Singing Between Empire and Colony: Yi Nanyŏng's Survival Tactics in Colonial Korea

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This thesis examines the legacy of Yi Nanyŏng (1916–1965), a prominent Korean singer during the Japanese colonial period, focusing on her musical strategies amidst the sociopolitical constraints of subjugation. Yi's 1935 song, "Tears of Mokp'o," became a symbol of Korean identity and resistance, embodying the affect of *han*— a shared Korean sense of grief and longing under national struggles. However, her participation in Japanese cultural industries, including pro-Japanese propaganda, and the 1936 re-release of "Tears of Mokp'o" in Japan as "Farewell Boat Song" under her stage name Oka Ranko, complicates binary narratives of resistance and collaboration.

This thesis not only analyzes Yi's musical works but also examines how her music was received by audiences in colonial Korea as well as in Imperial Japan. It contextualizes her career within the sociopolitical conditions of Japanese colonial rule, examining how her music both reflected and shaped contemporary notions of identity, resistance, and survival. By comparing the Korean and Japanese versions of "Tears of Mokp'o," the study highlights Yi's dual identity as both a Korean cultural icon and a performer navigating Japan's imperial entertainment industry. The Korean version, with its crying-like vocal technique, resonated deeply with the struggles of colonized Koreans, while the Japanese version exoticized and feminized Koreans, portraying them as passive subjects within Japan's colonial agenda. These differing receptions reveal not only the strategic adaptation in Yi's performances but also the cultural ambivalence within Japan, which sought to assimilate Korea while expressing nostalgia for pre-modern Korean traditions.

The thesis argues that Yi's music serves as an archive of cultural resilience and transcultural negotiation, reflecting both the oppressive power dynamics and the complex ways in which identity was constructed and performed under colonial rule. By situating her career within the broader sociopolitical context, this study uncovers how her music reveals the tensions of colonial modernity, the survival tactics of colonized artists, and the interplay of cultural memory and imperialism. Ultimately, this research invites a rethinking of Yi's legacy, offering a nuanced understanding of Korean popular music as a site of historical, cultural, and political negotiation.

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1.0 Introduction

During the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910–1945), the imperial government sought to assimilate Koreans into Japanese culture as part of its colonizing agenda.[1] This assimilationist policy intensified in 1939 with Japan's enforcement of "The Name-Changing Policy" (K. *Ch'angssikaemyŏng*, J. *Sōshi-kaimei* 創氏改名),[2] which mandated that Koreans adopt Japanese names, symbolizing the erasure of Korean identity. For many Koreans, compliance with the policy was unavoidable, but for Sŏl Chinyŏng (1869-1940),[3] a scholar and independence army soldier, the psychological and cultural costs were unbearable. Sŏl resisted the policy, refusing to abandon his Korean name, but his refusal came at a high price. Unable to bear the pressure of living under such an oppressive system, Sŏl tragically took his own life. His suicide subsequently became a powerful symbol within Korea of the devastating effects of colonial subjugation, highlighting the intense struggles that individuals faced in navigating their identities under occupation. As a result,

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[1] The Japanese empire's establishment of Korea as its first formal colony in 1910 was shaped by the unique relationship between the two nations. Bruce Cumings notes that Korea's colonial experience was distinct due to its geographic proximity and deep cultural ties with Japan, complicating the imperial project. Unlike more distant colonies, Koreans maintained clear historical and political boundaries with neighboring powers like China and Russia, which reinforced their strong sense of national identity. As a result, Japan engaged in substitution—replacing Korean elites, institutions, and culture with Japanese counterparts, rather than creating something entirely new. Bruce Cumings, "Korea, A Unique Colony: Last to be Colonized and First to Revolt," 1-3.

[2] Korean scholars debate whether the Japanese government's assimilation policy was applied throughout the colonial period or intensified after the 1930s, during preparations for the Sino-Japanese War. Historian Sinjae Kim argues for distinguishing between assimilationist ideology, consistently applied, and the more aggressive policies implemented from 1930-1945, when Japanese imperialism became more explicit in its efforts to integrate Korea. Kim Sinjae, "Ilchegangjŏmgi chosŏnch'ongdokpuŭi chibaejŏngch'aekkwa tonghwajŏngch'aek," 193-194.

[3] Korean names in this thesis follow the convention of surname first and given name second, as per the McCune-Reischauer romanization system.

Sŏl Chinyŏng was posthumously awarded the Order of Merit for National Foundation, 4th Class (Patriotic Medal) in 1991, in recognition of his contributions to the Righteous Army activities.[4]

Contemporary Koreans often categorize historical figures from the colonial era into two distinct groups: resistors and collaborators. Resistors, like Sŏl Chinyŏng, are honored for their unyielding stance against Japanese imperial power, willing to sacrifice everything, even their lives, in the name of resistance. On the other hand, collaborators are viewed as those who worked with the colonial government, earning disdain from future generations for their perceived betrayal of national identity. Yet, there are figures who defy these simple categorizations—artists like Yi Nanyŏng (1916-1965), whose life and career exist in a more ambiguous, grey area. Her 1935 song, "*Mokp'o-ŭi Nunmul* (Tears of Mokp'o)," quickly became an anthem of Korean suffering, embodying the deeply rooted sentiment of *han*, a mix of sorrow and longing, that resonated with a population under colonial oppression. The song's melancholic melody and evocative lyrics transformed it into a powerful symbol of resistance, offering a voice to the voiceless and embodying the pain of a nation in turmoil. For many Koreans, "Tears of Mokp'o" represented a form of cultural resilience, subtly defying the forces of assimilation by reinforcing a shared national identity.

However, Yi Nanyŏng's story becomes more complicated when viewed through the broader context of her career. In Japan, Yi Nanyŏng adopted the stage name Oka Ranko 岡蘭子 and re-released the song in 1936 with the title, "*Wakare no Funauta* (Farewell Boat Song)," seemingly aligning herself with Imperial Japan's entertainment industry and its imperialist agenda. This artistic rebranding highlights the complex dynamics of her dual identity as both a

[4] Rim Chaehŏ, "Sunchang Inmul (20): Sŏl Chin-yŏng Chisa," *Yŏllin Sunchang*, November 7, 2019. http://www.openchang.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=30331. All translations from the original Korean are my own, unless otherwise noted.

representative of Korean suffering and a participant in the Japanese cultural sphere. This duality became more pronounced when she contributed by singing on the recording to the 1943 wartime propaganda song "*Ich'ŏn obaekman ŭi kamgyŏk* (The Cry of 25 Million)," which supported Imperial Japan's efforts in World War II. The song lyrically defined colonized Koreans as the *Ch'ŏnhwangŭi paeksŏng* (subjects of the Emperor) and urged Koreans to support Imperial Japan's war efforts, encouraging them to go to war in allegiance with the Japanese empire. Her participation in this pro-war song project suggests a level of complicity in supporting and reinforcing the colonial ideology imposed by Japanese authorities, contrasting sharply with her earlier performances of "Tears of Mokp'o," which resonated with Korean audiences as a symbol of their political suffering.

Although Yi Nanyŏng's career offers valuable insights into the complexities of colonialism through her life and music, research on her remains underdeveloped.[5] This is largely due to the fact that many of her primary sources have yet to be fully uncovered and analyzed.[6] When I spoke with Ch'oe Yuchun, a prominent Korean scholar who specializes in early Korean popular music, he expressed concerns about writing a thesis on Yi Nanyŏng due to the limited availability of sources, as he also experienced a lack of materials on Yi Nanyŏng and Okeh Records[7] while writing his article.[8] Despite these gaps in the archival record, existing scholarship

[5] The absence of comprehensive archives complicates research on figures like Yi Nanyŏng. While the Korean Gramophone Archive offers some information on early recordings, its lack of funding makes materials inaccessible. Many records are privately held, limiting scholarly access. Furthermore, Okeh Records' focus on profit led to poor material quality, causing many recordings to deteriorate over time. The destabilizing effects of colonization and the Korean War likely contributed to the loss of materials, including potential recordings of Yi's Japan tour in the now partially lost film *Song of Korea* (Norae Chosŏn). Additionally, her activities during the Korean War remain largely undocumented.

[6] Chang Yujŏn, "Haengkwa purhaengŭro ponŭn kasu Yi Nannyŏng-ŭi samkwa norae," 136.

[7] The Okeh Records referenced in the context of colonial Korea should not be confused with the American record company of the same name.

[8] Jiyoon Auo, email message to Ch'oe Yuchun, Jan 28, 2024.

on Yi Nanyŏng has provided valuable insights into her life and music. A key reference is Chang Yujŏn's article, "The Life and Songs of Singer Yi Nanyŏng through Fortune and Misfortune," which offers a chronological exploration of Yi Nanyŏng's life and career. In another study, Chang explores how "Tears of Mokp'o" played a pivotal role in establishing *t'ŭrot'ŭ* as a major genre, blending Western, Japanese, and Korean influences during a time of cultural upheaval.[9] Similarly, Clark W. Sorensen's analysis highlights the symbolic importance of the song in representing Korea's colonial and post-liberation struggles.[10] Ch'oe Yuchun's research further explores the complexities of Yi Nanyŏng's life and career, focusing on how her music and persona embodied broader themes of colonial melancholy, as a cultural and emotional response to the colonial experience.[11] Additionally, a study co-authored by Chi Sanghwi, Kim Myŏngsuk, and Pae Myŏngjin delves into Yi Nanyŏng's vocal characteristics—particularly in "Tears of Mokp'o"—analyzing the profound emotional impact of her voice. Using sound engineering techniques, including spectrogram, to analyze her recorded vocality, their research examines attributes such as pitch, tone, and rhythm to explain the unique sorrowful quality of her singing.[12]

Despite valuable insights, existing studies have yet to fully address the controversy surrounding Yi Nanyŏng's complex legacy, often providing only general analyses of her activities related to Japan. For instance, Chang Yujŏn discusses her involvement in singing pro-Japanese military songs, which has sparked significant debate, but acknowledges that a definitive evaluation of her actions remains unresolved.[13] This unresolved status further complicates Yi's legacy, which,

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[9] Chang Yujŏn, "A Study on the Traditionalism of 'Trot': Focused on Yi Nanyŏng's 'Tears of Mokp'o,'" 60-67.
[10] Clark W. Sorensen, "Mokp'o's Tears," 147-196.
[11] Ch'oe Yuchun, "Shingminjijŏk Uul: Inanyŏnggwa Han'guk Yuhaeng-ga," 213-224.
[12] Chi Sanghwi, Kim Myŏngsuk, and Pae Myŏngjin, "Aedalp'ŭm-ŭl yubalhanŭn kasu Yi Nanyŏng-ŭi moksori t'ŭksŏng-e kwanhan yŏn'gu," 999-1006.
[13] Chang Yujŏn, "Haeng (幸) kwa purhaeng (不幸) ŭro ponŭn kasu Yi Nannyŏng-ŭi samkwa norae," 142-144.

in my view, is deeply entangled with Korean ethnic nationalism and its narratives of resistance, often framed within a public-driven binary of loyalty versus betrayal. This value framework, shaped by collective memory and societal discourse, heavily influences how historical figures from the colonial period are perceived and judged. In response, my research seeks to approach Yi's life from a different historiographic perspective, while building upon the invaluable work of Korean academics who have documented and interrogated Yi's life. My position as a student in a North American Ph.D. program allows me to engage with English-speaking scholarship, and this exposure enables me to bring a different perspective to the Korean-language discussion, complementing and enriching existing narratives rather than displacing them. By expanding my historiographic purview, I am able to explore new dimensions of Korean popular music and its historical contexts, which have often been eclipsed by nationalistic narratives.

