

Multicultural Musicscape for National Pride: Performing Arts of East-Asian Diasporas in Hawai‘i before WWII

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Abstract

This study investigates stage performances of Asian immigrants in the U.S., focusing their cultural interactions in Hawai‘i prior to World War II. Previous studies of Asians in the U.S. during the early twentieth century have focused on their separate ways of preserving homeland culture or presentation of mainstream American culture to express a sense of belonging to the host society and relieve anti-Asian sentiments. Despite increasing cultural interactions in cities during this period, the discussion of cultural exchanges among immigrant communities have received limited attention. This study expands previous perspectives by examining the performing arts to demonstrate that diverse multicultural events in Hawai‘i were important tools to promote respective Asian ethnic groups’ cultural identities, foster interactions among young adults of Asian ancestry, and inspire their national pride. The Asian diasporas in Hawai‘i constituting a majority of the local population, despite foreign-born Asian immigrants’ limited access to U.S. citizenship, appreciated opportunities to curate their own ethnicity on stages and culturally interact with other ethnic groups. The multicultural experiences ultimately instilled the satisfaction and national pride into the young adults of Asian ancestry.

Keywords: Asian immigrant, Hawai‘i, performing arts, ethnic identities, the early twentieth century, colonialism

1. Introduction

This study explores musical activities of Asian immigrants and their children during the early twentieth century in Hawai‘i to find what identities the Asian ethnic groups reflected through stage performances. How immigrants identified themselves is a key issue in understanding underlying intentions of their preservation and adaptation of homeland cultures. Identity is a precarious construction. The labels with which individuals identify, whether ethnic, national or gender-based, are often vague, as their definitions are situational, ever-evolving, and dissolving. However, despite their ambiguous construction, individuals and groups at times closely guard their identity. Music is a key to understanding identity. Music offers “a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective (Frith, 1996, p. 110).” Social groups get to know themselves as a particular organization of individual and social interests – of sameness and differences – through cultural activity including musical performances. Various factors such as individual, gender, age, and overarching structures like the music industry or formal music education hover around the musical landscape but can penetrate only very partially the moment of enactment of musical fellowship (Slobin, 1993, p. 41).

Asians began to move to Hawai‘i, where American capitalists and missionaries had established plantations and settlements by the 1830s. Originating primarily from China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines, these early immigrants were predominantly contract workers who labored on plantations. However, due to the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924 banning all the Asian labor forces from entering the U.S. territories, Asian immigration to the U.S. drastically diminished. The discriminatory immigration policy against Asians in the U.S. began to change only after the end of World War II. One of the conspicuous events in this change is the McCarran–Walter Act of 1952, which repealed the remnants of the Asian restriction of the Naturalization Act of 1790 and permitted Asians and other non-white immigrants to become naturalized citizens. The 1965 Immigration Act, setting across-the-board immigration quotas for each country, replaced the exclusionary immigration rules of the 1924 Immigration Act that excluded “undesirable” immigrants, including most Asians.

Despite the 1924 immigration policy banning Asian immigration to U.S. territory, early twentieth-century Hawai‘i was multiethnic communities where Asians outnumbered all other races. The Asian population in Hawai‘i

drastically multiplied due to high fertility among the first-generation married couples. The requirement of obtaining citizenship was not applied to the foreign-born first-generation Asians. It was because of the original U.S. Naturalization Law of 1790, limiting naturalization to immigrants who were “free white persons of good character.” On the other hand, all persons born in the U.S., including the second-generation Asians, have been granted citizenship since the 1898 decision in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*. A United States Supreme Court case in which the Court ruled, “A child born in the United States becomes at the time of his birth a citizen of the United States by virtue of the first clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution.”

