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 **Beyond Ke'eaumoku: Koreans, Nationalism, and Local Culture in Hawai'i (review)**

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Lili M. Kim (bio)

Hawai'i has held a certain fascination for many Americans. Thanks to earlier scholars who dubbed Hawai'i "The Last of the Magic Isles" and projected it as a paradise of racial harmony where people of different races and nationality coexisted as equals, Americans have perceived Hawai'i as an exotic heaven on earth, immune from all social ills, especially those stemming from racism and ethnocentrism. Hawai'i's "aloha spirit" continues to be romanticized in the minds of Americans in the continental United States even though later scholars have challenged that claim.¹ Brenda Kwon's *Beyond Ke'eaumoku: Koreans, Nationalism, and Local Culture in Hawai'i* is a continuation of that dialogue which challenges the notion of all-encompassing, nonhegemonic culture of Hawai'i. Kwon's goal in this book is to demonstrate and offer explanations for racial and ethnic hierarchies within the "Local" culture of Hawai'i by examining "*marginalized voices in the 'paradise'*" (p. 4, italics in the original).

Analyzing works of three Korean authors from Hawai'i—Margaret K. Pai, Ty Pak, and Gary Pak—Kwon attempts to define and distinguish "Local" identity of Hawai'i from "Asian American" identity of the continental United States and to answer the question of why and how Koreans in Hawai'i continue to be a marginalized group in Local culture. A much-needed examination of these Korean American authors, this short dissertation, published as a book, offers three reasons for marginalization of Korean Americans in Local culture. First, given Korea's political history with Japan and the Japanese majority in Hawai'i, Koreans resisted their association with Local identity. Second, as a result of the high rate of outmarriage by second-generation Koreans, "Korean identities became subsumed by Local ones." Third, the large presence of post-1965 Korean immigrants in Hawai'i gave "credibility to the perception of island Koreans as monolithically 'fob,'² with no Local history" (pp. 8-9). Taken together, **[End Page 191]** these three factors, Kwon

argues, rendered Koreans invisible and outsiders in Local culture. Taking the impact of tourism on the lives of the residents of Hawai'i, as well as their strong resistance to an unavoidable economic dependence upon tourism into consideration, Kwon concludes, "This overlooking [of Koreans within Local culture] ultimately enables tourism to continue to colonize, for if the act of colonization relies upon the reduction of the Other, then it follows that the obverse—complicating the Other—provides a valuable means of resistance" (p. 9). Thus, by insisting on ruptures and hierarchies within Local culture, Kwon firmly rejects the "racial paradise" thesis as a way to resist colonizing forces of tourism.

The first and foremost task of the book, then, is to establish exactly what is meant by "Local" and who can rightfully claim this identity. It is a difficult task, for there is not a stable definition, and as Kwon explains, it is a term that "excludes in order to maintain and affirm its existence" (p. 7). In other words, "Localness" can be best understood by stating what is *not*, rather than what is. Historically, for example, the term "Local" has excluded haoles³ and upper-class residents of Hawai'i, no matter how long they have lived in the Islands. Still, to give the reader at least a general idea of the term, Kwon writes, "'Local' can be used to refer to anyone of Asian, Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander descent, and *usually* designates those who have been in Hawai'i for more than one generation, although more politicized definitions call for a lineage that can be traced back to the plantation labor experience" (p. 6, italics mine). It is clear from Kwon's fluid definitions that the term "Local" can be applied in several slightly different ways. What is not clear, however, is how one makes a distinction between the variety of situations in which the term is used in order to decipher the correct use and meaning of the term.

Further complicating...

Beyond Ke'eaumoku: Koreans, Nationalism, and Local Culture in Hawai'i, by Brenda L. Kwon. New York: Garland Publishing, 1999. xiii, 153 pp. \$50.00 cloth.

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