Thus, my research began with the following questions: How can the life and work of Yi Nanyŏng provide a more nuanced understanding of colonial subjectivity beyond the resistor/cooperator framework? What might her recordings and musical activities during the Japanese occupation reflect the multi-strategic responses of colonized individuals? In what ways did figures like Yi Nanyŏng, while operating within imperial structures, unintentionally create gaps in colonial strategies that enabled reinterpretation, subtle resistance, and the preservation of cultural identity among colonized subjects? Finally, how do contemporary Korean perceptions of Yi Nanyŏng illuminate the complexities of post-colonial identity and memory in the context of Japanese colonialism?

To address these questions, my thesis first examines how Yi Nanyŏng is received in contemporary Korea. The first chapter will explore her reception history from the colonial period to the present day, revealing how she has been reinterpreted over time. In a society still grappling

with the legacy of Japanese colonization, the way Yi is viewed offers insights into current values and the reexamination of the past. This chapter will highlight how historical figures like Yi are remembered and redefined in the light of modern cultural and political dynamics, reflecting ongoing debates about national identity, colonial history, and the complexities of collaboration versus resistance. By tracing the evolution of her image, the chapter will show how she has been alternately celebrated or criticized based on shifting interpretations across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Ultimately, understanding her contemporary reception will shed light on the continuing influence of her music and legacy in shaping Korea's cultural identity and its efforts to come to terms with a challenging historical period.

Then, the second chapter will provide the historical, cultural, and political contexts in which Yi Nanyŏng's career unfolded. This chapter focuses on the complexities of life in colonial Korea from 1910 to 1945, examining the intertwined forces that shaped her career and the broader dynamics of the period. This chapter will explore the rise of the popular music industry under Japanese influence and how inter-Asian political dynamics fostered intercultural musical exchanges. It will also detail how colonial Mokp'o, embracing its role as a cultural and transportation hub, developed a unique locality that made "Tears of Mokp'o" resonate deeply with the regional identity and collective sentiment of the Korean people. By situating Yi Nanyŏng's career within these historical and cultural contexts, this chapter will illustrate how she emerged as a powerful voice symbolizing colonial resistance.

Within these socio-political landscapes, Yi Nanyŏng's work embodies the complex dynamics of cultural negotiation under Japanese rule, where artists faced immense pressure to conform while striving to preserve their cultural identity. Yi's dual role—as both Oka Ranko in Japan and herself in Korea—reflects this tension, as she operated within an imperial cultural

framework while embedding elements of Korean resilience into her music. This thesis positions Yi's career as emblematic of the broader challenges faced by colonized artists who negotiated their identities under imperial rule, contributing to the evolving discourse on Korean historiography.

To achieve deeper understanding of Yi Nanyŏng's survival tactics, chapter 3 will analyze two renditions of "Tears of Mokp'o": the original release in Korea in 1935 and its Japanese version, "Farewell Mokpo," in 1936 (Teichiku 50344).[14] Specifically, this chapter will examine the vocal techniques employed by Yi in each version, focusing on how her "crying-like" vocality conveys the affect of *han*, a distinctly Korean emotion that reflects the collective suffering of the Korean people under colonial oppression. Through a detailed analysis of elements such as phrasing, vibrato, dynamics, and emotional inflection, this chapter will illustrate how Yi used her voice to navigate the cultural expectations of both Korean and Japanese audiences. By comparing the musical elements in the two renditions, the chapter will demonstrate how Yi adjusted her performance style to suit differing cultural and political environments, thereby embodying both adaptation and resistance.

Furthermore, the reception of Yi Nanyŏng's work by audiences in both Korea and Japan sheds light on the role her music played in cultural negotiation. For Korean audiences, "Tears of Mokp'o" became a symbol of resistance—a song that encapsulated the emotional toll of colonization while fostering unity and cultural continuity. Its popularity stems from its ability to resonate with the lived experiences of colonized Koreans, providing solace when expressions of Korean identity were under threat. Conversely, her Japanese rendition of the song under the stage

[14] I was able to obtain the 1935 Korean recording of "Tears of Mokp'o" thanks to Professor Pae Yŏnhyŏng, the founder of Korean Gramophone Archive who individually works to maintain the materials without funding. Through Chŏng Ch'angkwan, Vice President of The Society of Korean Discology, I acquired the 1936 Japanese version, released by Teichiku Record, in MP3 format. Their help was pivotal in allowing me to compare the two versions of the song.

name Oka Ranko allowed her to enter the Japanese entertainment space, where the song's meaning was adapted to fit a different cultural narrative.

I will argue that her cultural adaptation reveals the influence of an Imperial Japanese gaze that habitually exoticized and feminized colonized Koreans. By naturalizing the sentiment of han, and overtly expressing Koreanness, the Japanese government aimed to portray Koreans as passive subjects, making them easier to objectify, consume, and assimilate into the imperial narrative. This strategy involved transforming han from a potential source of resistance into an aestheticized, controlled emotion that could be commodified and stripped of its subversive power. In doing so, Imperial Japan sought to neutralize Korean cultural expressions, ensuring they served imperial interests rather than fostering any sense of national identity or agency among the colonized. This process served to reinforce Japanese control by shaping Korean identity into something both consumable and subordinate, facilitating not only cultural domination but also the attempt to "Japanize" Korean subjects under the guise of preserving their distinctiveness. Through this manipulation, Imperial Japan sought to simultaneously maintain authority and suppress any form of resistance or cultural autonomy.

However, Japanese subjects may have had ambivalence about this portrayal, as they still harbored a sense of longing and nostalgia for these pre-modern figures they found in Korean culture. This dual reception of Yi Nanyŏng—embraced by Koreans as a voice of their struggle, and adapted to suit Japanese audiences' anxious relation to modernity—highlights the fluidity of identity, a complexity often driven by the necessity of survival. Her music played a multifaceted role, balancing resistance and adaptation to navigate the demands of colonial rule. Taylor Atkins observed how the Korean representative folk song "*Arirang*" likewise served dual purposes during the colonial period. For Koreans, "Arirang" became a powerful symbol of resistance, representing

the loss of sovereignty and articulating their struggle against Japanese colonial domination. The song's flexibility allowed for countless variations, some of which explicitly voiced anti-Japanese sentiment, making it a vital part of Korea's vernacular resistance. At the same time, for Japanese audiences, "Arirang" evoked a sense of nostalgia and longing for traditional, pre-modern lifeways that were being eroded by modernization. In this way, "Arirang" became a tool of both resistance and adaptation, reflecting the complex cultural exchange between colonized Koreans and their Japanese colonizers.[15]

While Koreans embraced Yi Nanyŏng's music as a symbol of their struggle, Japanese audiences viewed it nostalgically, longing for the traditional, pre-modern values they saw reflected in Korean culture. This dual reception is evident in her later involvement with *Chosŏn Akgŭktan* (the Joseon Opera Troupe) in the late 1930s and 1940s. Yi Nanyŏng's played a pivotal role in this troupe as the lead singer, and her performances drew significant attention from Japanese audiences. Scholars like Roald Maliangkay and Kim Ch'ŏnggang have noted how the Joseon Opera Troupe was exoticized and feminized in Japan, where press notices portraying the colonized Korean performers in ways that reinforced a Japanese model of modern subjectivity.[16] Through this process, Japanese audiences not only romanticized Korean culture but also reaffirmed a sense of superiority, using these performances to create racialized discourses that positioned Koreans as both 'Other' and subordinate.

However, as I will discuss in the conclusion, the tour of the Joseon Opera Troupe should be examined from different angles. While it is true that the troupe strategically promoted a sense

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[15] E. Taylor Atkins, "The Dual Career of 'Arirang': The Korean Resistance Anthem That Became a Japanese Pop Hit," 645–87.
[16] Kim Ch'ŏnggang, "Trchosŏnt'ŭl Yŏnch'urhada: Chosŏnakkŭktanŭi Ilbon Chinch'ul Kongyŏn'gwa Kungminhwaŭi (Pul)Hyŏp'waŭm (1933~1944)," 60.

of "Koreanness" to appeal to Japanese audiences, they were simultaneously providing a space for Korean laborers to experience and express Korean aesthetics, even in the face of colonial assimilation policies. This chapter will reflect on what her involvement with the Joseon Opera Troupe signifies in the broader context of cultural negotiation—highlighting the dual function of the performances as both a tool for compliance with Japanese demands and a means for asserting Korean identity. By evaluating the legacy of her work within the troupe, I will argue that Yi Nanyŏng's career exemplified cultural resilience, offering insights into the role of artists in navigating colonial pressures and fostering Korean identity amidst the challenges of imperial assimilation.

Contemporary perceptions of Yi Nanyŏng in Korea reveal a deeply layered post-colonial history that reflects not just her personal story, but also the evolving narrative of colonial memory in Korea. Her dual legacy as both a prominent artist during the Japanese occupation and a symbol of Korean cultural resilience complicates the binary view of resistance and collaboration. She maneuvered within the oppressive colonial system while subtly incorporating elements that aligned with national sentiment, embodying a form of cultural negotiation rather than direct opposition or compliance.

By analyzing Yi Nanyŏng's work, it becomes evident that her music functioned as a subtle form of resistance—not by overtly defying colonial authority, but by at times adapting the imperial narrative in ways that ultimately safeguarded elements of Korean identity within the framework imposed by the colonizer. Her strategies allowed her to navigate the constraints of colonial power while subtly maintaining cultural continuity and expression. Yi Nanyŏng's career exemplifies how cultural figures engaged in tactical negotiations that allowed them to maintain a sense of agency while outwardly conforming to the demands of the imperial system. Her recordings thus serve as

a testament to the multi-strategic responses of colonized individuals, who, rather than being passive actors in a colonial narrative, actively shaped the course of their cultural and national identities.

2.0 Literature Review

Yi Nanyŏng's controversial reception is also linked to her association with t'ŭrot'ŭ, as "Tears of Mokp'o" is considered one of the early t'ŭrot'ŭ songs that helped popularize the genre among colonized Koreans.[17] The history and politics of t'ŭrot'ŭ have been subject to considerable debate since the mid-twentieth century, particularly due to its perceived association with Japanese *enka*. A key example of this is the establishment of the term t'ŭrot'ŭ itself. Interestingly, during Yi Nanyŏng's era, the genre was referred to as *yuhyŏngga* rather than t'ŭrot'ŭ, a term that was not used during its emergence in the colonial period. Scholars continue to debate when and how the term t'ŭrot'ŭ was first introduced in Korea. According to Son Minjung, the term t'ŭrot'ŭ only gained wider usage in the late 1980s, following a national debate that replaced the derogatory term *ppongtchak* with the more neutral t'ŭrot'ŭ, marking a significant shift in how the genre was perceived and legitimized in Korean popular culture.[18] Another example is the three major debates surrounding t'ŭrot'ŭ that erupted over four decades: the "Japanese-Color Dispute" in the 1960s, the "Ppongjjak Dispute" in the 1980s, and the "Yi Mija Dispute" in the 1990s.[19] Their recurrence reflects ongoing tensions over t'ŭrot'ŭ's connections to Japanese influence and its public place in Korean cultural identity.