2. Literature Review

Previous research on multiculturalism in Hawai‘i relates the socio-cultural environment of its multiethnic community to Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci’s ideas on hegemonic discourse. Scholars stress social stratification in early-twentieth-century Hawai‘i, where white (*haole*) elites routinely controlled the political, economic, and cultural life of immigrants and native Hawaiians. Edna Bonacich and Lucie Cheng (1984) and Ronald T. Takaki (1983) reveal that each ethnic group maintained its religion, traditions, and living environments in plantation villages, where plantation owners intentionally segregated workers based on ethnicity to prevent unionization among the plantation workers. Gary Y. Okihiro (1991) emphasizes the tale of tragedy of Asian immigrants to demonstrate that they received less favorable treatments than European immigrants. Sally Engle Merry (2000) uncovers Native Hawaiians’ acceptance of the Anglo-American law system, arguing that the law gradually led elite Native Hawaiian and *haole* to reconstitute Asians into a new subordinate class of labor. As Tomoko Akami (2008) points out, the programs that the *haole* initiated to promote the preservation of ethnic groups’ culture were to develop the local tourist industry and continuously use cheap “colored” labor (p. 19).

Studies of Asian Americans’ cultural activities during the early twentieth century demonstrate their adaptability to host societies. More specifically, some describe the changed purposes and practices of traditional festivals and performing arts in the U.S. (Yano, 1985; Combs, 1985). Others reveal that Asian immigrants collaborated with people of mainstream American culture, showed their appreciation of the mainstream culture, and stopped displaying their traditional culture in public during World War II (Lowe, 1996; Asai, 1995; Asai, 2005; Yang, 2001; Choi, 2003). Mostly focusing on Japanese immigrants in the mainland, these studies stress the role of their musical activities in showing their belonging to the mainstream society and relieving anti-Japanese/Asian sentiments pervasive during World War II. Some studies dealing with the multiculturalism in early twentieth-century Hawai‘i do not specify concrete evidence of Asian immigrants in multicultural events.

3. Methodology

This study expands previous perspectives by examining Asian presentation of music, dance, and folk culture representing their ethnicity at multicultural events that fostered cultural interactions in Hawai‘i in the 1920s and 1930s, before the beginning of WWII, when most of cultural events disappeared due to concerted efforts of the local authorities to win the war. In my analysis of Asian ethnic groups’ cultural activities, the following research questions are to be closely examined:

- 1) What type of cultural activities were valued by Asian immigrants in Hawai‘i?
- 2) Was there any musical activity promoting cultural interactions among Asian ethnic populations?
- 3) What identities were reflected in their stage performances, and what roles did such musical activities play in Hawaiian society?

This study begins with my assumption that multiethnic groups in early twentieth-century Hawai‘i may have interacted socially or culturally, particularly between second-generation immigrants. Most plantation workers were from Asia, who shared a similar skin color, societal values, and above all, similar hardships living in a foreign country far away from their homeland – such factors may have contributed to increasing their interactions. Nonetheless, there were also factors that might have made such interactions difficult, such as the animosity between Japanese and Koreans due to their relations as the colonizer and the colonized in their homeland. Focusing on the issues, this paper investigates identities of Asian ethnic groups in Hawai‘i prior to WWII through analysis of multicultural events where the Asian diasporas shared their traditional cultures.

I analyzed newspaper articles, visual materials, and archival documents collected from the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and the Center for Korean Studies. As a result, this study argues that performing arts prior to WWII in Hawai‘i were important tools to strengthen Asian ethnic group’s cultural identity, foster interactions among young adults of Asian ancestry, and inspire their national pride. The Asians in Hawai‘i, despite foreign-born Asian immigrants’ limited access to U.S. citizenship, appreciated various activities of curating their

own ethnicity on stages and interacting with other ethnic groups. The multicultural musical landscape (i.e., musicscape) ultimately instilled the satisfaction and national pride into the young adults of Asian ancestry.

4. The Foundation of Socio-Cultural Institutions in Hawai‘i before WWII

A vast majority of Asian immigrants lived in urban areas like Honolulu on the island of Oahu’s south shore in the 1920s and 1930s. The population rate of Oahu grew sharply during the early twentieth century mostly due to the massive migration of immigrants to cities on that island. They began to flock to cities beginning in the late 1910s to shift from outer-island sugar plantations to pineapple fields in central Oahu for stevedoring and cannery work. Many of them also moved to start their own businesses. From this time to the U.S. intervention in WWII, several institutions were founded to facilitate social and cultural interactions among different ethnic groups in Hawai‘i.

