Koreans arriving in Hawai'i varies slightly among different sources. According to Wayne Patterson, 102 Koreans—56 men, 21 women, and 25 children—arrived on the shores of Hawai'i. Bong-Youn Choy, however, maintains that out of 101 Koreans aboard the S.S. Gaelic—55 men, 21 women, and 25 children—only 93 arrived in Hawai'i, as eight of the Koreans, who were found to have an eye disease, were prohibited from landing (Patterson 1; Choy 75).
- 6) Patterson notes, however, that Koreans left plantation work faster than any other ethnic groups (*The Ilse* 33).
- 7) The following discussion of the yellow peril is from Richard Austin Thompson, *The Yellow Peril, 1890-1924*.
- 8) The victory of Japan over Russia in Russo-Japanese War in 1905 particularly alarmed yellow perilists about the growing military power of Japan.
- 9) Japanese immigrants had clever ideas of their own. To get around this restriction, they

purchased land under their U.S. born children's names.

- 10) For a thoughtful discussion of the changing perception of the Chinese as a result of the U.S.-China international politics intersecting with the domestic scenes during the 1940s, see Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism*.
- 11) Said is not without his critics. Lisa Lowe challenges “the assumption that Orientalism monolithically constructs the Orient as the Other of the Occident” and argues for a more heterogeneous tradition of Orientalism. See Lowe ix. For similar charges, see Homi K. Bhabha 18-36; James Clifford, “On Orientalism” in *The Predicament of Culture*; and B. J. Moore-Gilbert, *Kipling and “Orientalism.”*

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## 국문초록

**적국의 오리엔탈화에 항거하며:  
2차 세계대전 중 미국 내 한국인 이주민과 인종 프로파일링**

Lili M. Kim (한국외대)

본 논문의 목적은 2차 세계대전 중 한국계 미국인들이 어떻게 “더러운 왜놈”(Dirty Japs)이라고 폄하되던 일본계 미국인으로 오인 받는 것에 저항했는지 살펴보는 것이다. 9/11 사태 이후 이슬람교도들이나 아랍계 인종들이 겪었던 것과 비슷하게, 하와이와 미국 본토에 거주하던 한국인 이주민과 한국계 미국인들은 일본의 진주만 공격 이후 종종 일본인으로 오인당하며 심리적, 언어적, 신체적 학대에 직면했다. 특히 1910년, 일본이 한국을 식민지화한 후 미국이 일본에 전쟁을 선포했을 때 한국이 독립국가가 아니었기에, 미국 내 한국인들은 법적으로도 일본인 이주민들과 함께 “적국적 거류 외국인”으로 분류되게 되었다. 본 논문은, 조국을 식민지화해 경멸해마지않던 일본인들과 같은 편으로 묶여야했던 한국계 미국인들의 특수한 고난에 대한 대처를 분석하며, 미국이 모든 아시아인들을 백인보다 열등한 “오리엔탈”로 규정함으로써 우호적인 공식적 외국인 지위를 얻으려 노력한 한국인들의 노력을 무색하게 하고 일본인 적들과 미국 내 일본계 사람들을 겨냥한 인종차별에 한국인들까지 휘말리게 했음을 주장하려 한다. 한국계 미국인들은 한국계라는 것을 강경하게 주장함으로써 2차 대전 중 일어난 “적국의 오리엔탈화”—일본인처럼 보이는 동양계 미국인들을 이국적인 동양인 적의 범주에 함몰시키는 과정—에 적극 항거한 것이다.

**주제어:** 한국인 이주민, 국내전선, 2차 세계대전, 항거, 오리엔탈화, 인종 차별, 적국적 거류 외국인

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