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[17] Chang Yujeong [Chang Yujŏn], "A study on the Traditionalism of "Trot": Focused on Yi Nanyŏng's "Tears of Mokp'o," 61.
[18] Son Minjung, "The Politics of the Traditional Korean Popular Song Style t'ŭrot'ŭ," 34-35.
[19] Scholars like Chang Yujŏn and Lee Seung-Ah attributed these disputes to the distinction between Asian music and Western music. Moreover, Seung-Ah Lee observed the dispute over trot as an example of Korea being influenced by American neocolonialism. Lee Seung-Ah, "Decolonizing Korean Popular Music: The 'Japanese Color' Dispute over Trot," 102–10.

The scholarly discourse surrounding t'ŭrot'ŭ music as having a Japanese influence has been deeply entangled with debates such as "Transplantation theory (*Isiknon*)" and "Indigenous development theory (*Chasaengnon*)." Transplantation Theory argues that many aspects of modern Korean culture were imposed by Japan during the colonial period, including Western-influenced practices introduced through Japanese mediation. On the other hand, Indigenous Theory contends that these cultural elements, including music and other artistic practices, originated from within Korea itself, developing naturally from traditional Korean roots without being shaped or imposed by external forces.

The derogatory term *ppongtchak* was widely used by scholars who believed that *t'ŭrot'ŭ* was a colonial product, which is influenced by Transplantation theory. For example, Hwang Byungki, a Korean traditional music scholar, denounced t'ŭrot'ŭ as a "dishonorable cultural vestige" of Japanese colonialism and argued for its abandonment in favor of rediscovering authentic Korean music in his controversial 1984 article titled "Who is Claiming Bbok-jjak as Our Own?" Notably, Son Min Jung observed that Hwang did not use the term t'ŭrot'ŭ in his article, opting instead for the pejorative term ppongtchak, which mimicked the two-beat rhythm of t'ŭrot'ŭ. It wasn't until the late 1980s, after the national debate, that the term t'ŭrot'ŭ gained wider usage, replacing ppongtchak as a neutral term to describe the genre.[20]

[20] This debate has been analyzed in detail by Son Minjung. Hwang's cultural imperialist perspective garnered support from scholars such as Park Yongku, No Tongŭn, Kim Ch'angNam, Yi YongMi, and Shin HyeSeung. Park Yong-Ku, for instance, argued that trot was a product of Japanese colonial industrialization, constructed through mass media, including records and radio, to create an economic and cultural colony in the 1920s. He emphasized the role of early popular music as a tool of economic and cultural propaganda (Park Yong-Ku, *Hangook Ilbo*, November 29, 1984). Other scholars, including Yi Yongmi and Shin Hyeseung, supported this perspective by analyzing trot's musical structures—its modal system, two-beat rhythm, and literary forms—asserting that these features originated from Japanese influence (Yi Yongmi & Shin Hyeseung, *Hangook Ilbo*, December 27, 1984). Son Minjung, "The Politics of the Traditional Korean Popular Song Style t'ŭrot'ŭ," 35.

Scholars of Indigenous theory, on the contrary, assert that t'ŭrot'ŭ originated from Korean traditional music. For instance, Kim Chip'yŏng and Suh Woosuk responded to Hwang Byungki's article in 1984, both taking essentialist viewpoints but differing on the origin of t'ŭrot'ŭ. Kim argued that t'ŭrot'ŭ originated from traditional Korean music, particularly focusing on its two-beat rhythm, which he linked to folk music like *nongak*. Kim also mentioned that Koga Masao, regarded as the founder of modern enka, might have been influenced by Korean music during his time in Korea.[21] This assertion positions t'ŭrot'ŭ as a precursor to or influence on enka, rather than a derivative of it. This perspective challenges the idea of t'ŭrot'ŭ being a colonial product and instead highlights the genre's indigenous development, shaped by the local musical traditions of Korea.[22]

However, scholars of Transplantation theory such as Noh Dongŭn and Yi Youngmi further critiqued tʾŭrotʾŭ for its connections to enka, particularly emphasizing the similarities between the two genre's musical characteristics.[23] One of the primary musical characteristics shared by both t'ŭrot'ŭ and enka is their use of pentatonic scales, specifically the *yonanuki* minor scale (A, B, C, E, F).[24] This scale, which omits the fourth and seventh degrees of the diatonic major scale, closely resembles the anhemitonic pentatonic scale, which is often found in both East Asian and Western

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[21] Son Minjung, 42-43.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Noh Dongŭn, "Waesaekkayo-ga Chŏnt'onggayorani," *Sisa Journal,* April 29, 1990. https://www.sisajournal.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=109498.
[24] As Takayuki Kobayashi explains in an article on enka and t'ŭrot'ŭ, the yonanuki scale in Japan has major (C, D, E, G, A) and minor variations. The major yonanuki scale, characterized by the omission of the "fa" and "si" notes, is found in many Scottish folk songs, such as "Auld Lang Syne," which influenced both Japanese and Korean music, including national anthems. The minor yonanuki scale first appeared in the Japanese military song "Song of the Normanton's Sinking" in 1887. Due to its association with a melancholic and somber mood, Japanese musicians initially avoided using the minor yonanuki scale. However, by the 1920s, it gradually found its place in popular music, particularly as musical tastes shifted and audiences began embracing more emotionally expressive forms of music. Kobayashi Takayuki, "Ilbon 'enka'wa hanguk 'teuroteu' bigyoreul wihan gichojeok gwanjeom," 17.

musical traditions. The absence of these scale degrees gives the music a distinctive sound that is free of semitones, creating a smooth, flowing melodic line that is characteristic of both genres.[25]

Additionally, scholars have asserted that enka's influence on tʾŭrotʾŭ can be seen in the vocal techniques employed: particularly the use of *kobushi* in enka, which is similar to the technique of *ggeok-kki* in tʾŭrotʾŭ. Both ornamentation techniques, similar to vibrato, involves a rapid fluctuation between adjacent notes, adding emotional expressiveness to the vocal delivery.[26] Okada Maki defines melisma and vibrato as essential vocal techniques that contribute to its emotional depth. Melisma involves extending syllables with multiple pitches, while vibrato adds nuance and avoids static pitch, enhancing the melody's fluidity. Together with *portamento*, these techniques create a smooth, expressive vocal line that is integral to the genre's style.[27] Ggeok-kki, on the other hand, is widely used in t'ŭrot'ŭ. Korean traditional music critics, such as Yi Yoonseon, argue that it is derived from *sigimsae*,[28] the ornamental vocal techniques commonly found in Korean traditional music.[29]

Throughout these three debates, critics and scholars have argued that the use of the yonanuki scale and kobushi vocal technique in tʾŭrotʾŭ are key reasons to consider it as "Japanese-color" music, and therefore, they believe the genre should not be celebrated.[30] For example, as

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[25] Okada Maki and Gerald Groemer, "Musical Characteristics of Enka, 284-286.
[26] Maki and Groemer, 284-286.
[27] Maki and Groemer, 288-289. "Han'guk Yusŏnggi Ŭmban-ŭi Chŏnsŏnggi" [Heyday of Korean Gramophone Records], *Korean Gramophone Archive*, http://www.sparchive.co.kr/v2/sub/story/story.php?at=view&bid=11&uid=4177.
[28] There are several types of *sigimsae*, such as *yoseong* (vibrato), *jeonseong* (sliding into a note), *toeseong* (descending note), *jeonseong* (quick, ornamental trills), and *kkeokneunmok* (note bending). *Yoseong* is widely used in most *minyo* and comes in two forms: fine trembling or coarse vibrating. The coarse vibrato is especially prominent in *Namdo minyo*, where the bending technique, *kkeokneunmok*, is also unique to this region. Chŏngmae Sŏ, "Sigimsae," in *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Culture*, accessed November 6, 2024, https://folkency.nfm.go.kr/kr/topic/detail/857.
[29] Yi Yunsŏn, "Yi Yunsŏn-ŭi Namdo Munhwa Kihaeng: Songgain-ŭi Sikimsae, Namdo T'ŭrot'ŭ-ŭi T'ansaeng," *Gugak Sinmun*, December 6, 2021. https://www.kukak21.com/bbs/board.php?bo_table=news&wr_id=18421.
[30] Chang Yujŏn, *T'ŭrot'ŭga muŏnyago murŭshindamyŏn*, 73.

Lee Seung-Ah discusses, the controversy surrounding t'ŭrot'ŭ songs like "Camellia Lady (*Tongbaek Agassi*, 1989)" by Yi Mija illustrates how t'ŭrot'ŭ has been scrutinized for its perceived links to Japanese enka.[31] In 1965, the military government banned "Camellia Lady" due to its use of the yonanuki scale, as part of efforts to "purify" popular music from perceived Japanese influences.[32] Such arguments have shaped the public perception of t'ŭrot'ŭ as a genre deeply entangled with Japan's colonial remnants in Korea, reinforcing the common belief that it should not be part of Korea's national cultural identity.

However, this postcolonial Korean attribution of a Japanese identity to the yonanuki scale needs scrutiny, considering the complex history of this scale's usage in Japan. The minor yonanuki scale was largely avoided in Japanese music before the 1920s, undermining the argument that the use of the yonanuki scale in t'ŭrot'ŭ represents a colonial remnant. Similarly, scholars such as Chang Yujŏn and Takayuki Kobayashi have argued that t'ŭrot'ŭ should not be dismissed as merely an imitation of enka. Highlighting the flaws in such criticisms, Chang emphasized that the yonanuki scale, often associated with traditional Japanese music, is not exclusive to Japan.[33] Kobayashi further noted that while the minor yonanuki scale faced criticism for its resemblance to Japan's traditional miyakobushi scale (A, B, D, E, F), marking it as "Japanese-colored" music, the

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[31] Lee Seung-Ah, "Decolonizing Korean Popular Music: The "Japanese Color" Dispute over Trot," *Popular Music and Society* 40, no. 1 (2017): 102-110.
[32] However, Yi observed that the reaction of the Korean public was ambivalent; while the government banned trot due to its perceived Japanese influence, ordinary people continued to enjoy trot songs in everyday life. Yi described this phenomenon as evoking a sense of "nostalgia" among middle-aged individuals, reminding them of their youth. Lee Seung-Ah, 107.
[33] Chang Yujŏn, *T'ŭrot'ŭga muŏnyago murŭshindamyŏn*, 92.

yonanuki scale is structurally distinct from miyakobushi.[34] This distinction, according to Kobayashi, challenges the oversimplified view of tʾŭrotʾŭ as merely a derivative of enka.[35]

Moreover, Chang pointed out that enka itself is not purely traditional Japanese music, but rather combines elements of Japanese traditional music and Western music into a song genre deliberately crafted to serve as nationalist purposes.[36] In fact, according to Kobayashi Takayuki, enka and tʾŭrotʾŭ should both be viewed through the lens of "indigenization and tradition," as well as "globalization."[37] He explains that enka, while often associated with traditional Japanese values and emotions of nostalgia, incorporates modern elements reflecting Japan's post-war experience, thus embodying a localized yet modern identity.[38]