First, Pan-Pacific Union (hereafter PPU) was founded in 1917 by Alexander Hume Ford (1868-1945), who came to Hawai‘i at the request of the Governor of Hawai‘i, Walter F. Frear (1863-1948). The organization was to bring about closer relations of people of the Pacific Islands in Hawai‘i. The founder of the PPU, Ford, joined a troop of these opportunistic Euro-Americans and was endorsed by the territorial government to promote interests of Hawai‘i in the region. Ford was also initially driven by Pan-Americanism; America had a mission to extend its unique and superior civilization to areas of the U.S. territories and to create a peaceful and mutually beneficial regional community. While Pan-Americanism focused mainly on the American continents, Ford thought its scope should be extended to the Pacific Rim powers, not neighboring Polynesian islands. He implemented this idea by establishing the PPU, which he modeled after the Pan-American Union. It was not a blatant assertion of the American hegemony in the Pacific; instead, the PPU emphasized the cooperation among Pacific powers on relatively equal ground. According to Ford’s internationalism, an anti-imperial tone needed to be dropped. He loved to rub shoulders with all the big names from powerful countries (Akami, 2008, p. 20).

The Institute of Pacific Relations (hereafter IPR) was founded in 1925 in the spirit of Wilsonianism, an awareness of the U.S. new role as a world power after World War I, and a belief that liberal democracy should be promoted throughout the world. It shared the vision of the Pacific Community and accepted Hawai‘i as its center. As the IPR members contended, Hawai‘i represented new ideas and attitudes that were implied in the concept of the Pacific Community. As the PPU did, the views criticized the Eurocentric worldview, proposed equal relations between the “East” and the “West,” and corrected the state-centered security or defense-centered thinking of international relations. The organization emphasized a non-official status was optimistic about solving problems by informal discussions and was willing to deal with “the Orient on a relatively equal basis. (ibid p. 30).”

The Honolulu Academy of Arts provided venues for Asians to present various musical performances. Anna Rice Cooke (1853-1934), a woman born into a prominent missionary family, founded the Honolulu Academy of Arts in 1927. Growing up in a home that appreciated the arts, she married Charles Montague Cooke (1849-1909), also of a prominent missionary family. In 1882, they built a house on Beretania Street in Honolulu and began to assemble an art collection. As their art collection outgrew their home, Anna Rice Cooke decided to create the first visual arts museum in Hawai‘i, which became the Honolulu Academy of Arts. The institution offered local Hawaiians a vast opportunity to appreciate Asian art pieces, art classes, and performing arts.

Activities of Honolulu YWCA demonstrate such cross-cultural interactions as well. In the late 1920s, the YWCA hired three social workers from Asian countries to work for immigrants’ adaptability to American lives. The social workers included Miss Whang from Korea, Mrs. Yi from China, and Miss Kisinoto from Japan. Whang helped Korean “picture brides,” who came to Hawai‘i from 1910 to 1924 through matchmakers using their photographs to marry Korean male workers in the United States. Whang solved the females’ domestic problems by acting as interpreters to speak for them. She also conducted a class to help the second-generation to learn Korean Culture and Traditions. The Chinese and Japanese social workers would have done something similar that Whang did. Females of different Asian ethnic groups at the YWCA practiced their own culture and customs and taught them to younger generations.

Schools were essential venues proving that subsequent generations of Asian immigrants preserved and shared their own cultural traditions while accustoming themselves to American culture. The most notable feature showing multicultural settings was racial clubs in McKinley High School and the University of Hawai‘i (hereafter UH); both were the biggest public schools in Hawai‘i. Through the 1920s, more than half of the high school students in Hawai‘i attended McKinley. The school is famous for having most of the student body of Asian ancestry. Likewise, one of the UH Archives Collections, Graduating Class Photographs from 1912 to 1934, shows growing racial diversity of college graduates since the 1920s. As the collection describes, “the classes of 1923 and 1924 demonstrate the rapid growth in the size of the student body of the University.” The yearbook presents students of different Asian ancestry, including Japanese, Korean, and Chinese.