However, enka became formalized and associated with distinct ethnic characteristics in the 1960s and '70s. Similarly to how t'ŭrot'ŭ was referred to as yuhyŏngga in the early 20th century, enka was known by a different name, ryūkōka. However, Christine Yano's *Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Japanese Popular Song* demonstrates how ryūkōka was transformed and nationalized under its new name, enka, in the 1960s and 70s, emerging as a cultural symbol closely tied to Japanese identity. During this time, enka's sentimental themes of

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[34] Kobayashi Takayuki, 17.
[35] Okada Maki also observed that the yonanuki scale differs from traditional Japanese scales, although it shares certain key characteristics. Specifically, like traditional Japanese scales, the yonanuki scale lacks the 7th note, which distinguishes it from Western scales. This absence of the 7th note creates a musical structure that aligns more closely with Japanese melodic traditions, despite its differences from older, more traditional scales. Maki, 285-286.
[36] Chang Yujŏn, 85-92.
[37] Kobayashi Takayuki, 30.
[38] Enka, widely considered a traditional Japanese genre, has its origins in the late 19th century during the Freedom and People's Rights Movement, where it served as a tool for political expression. Over time, it transitioned from a medium of protest to a form of popular entertainment, blending traditional Japanese music with Western influences. The genre became defined by its use of the pentatonic *yonanuki* scale, which incorporated Western harmonic elements into Japanese music. This hybridization reflected Japan's broader efforts at modernization during the Meiji era. After World War II, *enka* solidified its position as a genre that resonated deeply with the Japanese public, focusing on themes of nostalgia, love, and loss. It became symbolic of Japanese identity, blending the past and the present, and reflecting both cultural preservation and adaptation to Western influences. Tōru Mitsui, "The French Revolution and the Emergence of Enka," 13-24.

longing, perseverance, and nostalgia resonated with the broader population, particularly in the context of post-war recovery. As Japan rapidly modernized, enka provided a connection to an idealized past, evoking traditional values like hometown (*furusato*).[39] The broadcasting system such as NHK played a significant role in formalizing enka as a genre, promoting it through television, radio, and national festivals as a distinctly Japanese form of expression.[40] Enka became closely associated with national pride, often referred to as "Japan's song" (*nihon no uta*), and it played a significant role in shaping modern Japanese identities, including constructions of gender and heteronormativity.[41]

Even though enka is considered a national genre, Yano points out that the presence of non-Japanese artists adds complexity to its perceived cultural purity. Both Japanese-passing Koreans and overtly Korean singers were recognized as important contributors to the genre. For instance, Cho Yongp'il's, a Korean singer, gained significant popularity in the 1980s, followed by Kim Yonja, who became famous in the 1990s.[42] These artists challenged the ethnic boundaries of enka, demonstrating how a genre often perceived as distinctly Japanese could be embraced and performed by non-Japanese singers. Their success highlighted enka's capacity to transcend cultural and national lines while still reinforcing the emotional and nostalgic qualities that defined the genre. These features strengthen the case that enka cannot be understood solely through the lens of "tradition"; rather, its evolution must also be considered in the context of globalization, a concept that helps us understand how enka has become a transcultural musical genre.[43] Similarly, t'ŭrot'ŭ

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[39] Christine Yano, *Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Japanese Popular Song*, 168.
[40] Christine Yano, 19.
[41] Ibid., 148-150.
[42] Ibid., 9.
[43] Kobayashi Takayuki, 30-31.

demonstrates a tendency towards transcultural influences, blending elements from Japan, Korea, and the West, particularly in its rhythmic structure which is derived from the foxtrot. Kobayashi highlights that tʾŭrotʾŭ reflects Korea's adaptation of foreign influences to create a uniquely resonant genre while negotiating its colonial past.[44]

An inter-Asia perspective, as discussed by Nancy Yunhwa Rao in her exploration of global music history, further enriches this understanding of both tʾŭrotʾŭ and enka's intercultural musical evolution. Rao argues for a pan-regional outlook on music historiography, emphasizing how musical genres and ideas evolve through intricate interconnections, not as the result of unilateral imposition by one dominant force.[45] According to Rao, Japanese colonialism played a significant role in creating networks that facilitated the circulation of ideas, including musical concepts such as dodecaphony, across East Asia. As Japan fully embraced Western influences, it became a conduit for disseminating these ideas to its colonies and neighboring regions. However, the decision of whether and how colonized peoples engaged with these ideas was shaped by local circumstances.[46] While Japan's imperial reach made access to Western music more widespread, factors such as political control, cultural resistance, and local strategic use of these forms determined the extent of engagement. Japan's mediation introduced these ideas, but it did not fully dictate their reception. Instead, colonized societies navigated their own historical and political contexts, deciding how to adopt, adapt, or resist these foreign influences. Thus, the interaction between Japan and its colonies in music was not one of unilateral imposition, but a complex process of cultural exchange shaped by both external pressures and internal conditions.

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[44] Ibid., 7-60.
[45] Nancy Yunhwa Rao, "Inter-Asia Studies and Global Music History," *Formosan Journal of Music Research*, supplement (2023): 123–132.
[46] Nancy Rao, 127.

Within this framework, it becomes clear that Korean and Japanese musical interactions during the colonial period were far from one-directional; instead, they were characterized by circulation, mobility, and dialogue. This challenges the notion that Japanese colonizers had a purely unilateral influence on Korean culture. The debate between Transplantation Theory and Indigenous Development Theory in Korean music, particularly with regard to t'ŭrot'ŭ, often overlooks the mutual exchange that occurred between Korea and Japan. Focusing solely on Transplantation risks portraying Japanese popular music genres as "ethnically pure" and nationalistic, which oversimplifies the reality of cultural interaction. As Rao highlights the circulation of musical ideas across East Asia, it is crucial to recognize that both t'ŭrot'ŭ and Japanese enka evolved through hybridization, shaped by shared colonial histories, migration, and the exchange of musical practices. Framing t'ŭrot'ŭ solely as a product of Japanese imposition or as an isolated Korean response misses the complexity of its creation. Instead, t'ŭrot'ŭ should be understood within a transnational context, where both Korea and Japan, despite the tensions of colonialism, engaged in a dynamic inter-Asia exchange that reshaped their musical landscapes.

The debate over whether historical figures like Yi Nanyŏng and musical genres such as t'ŭrot'ŭ represented collaboration or resistance has been a significant and contentious topic in post-colonial Korean history. This is because Korean ethnic nationalism has been deeply intertwined with narratives of resistance and of the purported purity of national identity, making the roles of historical figures during the colonial period a central issue in defining and understanding Korea's past. Gi-Wook Shin, in his book titled *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy,* highlights how modern Korean ethnic nationalism emerged as both a response to and a product of external pressures like Japanese colonial rule and the postwar division of Korea. Specifically, Shin argues that this form of nationalism, deeply intertwined with a sense of ethnic

identity, was catalyzed by the oppressive policies and racial discrimination imposed by the Japanese. Shin's analysis suggests that the binary perception of Yi Nanyŏng—viewed either as a collaborator or a national icon—reflects the broader tension within Korean society regarding its colonial legacy.[47]

However, in *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II,* Takashi Fujitani argues that the experiences of colonized Koreans and Japanese Americans during WWII cannot be easily categorized as either resistance or collaboration. Fujitani demonstrates that both groups navigated complex, ambiguous roles under imperial powers. Koreans in the Japanese Empire were coerced into military service and labor, blurring the lines between collaboration and survival. Although Japan tried to assimilate Koreans as "loyal imperial subjects," racial hierarchies kept them in a subordinate position. Similarly, Japanese Americans were interned in camps by the U.S. while also conscripted into the military, complicating their position between loyalty and marginalization. Fujitani's central argument is that wartime realities defied binary labels of collaborator or resistor. Instead, individuals were caught in a spectrum of choices influenced by coercion, survival, and negotiation of their complex identities within oppressive systems. The book highlights how colonial subjects and minorities in imperial contexts navigated these ambiguous roles, challenging simplistic narratives of wartime collaboration and resistance. His book helps us to move beyond reductive labels to understand the intricate ways in which people negotiated their identities and roles within the colonial system, revealing a more nuanced picture of life under imperial rule.[48]

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[47] Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).
[48] Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

Building on Fujitani's argument that the binary view of categorizing individuals as either collaborators or resistors is overly simplistic, such a framework also attributes excessive agency to imperial subjects. When historians frame historical figures within a binary understanding of their political relation to an occupying power, the underlying assumption is that colonial power was absolute, while colonized people themselves lacked agency. However, as Lauren Benton argues in *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900,* this perspective overlooks the complex and uneven ways in which imperial power was actually exercised. Benton highlights that colonial rule was not monolithic and that geographical and legal complexities often allowed for spaces where colonized peoples could resist and navigate imperial projects. Her work challenges the notion that colonial subjects were merely passive recipients of imperial power, instead revealing the significant and often overlooked ways in which these populations exerted influence and agency within the constraints of colonial rule.[49]

Beyond Fujitani and Benton, scholars of postcolonial studies of inter-Asian context have increasingly sought to deconstruct this binary and explore the more complex dynamics of identity, power, and resistance under Japanese colonial rule. For instance, Leo Ching, in *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation*, delves into how Japanese imperialism in Taiwan created hybrid identities that were neither fully colonial nor completely resistant. His analysis demonstrates that colonial subjects often navigated a nuanced terrain, balancing the pressures of assimilation with efforts to preserve their cultural identities. By examining this negotiation, Ching challenges the simplistic division between collaboration and resistance, revealing how individuals existed in a fluid space where both survival and subtle forms

[49] Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

of defiance could coexist. This more complex understanding of colonial identity formation sheds light on the intricate ways imperial subjects interacted with, adapted to, and sometimes resisted colonial authority.[50]

Looking into more Korean-specific studies, scholars such as Todd Henry have contributed to the understanding of how colonial subjects in Korea engaged in complex interactions with imperial authority. In *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945*, Henry argues that the negotiation of public spaces in colonial Seoul became a means for colonized Koreans to both comply with and resist Japanese rule. For example, despite the Japanese efforts to control public spaces by making Seoul a modern city, Koreans found ways to resist, adapt, or reinterpret these spaces to suit their own needs. While Koreans participated in some of the state-sponsored events, they also held their own gatherings, protests, and religious ceremonies in these same spaces, subtly subverting the intended purposes of the colonial government. These acts of negotiation, both subtle and overt, challenge the simplistic labels of resistance or collaboration and highlight the intricate ways in which colonial power was both enforced and contested.[51]

It is fascinating to see how Imperial Japan's assimilation policies ironically provided Koreans with opportunities to create their own modern identities. Similarly, Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, emphasize that the complexities of identity formation during the colonial period cannot be understood purely through the lens of opposition to Japanese imperialism. They argue that colonized individuals were engaged in a dynamic process

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[50] Leo Ching, *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
[51] Todd A. Henry, *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

of adaptation, accommodation, and resistance shaped by broader structural forces such as capitalism and global modernity. Rather than simply resisting Japanese rule, many Koreans navigated the opportunities and challenges posed by modernization and industrialization, which altered social, economic, and cultural conditions in profound ways. A key argument in their volume is that Japanese colonial policies, while intended to assimilate Korea, often produced unintended consequences. For example, efforts to standardize the Korean language and expand industrial infrastructure inadvertently strengthened aspects of Korean culture and identity. By introducing modern technologies like radio and modern education systems, Japanese authorities provided tools that Koreans used to assert their cultural distinctiveness, demonstrating how colonization could simultaneously suppress and stimulate the development of a unique national consciousness.[52]

This body of literature emphasizes the need to move beyond reductive binaries, recognizing that colonial subjects like Yi Nanyŏng operated within a complex spectrum of power dynamics. Scholars challenge simplistic labels of 'collaborator' or 'resistor' by showing that life under colonialism involved constant negotiation, adaptation, and contestation of power. Central to postcolonial theory, this perspective seeks to understand how colonized peoples simultaneously accommodated and resisted imperial authority in ways that defy binary categorizations. Moreover, it challenges the traditional notion of empires as the sole agents of power, with colonized peoples as passive subjects. As scholars like Benton, Henry, Robinson and Shin demonstrate, imperial projects often produced unintended consequences, sometimes fostering the preservation or transformation of colonized cultures into new hybrid forms. This understanding subverts the idea

[52] Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Edson Robinson, *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999).

of one-directional influence, revealing a more complex interaction between empire and the colonized, where agency exists on both sides.

Building on this broader understanding of imperial influence and cultural hybridity, it becomes essential to apply this perspective to figures like Yi Nanyŏng, whose life and work exemplify the complexities of navigating colonial rule. While much of the public discourse around Yi Nanyŏng frames her legacy within the collaborator/resistor binary, I aim to move beyond this simplistic categorization and explore the more nuanced dynamics of her life and music under colonial rule. Music scholars have yet to fully examine how Yi's artistic strategies and personal choices navigated the complex political landscape of imperialism, assimilation, and cultural preservation. By focusing on the intersections of her music, identity, and colonial pressures, it becomes possible to reveal a richer understanding of her role, one that transcends the binary framework. This approach not only sheds light on Yi's multifaceted legacy but also invites a broader rethinking of how colonized individuals operated within and beyond, the confines of colonial power structures.

3.0 Reinterpreting Yi Nanyŏng Through Time

Yi Nanyŏng emerged as one of the most influential popular singers in Korea during the colonial period of Japanese occupation, from 1910 to 1945. She is best known for several famous songs, including "Tears of Mokp'o," " *Tabang-ŭi P'urŭn Kkum* (Blue Dreams of the Café, 1939)," and " *Mokp'o nŭn Hanggu da* (Mokp'o is a Harbor, 1942)." With the release of her hit song "Tears of Mokp'o" by Okeh Records in 1935, she began to reach the height of her career. It sold approximately 5 million copies in colonial Korea[53]—a phenomenal achievement, especially considering that at the time, selling 1 million copies was already regarded as a major hit.[54] Indeed, the magazine *Samch'ŏlli*[55] recognized her as one of the top three singers of the period. This recognition played a crucial role in establishing her prominent position in the music industry during the colonial era.[56]

Many scholars attribute her popularity to the political affective power of "Tears of Mokp' o," whose lyrics indirectly addressed the struggles of colonial life allowing colonized Koreans to deeply resonate with its message.

<The lyrics of "Tears of Mokp'o">

The sailor's song fades.
The waves of Samhak Island burrow deeply into the land.
It wets the skirt hem of a young bride at the port.
Are these the tears of farewell?

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[53] Pak Ch'anho, *Han'guk Kayosa*, 314.
[54] "Han'guk Yusŏnggi Ŭmban-ŭi Chŏnsŏnggi" [Heyday of Korean Gramophone Records], *Korean Gramophone Archive*, http://www.sparchive.co.kr/v2/sub/story/story.php?at=view&bid=11&uid=4177.
[55] *Samch'ŏlli* was a prominent magazine in colonial Korea that covered various aspects of culture, society, and the arts. It played a significant role in shaping public opinion and introducing influential figures of the time.
[56] Ch'oe Yuchun, "Shingminjijŏk Uul: Inanyŏnggwa Han'guk Yuhaeng-ga," 341.

The sorrow of Mokpo?
Underneath Nojeok Peak, we hold three hundred years of enmity.
Here, I clearly feel traces of you—a sorrowful devotion.
The winds from Mount Yudal embrace the Yongsan River.
I cry tears of yearning.
This is the song of Mokpo.
The night is deep and the crescent moon drifts.
How do old wounds come back anew?[57]

Sagong-ŭi Paetnorae Kamulgarimyo.
Samhakto P'ado Kipi Sumŏdŭnŭnde.
Pudu-ŭi Saeassi Arongjŏjin Otcharak.
Ibyŏl-ŭi Nunmurinya Mokp'o-ŭi Sŏrum.
Sambaek Nyŏn Wŏnhan P'umŭn Nojŏkpong Mit'e.
Im Ch'ach'wi Wanyŏnhada Aedalp'ŭn Chŏngjo.
Yudalsan Paramdo Yŏngsangang-ŭl Anŭni.
Im Kŭryŏ Unŭn Maŭm Mokp'o-ŭi Norae.
Kip'ŭn Pam Chogakttal-ŭn Hŭllŏganŭnde.
Ŏjjita Yet Sangch'ŏga Saerowŏjinga.
Mot Onŭn Imimyŏn I Maŭmdo Ponael Kŏsŭl.
Hanggu-e Maejŭn Chŏlgae Mokp'o-ŭi Sarang.[58]

Yi Tongsun stated that due to the powerful affective impact that "Tears of Mokpo" had on colonized Koreans, "the song transcended the personal legacy of its singer and became a national anthem for Korea." Yi further notes that, it has maintained its status as one of the most beloved pieces of Korean popular music from its release in 1935 to the present day.[59] As a result of its phenomenal success in colonial Korea, the song was re-released in 1936 in a Japanese version by Teichiku records (*Teichiku Rekōdo,* Imperial Gramophone Company). In that re-release, the record label changed the song's title to "*Wakare no Funauta* (Farewell Boat Song)" and Yi Nanyŏng performed under her Japanese name, Oka Ranko. Since then, "Tears of Mokp'o" has been

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[57] The English translation of the lyrics of "Tears of Mokp'o," as translated by Chang. Chang Yujeong [Chang Yujŏn], "A Study on the Traditionalism of 'Trot'," 64.
[58] The romanization of the original lyrics of "Tears of Mokp'o" is from the Korean Gramophone Archive's website page, Tears of Mokp'o,"
http://www.sparchive.co.kr/v2/sub/search/music.php?at_opt=&at=view&content=%EC%9D%B4%EB%82%9C%EC%98%81&id=19875&page=9;.
[59] Yi Tongsun, *Pŏnji ŏmnŭn chuma,* 261.

reinterpreted numerous times by legendary artists in both Korea and Japan, including Korean singers Cho Yongp'il (2007) and Yi Mija (2005), as well as Japanese singers Sugawara Tsutomu (1951) and Miyako Harumi, with her rendition " *Namida no Renrakusen* (Tears of the Boat, 1987)."

As this suggests, Yi Nanyŏng's influence extended well beyond her lifetime. In his autobiography, the song's composer, Son Mokin, detailed how Yi's funeral was permitted by the government on an exceptional basis, which reflected her cultural and societal significance in post-colonial Korea. Despite the restrictive Korean political climate of the 1960s, when collective actions were banned under the president Pak Chŏnghŭi's dictatorial regime, Yi Nanyŏng's funeral was conducted with notable solemnity and on a large scale. Son Mokin recounted his efforts to persuade the government to permit this significant gathering by emphasizing Yi Nanyŏng's profound impact on Korean society. By Son's own account, he argued to the government that her musical contributions during the colonial period provided comfort and solace to the Korean people, thereby warranting the exceptional treatment of her funeral.[60]

Even now, Yi Nanyŏng's legacy holds significant meaning for the city of Mokpʾo. Mokpʾo is a port city located in the southwestern region of South Korea, within South *Chŏlla* Province (*Chŏllanam-do*). It lies at the southern end of the Muan Peninsula and faces the Yellow Sea, which opens the city to maritime activities. Its coastal position has historically made Mokpʾo an important seaport, particularly during the Japanese colonial period, when it became a hub for trade and transportation.[61] Since Mokp'o played a crucial role in the empire's transportation network, the city's architecture reflects a significant Japanese influence. Clark W. Sorensen highlights how

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[60] Son Mokin, *Kayoinsaen*, 104-108.
[61] Kwak Sugyŏng, "Kaehangjangŭi taejungmunhwa yuipkwa chŏn'gae-mokp'oŭi t'ŭrot'ŭ yuipkwa hŭngsŏngwŏninŭl chungshimŭro," 29.

Mokp'o actively preserves and reinterprets its colonial-era buildings and cultural artifacts, using its city design to reflect the ongoing dialogue between art and politics. Unlike Seoul, which has removed many remnants of its colonial past due to their oppressive associations, Mokp'o has retained these structures, showcasing the city's complex historical layers—from its colonial history to expressions of local pride.[62] This preservation underscores a distinctive regional identity that stands in contrast to national narratives.

Furthermore, Sorensen emphasizes that theater and ritual in Mokp'o, particularly performances by Son Jaeo, symbolically unite "the souls of the living and the dead,"[63] addressing the deep pain and suffering embedded in Korea's history. Son Jaeo is a prominent director and playwright known for his innovative approaches that blend traditional Korean cultural elements with contemporary themes. His notable works, *Tears of Mokp'o* and *Nanyŏng*, explore the emotional and historical weight of Mokp'o's colonial past, utilizing Yi Nanyŏng's biographical storytelling, music, and visual elements to reflect on the community's experiences during times of hardship.[64] Through his integration of ritual and communal participation in performances, Son creates spaces that evoke collective memory and cultural identity, allowing audiences to confront difficult truths about their shared history. The intentional organization of city spaces, both physically and symbolically, highlights different aspects of Mokp'o's layered historical identity, transforming these locations into dynamic arenas for cultural expression and political discourse. This complex interplay between art and society reflects Mokp'o's unique position in South Korea,

[62] Clark W. Sorensen and Andrea Gevurtz Arai, "'Mokp'o's Tears': Marginality and Historical Consciousness in Contemporary South Korea," 159.
[63] Clark Sorensen, 169.
[64] Ibid., 159-163.

where local narratives challenge dominant national histories, allowing for a richer understanding of the past and its impact on the present.

During my research visit to Mokp'o in July 2024, I observed how Yi Nanyŏng is celebrated both as a pioneer of early popular music and a symbol of resistance against Imperial Japan, through various monuments and museum exhibitions. For example, the *Special Exhibition: The Queen of Korean Popular Music, Yi Nanyŏng, and the Pioneers of Hallyu, The Kim Sisters*, a dedicated exhibition on the second floor of the Popular Music of Korea Museum highlights her substantial contributions to early Korean popular music, with a special focus on "Tears of Mokp' o." Additionally, Yi is commemorated that not only showcases her career but also highlights the achievements of the Kim Sisters, a girl group composed of her two daughters and a cousin, whom she produced. Yi was both a teacher to the Kim Sisters, teaching them English and Western popular music, and their producer, overseeing the planning and management of their careers. One of the members, Kim Sŭkcha, Yi's daughter, recalled how Yi "had them learn and memorize English song lyrics phonetically before they understood the meaning of the English words." Yi bought American records on the black market to expose them to Western music.[65] This exhibition emphasizes Yi Nanyŏng's pioneering role in the Korean music industry while celebrating the Kim Sisters' international success as one of the first Korean acts to gain fame in the United States, thereby extending her musical legacy.