Table 1. Racial Clubs of the UH in the Early Twentieth Century

Organization	Ethnic Groups	Purpose
Te Chih Sheh	Chinese	To promote friendship among university women; to play an active part in community and service project
Wakaba Kai	Japanese	To encourage fellowship among the Japanese female students and the welfare of the Associated Students and Japanese people
Posōnghoe (Poh Song Whe)	Korean	To foster a closer relationship among the Korean female students of the UH
Ke Anuenue	Hawaiian	To foster interests in Hawaiian culture, promote scholarship, to give aid to needy Hawaiian families
Ka Pueo	Caucasian	To sponsor their social affairs and to assist the carnival and run dance events

Social clubs at school provided multiethnic students with opportunities to enjoy and present their own ethnic culture. As recorded in the UH archives, a wide-ranging compendium of articles written by second-generation Asian Hawaiians, UH students of different Asian descent organized their social clubs. Table 1 is the list of such racial clubs founded in the 1920s and 1930s.

Likewise, the McKinley High School had racial clubs. Associations of Chinese and Japanese students were founded in the early 1920s, while those for Koreans and Filipinos were established in the 1930s. The clubs for students of specific ethnic ancestry enjoyed events by themselves to promote fellowship and knowledge of their own culture. Besides, they shared different forms of cultural heritages with other ethnic groups, which facilitated socio-cultural interactions among them.

The above-mentioned Hawaiian institutions played a crucial role in facilitating interactions among Asian ethnic groups. Particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, international official and unofficial organizations emphasized the unity across the Pacific Rim and the significance of Hawai'i with respect to location. The enormous diplomatic and social changes led to establishing the multicultural environment in Hawai'i. The urban settings of Hawai'i, where Asian immigrants were the majority population, naturally led the Hawaiian authorities to encourage programs for fellowship among people of Asian ancestry.

5. Cultural Interactions among Asian Ethnic Groups in Hawai'i before WWII

The newly founded institutions provided Asian young adults with various opportunities to share their ethnic cultures on stages. This study analyzes four different events proving the multicultural musicscape in Hawai'i before WWII.

5.1 Balboa Day

Balboa Day was a perfect example showing the multicultural environment of Hawai'i during the early twentieth century. The festival featured flag ceremonies and musical performances presented by representatives from different ethnic communities in Hawai'i. It originally commemorated the first arrival in the Pacific islands by a European explorer, Vasco Nunez de Balboa (1475-1519). Ford, who came up with an idea that informal gatherings of a social organization could be a key to overcome racial and ethnic problems, first conceived of the Balboa Day in 1915 to promote Hawai'i as the crossroads of the Pacific. It indicates the Hawaiian authorities' desire for an era of better understanding and closer cooperation between multiethnic immigrants in Hawai'i as well as the Pacific nations (Bulletin of the Pan-Pacific Union, 1920, p. 16). The PPU took charge of hosting the Balboa Day after its foundation in 1917 and developed it as an annual cultural event. Below are descriptions of the 1917 Ball of All Nations, the opening program of the Balboa Day.

“Fun and frolic will vie with “beauty and youth of many races” this evening at the Ball of All Nations in the palace square... the dancing is to consist of fine exhibitions of American, European and Oriental dancing... the management of the ball, which is free and to which all the public is invited to attend and participate.” (“The Dancers in Ball of all Nations,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, February 19, 1917)

“No more orderly crowd was ever seen in Honolulu, for the excellent exhibitions of folk dances of Europe and the Orient, with plentiful numbers for public dancing, kept the inclinations of all the individuals of the crowd in accord with the pleasure-seeking and entertainment spirit of the evening. There must have been nearly 1000 masked and costumed dancers who danced... Fully 5000 other persons sat upon the bleachers and witnessed the dancing...The dancing program at the Palace grounds was started promptly as scheduled at 8 o'clock, but not before the major portion of the crowd

had filled the bleachers.” (“Mask Ball is Gaiety and Life All Personified,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, February 20, 1917)