During the visit to Mokp'o, I took a cable car to *Nojeokbong*, a notable peak on the slopes of *Yudalsan* Mountain. There, I observed that the monuments of Yi Nanyŏng and "Tears of Mokp'o" are placed beside those of Admiral Yi Sunsin. Yudalsan Mountain, a popular destination

[65] Chŏng Taeha and Wŏn Nagyŏn, "Asia Ch'oeso Miguk Chinch'ul Kŏlgrup Kim Sisters ŭl Asipnikka." *Han'gyŏre*, August 24, 2023. https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/1105579.html.

for hikers, is equipped with cable cars for tourists and holds great historical significance in Korea. It is famously tied to Admiral Yi Sunsin, the 16th-century naval hero who successfully defended Korea against Japanese invasions during the *Imjin* War (1592-1598). This mountain is particularly symbolic because it was near here that Yi Sunsin used his military genius to turn the tide of the war. During the Imjin War, while King Seonjo fled the capital to seek refuge and military aid from the Ming Dynasty, Yi Sunsin remained steadfast, leading crucial naval victories, particularly in defending the Chŏlla region. In contemporary Korea, Yi Sunsin is regarded as one of the most respected figures in Korean history, and his legacy is honored through numerous public statues (such as the one in Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul), annual commemorations, and portrayals in films, TV dramas, and literature. His values of loyalty, patriotism, and self-sacrifice continue to resonate with all contemporary Koreans, especially during moments of national reflection or external challenges.

I encountered the first statue at the entrance of Nojeokbong, which was dedicated to the song "Mokp'o is a Harbor" by Yi Nanyŏng (fig.1). Right beside it, I came across the statue of Yi Sunsin (fig.2).

Figure 1 The statue of “Mokp’o is a Harbor” stands as a welcoming symbol for visitors.

Figure 2 The statue of Yi Sunsin

The statue of Yi Sunsin is slightly tilted. Later, I discovered that this unique pose, facing Japan and reminiscent of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, symbolizes his watchful gaze, signifying his intent to protect Mokp'o.[66] The statue, located near the Nojeokbong's entrance, was established by the Yudalsan Park Promotion Committee in 1982. The strategic placement of the statue enhances the visitor's experience, especially as midway up the trail, the sound of "Tears of Mokp'o" starts to echo, creating a powerful sonic atmosphere that connects the monument to the music. Following the sound of Tears of Mokp'o, I came across the statue of Tears of Mokp'o, designated as Mokp'o Cultural Heritage No. 27 (fig.3). This statue was donated in 1969 by Park Ojoo, a local instrument shop owner in Mokp'o.

The placement of Yi Nanyŏng's monuments along the path leading to the statue of Admiral Yi Sunsin draws a symbolic parallel between two forms of resistance—military and cultural. While Yi Sunsin is celebrated for defending Korea's physical sovereignty during the Imjin War, Yi Nanyŏng is honored for her cultural resistance against Japanese imperialism through her contributions to early Korean popular music. The installation underscores her importance by positioning her legacy alongside a revered national hero, emphasizing her role as a protector of Korean identity. This connection is further highlighted by the auditory experience, with "Tears of Mokp'o" playing in the background, reinforcing themes of resilience and cultural pride. The use of sound deepens the sensory experience and evokes a sense of historical continuity, linking past struggles for national identity with present-day cultural expressions, as earlier discussed by Sorensen, who described Mokp'o as holding "the souls of the living and the dead." [67] This immersive environment reflects the complexities of colonial history and the ongoing fight for

[66] Choi Okyun, "The Reason Why the Statue of Yi Sunsin is Tilted Like the Leaning Tower of Pisa." *OhmyNews*, May 26, 2015. https://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002111602.
[67] Clark W. Sorensen, 169.

cultural identity, inviting visitors to reflect on Yi Nanyŏng's significance as a cultural guardian in the face of historical adversity.

Figure 3 The statue of “Tears of Mokp’o”

Figure 4 Information of the statue and the song

Figure 5 Sign to the statue of "Tears of Mokp'o."

Yi Nanyŏng's legacy also extends far beyond the city of Mokpʾo itself, because of its importance for the history of modern Korean popular music. For nearly a century, Yi Nanyŏng's status as a symbol of political resistance has been enhanced through the enduring impact of her iconic song, "Tears of Mokpʾo," which has been covered by influential artists like Kim Sisters (1975), Cho Yongpil (1984) and Jang Yoonjeong (2006) across multiple generations. Importantly, the song has been repeatedly revitalized during times when Koreans are struggling. The 1980s was another significant historical struggle for Korea, marked by a fight for democracy and social change after the periods of colonialism and the Korean War. During this time, "Tears of Mokpʾo" took on new life, becoming the unofficial anthem of the *Haitai* Tigers in 1983, a professional baseball team based in Kwangju, Chŏlla Province. Im Chaejun, the primary care physician for the Haitai Tigers, reflected on how the song was utilized. During the moment of victory, as the audience cried and sang "Tears of Mokp'o," the Japanese visitors did not understand how the song

could evoke such emotion, despite not being the national anthem, nor why the audience was in tears.[68]

Even though the Japanese visitors could not understand why the Haitai Tigers' fans sang the song in tears, the people of Kwangju knew the answer. Kwangju was the center of the 1980s pro-democracy movement, epitomized by the Kwangju Uprising. The Kwangju Uprising began on May 18, 1980, when citizens of Kwangju, in the Chŏlla region, rose up against the military dictatorship of Chŏn Tuhwan. The government responded with brutal force, deploying paratroopers and military units to suppress the uprising. Over several days, violent clashes between the military and Kwangju citizens resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths and thousands of injuries. This tragic event became a powerful symbol of resistance to authoritarianism and a rallying point for South Korea's pro-democracy movement.

In this context of deep-rooted struggle and resilience, the "3S" policy, introduced by Chŏn Tuhwan in the early 1980s, aimed to maintain public order and control dissent during a time of political unrest. The three "S"s stand for Sports, Screen (or Cinema), and Sex. The administration promoted sports as a means to unify the nation and divert public attention from political issues, fostering national pride through athletic events and international competitions. However, the use of "Tears of Mokp'o" as the anthem of the Haitai Tigers' fans symbolically neutralized the effect of the policy. After the Kwangju Uprising, the song became a powerful emblem of regional unity in Chŏlla, connecting the Tigers' victories to the broader political struggles faced by the community. Rather than merely serving as a source of entertainment, the song's themes of sorrow, resilience, and longing resonated deeply with the collective experience of those who fought for justice and

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[68] Im Chaejun, "Grae, Na Dolpalida!: Haitai Juchui Hoegorok," *Chosun Ilbo*, January 24, 2008. https://sports.v.daum.net/v/20080124123512546.

freedom. By adopting "Tears of Mokp'o" as their anthem, the fans transformed a seemingly innocuous sporting event into a platform for political expression, challenging the government's attempts to divert attention away from pressing social issues. The Kwangju Uprising and "Tears of Mokp'o" became inextricably linked in South Korea's cultural memory, evolving from reflections of colonial sorrows into potent symbols of resistance against authoritarian rule. In this way, the song not only commemorated a painful history but also became a rallying cry for those advocating for democracy, effectively subverting the very strategies employed by Chun's regime to control public sentiment.

Another striking example from the 2000s will illustrate how "Tears of Mokpʼo" has played an instrumental role in unifying Koreans during national political crises. In 2006, when tensions with North Korea over nuclear weapons reached a peak, former President Kim Taejung, who had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 for his efforts in promoting peace on the Korean Peninsula, delivered a powerful speech advocating for the Korean peninsula's peaceful reunification.[69] Following his speech, the event's emcee invited the audience and Kim Taejung himself to sing "Tears of Mokpʼo." The documentary *In Memory of Kim Taejung* captures this moment in detail, emphasizing the emotional weight of the moment was heightened as Kim Taejung himself joined in, singing along through the second verse.[70]

Kim Taejung's love for "Tears of Mokp'o" goes beyond just this speech. The documentary notes that he often performed this song in private settings,[71] likely because it is deeply intertwined with his political journey. Kim, who was an opposition leader at the time of the Kwangju Uprising,

[69] Kim T'aegyu, "'Mokp'o-ŭi Nunmul' purŭn DJ "Hanbando PSI Andwae,"" *Han'gŏre*, October 29, 2006. https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics_general/167934.html.
[70] *Ch'umo T'ŭkchip T'akyu Hugwang Kim Taejung*, directed by Chŏng Myŏngsul (2009; Mokp'o: Mokp'o MBC, 2019), YouTube Video/ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zL9r0wwjqIM.
[71] *Ch'umo T'ŭkchip T'akyu Hugwang Kim Taejung*, directed by Chŏng Myŏngsul.

had long been a vocal critic of the military regime led by Chŏn Tuhwan. Prior to the uprising, he was detained, which angered many citizens of Kwangju. They viewed his arrest as a blatant act of oppression that exemplified the regime's disregard for democratic principles and human rights. This sentiment fueled their determination to rise against the authoritarian government, seeing Kim as a symbol of hope and resistance in their struggle for freedom and justice. His absence during the uprising intensified the collective outrage, as the people of Kwangju fought not only for their rights but also for the ideals Kim had championed throughout his political career.[72] In 2000, Kim was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, being recognized his dedication to fostering dialogue and understanding in a region marked by division and conflict, highlighting his role in promoting peace and democratic values both within Korea and internationally.[73] His advocacy for peaceful reconciliation between North and South Korea and his commitment to nonviolent political activism significantly contributed to the democratization of South Korea.

As depicted in the documentary, Kim's return to Mokp'o was met with an overwhelming outpouring of support, highlighting his deep-rooted ties to the region. The emotional resonance of the song, which became an anthem for the Haitai Tigers and a symbol of resistance, mirrors Kim's own journey through political turmoil and his enduring commitment to the people of Chŏlla. The documentary illustrates how, during significant moments in his life, Kim sang "Tears of Mokp'o," connecting his personal experiences of loss and resilience with the collective memory of the Kwangju Uprising and the ongoing struggle for democracy in South Korea. This integration of the song into his narrative underscores how "Tears of Mokp'o" not only reflects his personal experiences of resilience and loss but also resonates with the collective memory of the Kwangju

[72] Ch'oe Yŏngt'ae, "5.18 Minjung Hangjaeng-gwa Kim Taejung," 185-211.
[73] "Kim Taejung Taet'ongnyŏng Nobel P'yŏnghwasang Susang" [President Kim Dae-jung Wins the Nobel Peace Prize], *Presidential Archive,* https://pa.go.kr/portal/online_contents/instant_record/instantRecordDetail.do?seq=30.

Uprising and the broader fight for democracy in South Korea. Thus, "Tears of Mokp'o" transcends mere lyrics, becoming a powerful representation of the spirit of resistance and the commitment of the Chŏlla local populace to their ideals of freedom and dignity.

These successive political reinterpretations of the song illustrate how each generation has adapted its meaning to resonate with their contemporary political contexts, further solidifying the song's status as a powerful symbol of hope and resistance against oppression. However, an interesting point in Yi Nanyŏng's (and this song's) reception history is how her perceived relationship to Japan differs from that of other artists from the colonial period. She remains a symbol of resistance to imperialism and political struggles, while many of her colleagues and relatives with whom she worked are considered *Ch'inilp'a* (pro-Japanese figures). Notably, figures like Kim Haesong, Nam Insu, Yi Ch'ŏl, and Yi Pongnyong, with whom she had close personal and professional relationships, were listed either in the *Pro-Japanese Anti-National Behavior List* (*Ch'inil Panminjok Haengwi Myŏngdan*) or the *Encyclopedia of Pro-Japanese Collaborators* (*Ch'inil Inmyŏng Sajŏn*, often referred to as the *Dictionary of Pro-Japanese Figures*).[74] Interestingly, Yi Nanyŏng is not included in either of these lists, despite her close connections to these figures.

The *Pro-Japanese Anti-National Behavior List* and the *Encyclopedia of Pro-Japanese Collaborators*[75] both emerged from a collective desire within South Korean society to confront the colonial past and to address the lingering effects of collaboration during Japan's occupation of

[74] Kim Haesong, Yi Nanyŏng's husband, Son Mokin, the composer of "Tears of Mokp'o," Nam Insu, the singer who collaborated with Yi, and Yi Pongnyong, Yi's brother, are all listed in the *Encyclopedia of Pro-Japanese Collaborators*. Meanwhile, Yi Ch'ŏl, the founder of Okeh Records, and Cho Myŏngam, the lyricist, are listed in the *Pro-Japanese Anti-National Behavior List*.

[75] Committee for the Inspection of Pro-Japanese Collaborators, *Report on the Investigation of Pro-Japanese Collaborators. Vol. 1-2* (Seoul: Committee for the Inspection of Pro-Japanese Collaborators, 2009); Ch'inil Inmyŏng Sajŏn P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, *Ch'inil Inmyŏng Sajŏn*, (Sŏul: Minjok Munje Yŏn'guso, December 28, 2009).

Korea. Despite their shared goal of identifying those who supported Japanese colonial rule, they differ in the motivations behind their creation, the process of compiling them, and their specific focus. The *Pro-Japanese Anti-National Behavior List* was released by the South Korean government in 2005, largely in response to growing demands from civic organizations and the public to reveal the identities of collaborators and hold them accountable. During the early 2000s, there was an increased emphasis on historical justice, fueled by public resentment over the presence of descendants of collaborators in influential political positions and a desire to acknowledge the sacrifices of pro-independence activists. As a state-led initiative, the list reflects an attempt to establish an official stance on the historical issue of collaboration. The government's list primarily targets individuals who played significant roles in undermining Korean sovereignty, particularly those with direct involvement in political, military, or economic actions that enabled Japanese imperial rule.[76] For instance, figures who signed treaties, actively suppressed independence movements, or wielded power to directly benefit the colonial administration were prioritized.

On the other hand, the *Encyclopedia of Pro-Japanese Collaborators*, published by the Center for Historical Truth and Justice in 2009, was a grassroots initiative funded by a public campaign. The project raised over 7 billion won and involved contributions from over 180 scholars, demonstrating the depth of civic engagement and interest in addressing Korea's colonial past.[77] Unlike the government list, this publication was not limited to individuals in high-ranking positions of power. Instead, it took a more inclusive approach, covering a broader spectrum of

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[76] Yun Haedong, "Hyŏmnyŏgŭi pop'yŏnsŏnggwa kŭndaegukka - ch'inilbanminjok'aengwi chinsanggyumyŏng chagŏbŭi sŏnggwawa kwaje," 295-297.
[77] Jeong-Chul Kim and Gary A. Fine, "Collaborators and National Memory: The Creation of the Encyclopedia of Pro-Japanese Collaborators in Korea,"137.

collaboration. This included not only political and military leaders but also intellectuals, artists, cultural figures, and educators who contributed to promoting Japanese imperialism, whether through propaganda, literature, or participation in cultural assimilation policies.[78] By documenting a wider range of individuals, the *Encyclopedia* aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how collaboration occurred at multiple levels of society and how cultural and ideological compliance supported Japanese rule.

Both lists are ultimately rooted in the aspiration of the Korean people to decolonize their own society by clearly identifying those who collaborated with the colonial authorities, thereby enabling a symbolic form of historical justice. Labeling these individuals serves as a mechanism for acknowledging the injustices of the colonial era and preventing the erasure of collaboration from the historical narrative. By documenting these individuals, both lists attempt to dismantle the legacy of colonialism and reshape Korean historical memory. They contribute to a broader decolonial effort that seeks to understand how colonial structures persisted even after independence and to prevent the descendants of collaborators from benefiting unjustly from their ancestors' actions. In labeling these individuals, both initiatives emphasize the importance of accountability and transparency, striving to create a society where history is not forgotten but critically engaged with, thus fostering a collective sense of justice and historical consciousness.

As a result, Nam Insu, Son Mokin, and Kim Haesong were excluded from the government's list, as they were deemed "socially less influential" due to their roles as composers at the time.[79] The government prioritized individuals in positions of political or economic power,

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[78] Minjok Munje Yŏn'guso, "Ch'inil Inmyŏng Sajŏn", *Minjok Munje Yŏn'guso's Website*, August 27, 2016. https://www.minjok.or.kr/archives/78448.

[79] Kim Ch'ŏlhan, "Yŏksa sok ŭi Onŭl - 4-wŏl 13-il 'Mokp'o ŭi Nunmul'-ŭl Chakkokhan 'Son Mokin,'" *Midŏ Inch'ŏn Sinmun,* April 13, 2021. https://www.mediaic.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=50613.

such as Yi Ch'ŏl and Cho Myŏngam, who were included due to their roles as a company founder and a politician, respectively. Nevertheless, all of these individuals are listed in the pro-Japanese dictionary, as they were accused of releasing several Japanese militaristic songs. This discrepancy highlights an important distinction: while the government's list focused on figures with direct influence in shaping public policy or societal structures, composers—despite their contributions to pro-Japanese propaganda through music—were not viewed as having the same level of direct social impact.

On the other hand, all of them are listed in the "*Encyclopedia of Pro-Japanese Collaborators*," having been accused of releasing several Japanese militaristic songs. One of the most controversial activities they conducted was the creation of the song "The Cry of 25 Million," which was sung by Yi Nanyŏng and Nam Insu and composed by Kim Haesong. This song was an explicit piece of propaganda, supporting Japanese imperial control over Korea and aligning with the empire's cultural agendas. Moreover, Yi and her colleagues participated in another problematic album. In January 1942, Okeh Records released a collection of militaristic songs titled *Oke Kayogŭkchang* (Okeh: Gayo Theater), which included the song "*Sinch'un Yŏpsŏ* (New Year's Postcard)."

Despite being prominently involved in these activities, Yi Nanyŏng is not included in either the *Encyclopedia of Pro-Japanese Collaborators* or the *Pro-Japanese Anti-National Behavior List*. However, it is inescapable that Yi Nanyŏng continues to hold a controversial status in Korea. In March 2016, the Tears of Mokpʾo Memorial Association hosted the "Citizen Debate on Singer Yi Nanyŏng from Modern and Contemporary Perspectives." This event featured a researcher from the Institute for Research in Collaborationist Activities, who discussed Yi Nanyŏng's pro-Japanese activities during the Japanese occupation, including her performance of

two military songs.[80] These activities have sparked debate over whether Yi Nanyŏng was indeed pro-Japanese. Advocates for Yi Nanyŏng argue that, unlike her relatives, she participated in only a few pro-Japanese songs. According to the criteria used to assess pro-Japanese activities in the arts—such as persistence, repetition, and active support—her involvement lacks the consistency to classify her as a full collaborator. With only two pro-Japanese songs attributed to her, her actions are not considered sustained enough to meet these standards. Although there are isolated instances of pro-Japanese activities, the lack of additional evidence led to her exclusion from the *Pro-Japanese Dictionary*.[81]

Thus, many historians and contemporary Koreans have interpreted Yi Nanyŏng's artistic decisions through the resistance framework, focusing on how her work embodied Korean identity and resilience under Japanese occupation. However, this framework falls short of explaining the instances where she adapted and negotiated with colonial authorities. As Nuno Domingos, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, and Ricardo Roque argue, the traditional binary frameworks—resistance versus domination or colonizer versus colonized—are inadequate for capturing the full complexity of individuals' actions within colonial contexts. These dualistic models assume a rigid division between opposing forces, yet they overlook the many shades of negotiation, compliance, and adaptation that often took place.[82]

This thesis points to the need for alternative frameworks that account for the diverse pressures and motivations behind artistic choices in colonial settings. Yi Nanyŏng's decision to

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[80] Minjok Munje Yŏn'guso, "Yi Nanyŏng-ŭi Ilche Kangjŏmgi Haengjŏk ŏttŏk'e P'yŏnggahalkŏsinga." [How Could We Judge Yi Nanyŏng's Pro-Japanese Activities], *Minjok Munje Yŏn'guso's Website*, https://www.minjok.or.kr/archives/77624.
[81] Chang Yujŏn, "Haeng (幸) kwa purhaeng (不幸) ŭro ponŭn kasu Yi Nannyŏng-ŭi samkwa norae," 142-144.
[82] Nuno Domingos, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, and Ricardo Roque, "Rethinking Resistance and Colonialism," 1–32.

engage in certain pro-Japanese songs, for instance, cannot be fully understood as mere collaboration. Rather, it reflects the survival strategies employed by artists navigating a colonial entertainment industry that imposed considerable political and social constraints. Collaboration did not necessarily indicate support for the colonial regime; instead, it was often a pragmatic response to the demands of survival, cultural autonomy, or the maintenance of status within a controlled system. These alternative frameworks provide a more comprehensive lens through which to analyze Yi Nanyŏng's career, revealing that resistance and collaboration are not mutually exclusive but can coexist within the same individual's experience. This approach offers a deeper understanding of the nuanced ways in which colonial subjects engaged with power, contributing to a more detailed and accurate portrayal of their lived experiences.

In the next chapter, this thesis will delve into the historical, political, and musical context surrounding "Tears of Mokp'o," exploring how these elements influenced Yi Nanyŏng's artistic strategies within the colonial environment. This approach will provide a foundation for understanding how her work reflects broader socio-political dynamics and the pressures faced by Korean artists under Japanese rule. By examining the intersecting factors that shaped her career, this chapter will set the stage for analyzing her music as a site of both cultural resistance and adaptive engagement with colonial power structures.