The event featured folk dancing in costume by migrants of different countries and open-air dancing for the Carnival crowds in the Palace grounds. There were troupes performing national dances from Russia, Ireland, Japan, Spain, Korea, and, the Philippines. They were followed by Hawaiian folk dance by three dancers with native music, Scottish national dance by Miss Cumming-Smith, and American social dance. The purpose of the event was aligned with that of the hosting organization, the PPU, which was to bring about closer relations of people of all Pacific races in Hawai‘i. The annual festival, sometimes called the Pan-Pacific Day (or Week), continued until 1941. The Second World War, beginning with a surprise military strike of the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service on Pearl Harbor in Hawai‘i on December 7, 1941, brought about the disappearance of cultural events including the end of Balboa Day festivals. Between 1915 and 1941, the Balboa Day was an annual multiethnic event, providing invaluable sources about what kinds of music and dance were presented by respective ethnic groups in early twentieth-century Hawai‘i.

Asians participated more actively in Balboa Days in the 1930s. Different ethnic groups presented traditional music, dance, and folk games at tea parties and banquets of the festival. Based on archival resources of the PPU Records (Box 3, Folder “Other Programs Balboa Day,” # 22-24) that I collected from the UH Archives, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos continuously presented folk customs, songs, and dancing. Each of the Asian ethnic groups presented a variety of musical performances, as they thought, best representing their ethnicity. To be specific, the Chinese displayed a play showing “domestic scene in ancient China,” while performing “sword dance by exotic dancer of the Far East.” Chinese Orchestra Music Ensemble sometimes accompanied the performances. To present Japaneseness, some showed “wrestling as practiced in Japan with Japanese surroundings,” while others presented Japanese traditional folk dances like “Yanagi no Ame” (Willow in the Rain). Korean ethnic groups performed their traditional ways of “wedding ceremony in picturesque Korea” on stages, while Korean folk songs were sung to represent Koreanness. Lastly, Filipinos showed their traditional music and dance like “bamboo dance,” emphasizing that all of their performances were what the Filipinos enjoyed “before the arrival of the Spaniard” or prior to “the days of the coming of European influence to their homeland.”

5.2 Music Week Recitals

The National Music Week provides a clue to understanding what kind of vocal music Asians presented to curate their ethnic culture. The Music Week was an annual concert held in May to show various genres of music from different countries. This event proves the active participation of Asians in music programs of the Honolulu Academy of Arts beginning in the 1930s. Based on the 1934 and 1935 concert pamphlets, Asian ethnic groups participated in the concert to present some pieces of Asian vocal music, each of which was recorded along with respective English titles in parentheses.

For example, Filipinos sang “May Isang Bulaklak” (Pudding Flower), “Bahay Kubo” (My Nipa Hut), and “Carinosa” accompanied with Filipino string orchestra. Introduced as “old song of Japan,” Japanese sang “Hanazono” (The Flower Garden), “Mama-no-kawa” (A Maiden’s Sad Romance), “Yorokobino Namitohanato” (Waves and Flower of Joy), and “Toginuta” (Distant Sound, Beating of Cloth) to the accompaniment of Koto Ensemble or Koto, Shamisen, and Shakuhachi playing. There were also Chinese performers singing “Ssu Tang Tan Mu” (the Return of the Fourth Son), “Lien Shen Tsao” (Spring Time), and “Fung Wang Tai” (The Red Flower) accompanied by *yeon kum* [*yangqin*] (a struck box-zither chordophone) and “Wu Szih Pai (Rhythm from the Rainbow)” with drum accompaniment. Koreans presented five folk songs: “Nong-ga Mena-ri” (Korean Spinning Song), “Heung Ta Ryung” (Korean Love Lyric), “Nanbong-ga” (Make Merry; Old Age Will Bring Its Sorrows), “Sa Bal Ga” (Youthful Hopes), and “Sijo” (A Philosophy of Spring).

Each of the ethnic group’s presentation of their own vocal music indicates blurred boundaries between different vocal music genres. As an example of the Korean performances, “Sijo,” with its lyrics based on classical poetry, originally “required high standards of literary expertise and aesthetic restraint, a cultural trait which perfectly befitted the spiritual worlds of Chosŏn scholars who placed high value on a solemn and frugal lifestyle (Kim, 2009, p. 78).” The song was a genre of vocal music that the upper-middle class like aristocrats frequently enjoyed in the late Chosŏn dynasty. On the other hand, the other pieces were what the lower-class people previously enjoyed in village market places or plazas. The additional explanation next to “Sijo,” which, as “Classic from Korea” in 1935, not as “Songs from Korea” as for the other pieces, probably indicated the different origins of Korean vocal music genres. It is notable that Korean Hawaiians in the early twentieth century presented such diverse genres of Korean traditional vocal music consecutively, not preferring specific genres of their traditional music. Likewise, the other

ethnic groups made use of all possible resources to show diverse types of vocal music to show their distinct and diverse ethnic culture.

5.3 Beauty Pageants

The Ka Palapala Pageant firstly was held in 1937. Neal Batchelor, an assistant editor of the *Ka Leo* (UH student newspaper) and Calvin McGregor, who was a student body officer, came up with the event. As recorded in the Associated Students of the University of Hawai‘i (ASUH) and the Bureau of Student Activities, the Pageant was a significant annual affair for the entire territory until the establishment of the East-West Cultural Center at UH in 1960 that led to the expansion of the cultural aspects of the Ka Palapala Pageant. Students who could offer first-hand knowledge of the customs and standards of their native Asian countries participated in the events. The Ka Palapala Pageant, pageant queens, chosen on the “big night,” represented the seven racial groups dressed in the costumes. They represented Japan, China, the Philippines, Hawai‘i, Korea, America, and Cosmopolitan indicating “mixed-race.” Not many archives of the early twentieth-century Beauty Pageant are left. Only a few visual resources and newspaper articles record the beauty pageant of the 1940s, where “beauties” representing different ethnic groups won the prizes at the UH.

Due to the lack of archival materials recording the show before 1945, it is hard to find how the event must have proceeded. However, some data on the Beauty Pageant after the war gives a clue.



Figure 1. Scene of the Beauty Pageant in the Early 1960

The scene documenting the beauty pageant in the early 1960s shows young females of different racial backgrounds. They are wearing their traditional costumes while posing for a picture side by side. Program books of the Beauty Pageants prove that there were performances of music and dance of different racial groups as opening ceremonies. It is very interesting that competition was within ethnic groups rather than between them. They seemed wary of allowing their respective cultural standards of beauty to clash. There existed such “multi-racial” beauty contests for a long time, which demonstrates multicultural settings in Hawai‘i during the early twentieth century very well.

5.4 Festival of Nations

An analysis of the McKinley High School newspaper, *the pinion*, reveals that there was an annual festival called Festival of Nations, which was one of the annual school events. Students of different ethnic backgrounds shared their own culture and customs at the event. A sorority of the McKinley High School, Girl Reserves, hosted it at the YWCA beginning in late 1920.

At the event, the second-generation Asian Hawaiians at the McKinley High School presented food, costumes, music, and dance that showed their respective ethnic identities. To be specific, Japanese girls in colorful *kimono* served *sukiyaki*, tea, and candy for twenty-five cents in the 1933 Festival of Nations, while the Chinese presented tea, sweets, and cake. Hawaiians showed Hawaiian dancing, singing, and entertainment. In addition, Koreans offered noodles with Korean dancing and singing by young girls. The 1936 event presented American, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Hawaiian food, folk games, and entertainment. The 1937 Festival of Nations featured comedy, games, singing, and dancing. From 1938 on, the Festival of Nations stopped its various programs. Instead, the dance events called “Clipper Dance” or “Spring Frolic” still had some programs showing various dances of different ethnic groups.

6. Instilling the National Pride into Asian Young Adults through Performing Arts

The multicultural events in Hawai‘i were accelerated in the 1920s and 1930s when Hawaiian institutions were active in promoting cultural programs. The purpose of establishing PPU and IPR was meant to assert American-led regional order, in which American moral superiority and its benevolence were assumed. However, both aimed for a synthesis of the “East” and “West,” not by domination but by cooperation on relatively equal footings. Rather than advocating the inevitability of war or stirring up fear and insecurity, both proposed a solution to a relatively balanced relationship to reduce grievances that the imbalance of power between the “Western” and “Oriental” powers caused.

The 1920s and 1930s were also the times when Americanization campaigns in Hawai‘i were prevalent. While primarily targeted at Japanese immigrants, the Hawaiian authorities were deeply concerned with eradicating the vestiges of Asian immigrant culture, especially their own language and history (Tamura, 1994, pp. 56-61). As evidence of the campaigns, Hawaiian authorities tried to control educational institutions and language schools of different ethnic groups. As such, the above-discussed multicultural programs were a different direction of the Americanization campaign. In contrast to the educational policies, the Hawaiian authorities encouraged multicultural events as a sign of their respect for all cultures of different ethnic groups. “The melting pot,” “paradise for Pacific nationals,” and “Americanism” were wordings that local newspapers frequently mentioned when describing such diverse multicultural programs. The group identification created by national pride was central to the Americanization programs at Hawaiian institutions.

The multicultural programs of the public schools, the Academy of Honolulu Arts, and social organizations could be understood as strategies of the Hawaiian authorities that had ulterior motives to Americanize people of different Asian ethnic backgrounds. Due to a significant number of young adults of Asian ancestry in Hawai‘i, “the anti-Asian sentiment or Yellow Peril prevalent on the West Coast was muted in Hawai‘i (Choi, 2004, p. 143).” However, the efforts of the Hawaiian institutions to facilitate closer relationships among them for economic, political, and diplomatic reasons should not be overlooked. Many newspaper articles associate the features of respecting all ethnic groups with Americanism, which they labeled as “a true democracy.” Allowing different ethnic groups to cherish their own traditional folk cultures was one of the tactics that the Hawaiian institutions devised, which gave the multiethnic Hawaiian residents a feeling of satisfaction of living in the “democratic” society.

The Asians took advantage of the rich cultural life. Living far away from their homelands, they appreciated opportunities and freedom of curating their own ethnic culture to the public eye. The cultural events invoking respective ethnic identities were important tools to instill their national pride as American citizens and unify Asian ethnic groups that consisted of a majority of the population in Hawai‘i.

7. Conclusion

This paper traces stage performances of Asian immigrants in Hawai‘i prior to WWII. Prior studies did not focus much on the efforts of the Asians to preserve their ethnic identity and the cultural interactions between them during the period. As a result of examining primary sources to understand their presentation of ethnicity on stages and cultural interactions in Hawai‘i during the early twentieth century, this paper leads to the following conclusions.

During the 1920s and 1930s, programs of several educational and social institutions (i.e., PPU, IPR, the Honolulu Academy of Arts, the Honolulu YWCA, and Public schools) facilitated multicultural settings where different Asian diasporic communities presented their own customs, music, and dance. The performing arts had a key role in increasing the number and intensity of these interactions, especially among the second generations. Even the children of Koreans or the Philippines, whose homelands lost its sovereign power, were not an exception.

Modern-day Hawai‘i represents a multiethnic society. According to the recent Census Bureau annual population estimates, Hawai‘i is the only majority-Asian state in the U.S., with people of Asian descent comprising almost 60 percent of its total population. Their cultural activities precisely reflect the Hawaiian multiethnicity. The article below, an excerpt from the website of the Pan-Pacific Festival, is just one of many cultural events describing a diversity of ethnic music and dance in Hawai‘i.

“Enjoy multiple entertainment stages featuring cultural performances such as Japanese Taiko drums, Korean dance, Hawaiian music, *hula*, and more. Each year we also highlight a popular headlining entertainer from Hawai‘i!”

The multicultural musicscape in Hawai‘i can be traced back to the early twentieth century. In particular, the close interactions prior to WWII between different Asian ethnic groups, who constituted a majority of the population, were noticeable. The performing arts, with the support of social and educational institutions, were a driving force that promoted different Asian ethnic groups’ cultural identity, facilitated interactions among the multiethnic

groups, and instilled their national pride. Through stage performances, all Asian diasporas in early twentieth-century Hawai'i took advantage of many opportunities to curate their own ethnicity on stages and interact with other ethnic groups. Such experiences, which were supported by the Hawaiian authorities for the good of its own economy and security, were what Asians in the U.S. mainland or their homelands were not allowed to enjoy.

Conflict of interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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