4.0 The Historical, Musical, and Political Landscape of Yi Nanyŏng and "Tears of Mokp'o"

During the Cultural Rule (1920~1929),[83] the Japanese government permitted Koreans to partake in public life through newly established institutions and media, but the underlying goal was to promote Korean assimilation ideology by utilizing various institutions. For instance, the establishment of the "*Kyŏngsŏng Pangsongguk* (Seoul Broadcasting Station, JODK)" in 1927 played a role in legitimizing colonial rule[84] by promoting cultural assimilation and projecting Japanese influence as a civilizing mission. Furthermore, the reform of publication legislation that permitted new vernacular newspapers, such as *Tong'a Ilbo*, *Chosŏn Ilbo*, and *Chungang Ilbo*, helped disseminate Japanese cultural values and promote the assimilation agenda. These newspapers projected Japanese modernity while controlling the narrative to align with colonial goals.[85]

However, unlike the initial imperial plan to assimilate Koreans through "cultural advancement" and narrative control, the outcomes were not always as intended.[86] Mark Caprio highlights that the discussion of culture on newspapers were "not the kind of culture, however, that

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[83] Colonial Korea can be divided into three distinct phases, each characterized by different implementations of imperial policies: the "Military Rule (*Mudant'ongch'i*, 1910–1919)," "Cultural Rule (*Munhwa T'ongch'i*, 1920–1929)," and "Assimilation Rule (*Minjok Malssal T'ongch'i*, 1930-1945)." The first of these was "Military Rule (1910-1919)," when the Japanese Imperial Army mobilized military and police forces to maintain public order, a system sometimes referred to as gendarmerie governance. The second period is referred to as "Cultural Rule (1920-1929)." Following the Japanese Empire's recognition of the limitations of its prior policies, especially in the light of the strong backlash exemplified by independence movements like the March 1st Movement of 1919, the regime's policy shifted towards permitting Koreans to enjoy a degree of cultural freedom. This allowed for Korean press and large public gatherings, and it symbolically replaced the gendarmerie police system—which had become synonymous with arbitrary rule—with a regular police system. Bruce Cumings, "Korea, A Unique Colony: Last to be Colonized and First to Revolt," 4-5.
[84] Pak Yonggyu, "Ilcheha radio pangsongŭi ŭmang p'ŭrogŭraeme kwanhan yŏn'gu," 135.
[85] Mark E. Caprio, "Post–March First Policy Reform and Assimilation," 127.
[86] Mark Caprio, 127.

the Japanese administration welcomed."[87] Instead, newspapers became spaces where Korean cultural discussions, which diverged from the colonial agenda, could take place. Similarly, the Seoul Broadcasting Station, while playing a pivotal role in disseminating both Western and Japanese music to reshape the musical landscape of Korea under colonial rule, sometimes offered Koreans opportunities to explore their own modern identities.[88] The station's music programs, which included traditional Korean, Western, and Japanese music, inadvertently allowed a blend of cultural elements that encouraged Koreans to reflect on their heritage and modernity. It provided unexpected room for Korean listeners to experience cultural diversity beyond the boundaries of Japanese assimilation policies, giving space for Koreans to engage with their traditional culture alongside the new, modern influences brought by Western music. As a result, this contributed to the construction of the modern Korean identity.

During this time, major cities like Seoul witnessed the rise of numerous notable musical groups, including the Korean Musicians Association, established in February 1930, and an amateur orchestra formed by students from *Keijō* Imperial University, which held performances at *Bumin* Hall. These groups played a crucial role in fostering the introduction of Western art music in colonial Korea and reflected the intellectual and cultural pride of both Korean and Japanese participants.[89] Yi Kyŏngpun emphasizes that Western classical music culture, which entered Korea via Japan involved the voluntary participation of Korean musicians rather than merely being imposed upon them.[90] While Japanese musicians and audiences significantly influenced Korean music culture, it is also essential to recognize that the colonial cultural infrastructure, including

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[87] Ibid., 127.
[88] Ibid., 137.
[89] Yi Kyŏngpun, "Ilcheshigi sŏyangŭmangmunhwawa ilboninŭi yŏnghyang," 172.
[90] Yi Kyŏngpun, 178.

Western-style orchestras and educational opportunities, inadvertently nurtured a generation of Korean musicians who emerged as significant cultural figures.[91]

As a result, these Japanese-filtered Western music institutions also allowed Koreans to explore new cultural forms, contributing to the creation of a unique modern Korean culture that combined both Western and traditional elements. This blending of influences gave rise to hybrid popular musical genres, including *yuhyŏngga* (later called as *t'ŭrot'ŭ)*, *shinminyo*, *manyo*, and *Jazz songs*. According to Chang Yujŏn, *shinminyo* refers to newly emerged popular songs from the early 20th century that borrowed traditional folk song forms, with separate lyricists and composers creating entirely new works. *Manyo* is defined as a "comic song," a type of popular song that incorporates humorous dialogue or storytelling. *Jazz songs* do not refer to the jazz that is rooted in African American music but rather encompass songs influenced by Western music. *Yuhyŏngga* blends elements of Japanese traditional music, jazz, and traditional Korean music.[92] These genres reflected the fusion of Western styles, Japanese traditional music with Korean sensibilities, thereby contributing to a distinctly modern Korean musical identity. The resulting cultural milieu, which included both traditional and popular elements, ultimately fostered the growth of these transcultural genres, showcasing Korean resilience and creativity amidst colonial pressures.

When "Tears of Mokp'o" was released in 1935, Koreans were especially suffering from Imperial Japan's exploitation of rice production. Imperial Japan implemented the *Sanmi Chŭngsik Kyeraek* (Rice Proliferating Plan) from the 1920s to the 1940s, attempting to use the Korean Peninsula as a vast plantation. While the first Rice Proliferating Plan ended in failure, the second plan implemented in 1926 succeeded in plundering even more resources, leading the Korean

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[91] Ibid., 134.
[92] Chang Yujŏn, *Oppa nŭn p'unggakchaengi ya : taejung kayo ro pon kŭndae ŭi p'unggyŏng*, 82-84.

Peninsula into famine under Japanese rule. Due to the Rice Proliferation Plan, many peasants became economic and political refugees, flying during these decades to other countries such as Japan, Manchuria, and Siberia, or to other regions of Korea—particularly newly established urban centers known as "treaty ports," including Mokp'o.[93]

Mokpʼo, a coastal city situated in the southwestern region of *Chŏlla (Honam)* Province, possesses a distinctive history during the colonial era. In contrast to port cities like Busan, which were forcibly opened by Imperial Japan, Mokpʼo was granted access to foreign trade in 1901 by Gojong (1852-1919), the final monarch of the Joseon Dynasty, as part of his efforts to broaden Korea's international commerce. Upon the announcement of Mokpʼo's planned establishment as a treaty port, Japanese settlers, motivated by Japan's relocation incentives, gathered in Mokpʼo.[94] As the port opened and the population surged, Mokpʼo underwent urban expansion, transforming into a modern city. In 1906, the Bureau of Agricultural Promotion established a Mokp'o branch, expanding cotton cultivation in the Jeonnam region, leading to the construction of industrial facilities at Mokp'o port and culminating in the C*hosŏn Myŏnŏp Kongjinhoe* (Chosun Cotton Industry Exhibition) in 1926, which solidified Mokp'o's status as a representative city of Jeonnam with significant infrastructure growth.[95] As a result, Mokpʼo rapidly embraced modern culture under Japanese influence, becoming one of the most 'civilized cities' in Korea.[96]

While Mokpʼo shined brightly with its modern culture, it also harbored a hidden past of significant historical darkness. As Mokpʼo being one of the closest big cities to Japan, it became

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[93] Chŏn Yŏngŭi, "Ilche kangjŏmgi kaehangjangŭi toshihwa kwajŏnggwa shingminji kŭndaehwaŭi ijungsŏng," 130.
[94] Kwak Sugyŏng, "Kaehangjangŭi taejungmunhwa yuipkwa chŏn'gae-mokp'oŭi t'ŭrot'ŭ yuipkwa hŭngsŏngwŏninŭl chungshimŭro," 40.
[95] Ch'oe Sŏnghwan, "Yukchimyŏn pogŭm hu ilchegangjŏmgi mokp'ohangŭi kinŭnggwa yŏnghyang," 281.
[96] Kwak Sugyŏng, 29.

imperial Japan's economic hub city where the government established one of the branches of *Dongyang Cheokshik* Company (東洋拓殖株式會社, Oriental Development Company, 1908-1945). The Oriental Development Company, as a state-sponsored enterprise, directly carried out or financially supported various projects initiated by the Japanese colonial government to exploit Korean land and resources, including Japanese immigration to Korea, Rice Proliferating Plans, and military industrialization.[97] It established branches in major cities nationwide, including Mokp'o on June 1, 1920. It is noteworthy that the Mokp'o branch collected the highest amount of rent from peasants.[98]

Moreover, Mokp'o gained notoriety as one of the harshest living environments for Koreans. Mokp'o was called a "Dual City" where neighborhoods were ethnically divided between Japanese and Korean residents,[99] in order to exercise colonial power and legitimize domination of colonized people.[100] This segregation wasn't just about physical space—it symbolized and reinforced the hierarchy imposed by the colonial authorities. This urban divide visually and functionally communicated the supposed superiority of the colonizers and the subordination of the colonized. Due to its hierarchical segregation, Mokp'o was referred to as the "Street of Discrimination against Joseon People" nationwide.[101]

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[97] Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, s.v. "Dongyang Cheokshik Company," accessed October 7, 2024. https://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Article/E0016671#cm_reference, and Cho Myŏnggŭn, "Chŏnshigi tongyangch'ŏkshikchushik'oesaŭi chagŭm chodalgwa unyong shilt'ae," 46-48.

[98] "Ku Tongyang Ch'ŏksik Chusik Hoesa Mokp'o Chijŏm (舊東洋拓殖株式會社木浦支店)," Korea Heritage Service, https://www.heritage.go.kr/heri/cul/culSelectDetail.do;jsessionid=uij6qQPNPvLA7zlBCCYXKDM3aS74BmSV7JW8xdJBDSk1wSIKzBTgG2yiWTKJqAOO.cpawas_servlet_engine1?pageNo=1_1_2_0&ccbaCpno=2333601740000

[99] Pak Ch'ansŭng, "Colonial Modernity and the Making of Mokpo as a Dual City," 106.

[100] Pak Ch'ansŭng, 129.

[101] Chŏn Yŏngŭi, 130.

Mokp'o provides clear evidence of how Koreans became victims of forced labor under the Japanese Empire. During the colonial period, Mokp'o's role as a hub for land cotton cultivation and processing led to the establishment of numerous industrial facilities, including those operated by the Chosun Cotton Company. These facilities often relied on the coerced labor of Korean workers, who were subjected to harsh conditions, such as strenuous physical labor and inadequate wages. According to Chŏn Yŏngŭi, the labor conditions in Mokp'o's cotton factories were so severe that they led to numerous labor disputes, including strikes by Korean workers demanding better pay and improved conditions in 1920s. [102]These disputes were met with suppression by the colonial police, illustrating the oppressive nature of the work environment and the coercive practices enforced by the Japanese authorities to maintain control over the Korean workforce.[103]

Despite the efforts of labor unions to secure better treatment, these efforts ultimately proved unsuccessful. As the Second Sino-Japanese War, which broke out in July 1937, dragged on, the Japanese Empire found it necessary to implement comprehensive state-level control and mobilization to supply military goods and labor. To achieve this, on April 1, 1938, the Japanese government enacted the "National Mobilization Law (*Kukka Ch'ongdongwŏnpŏp*)." In 1944, as the wartime situation continued to deteriorate, the Japanese colonial authorities began the full-scale implementation of conscription in Korea under the "National Conscription Ordinance."[104] This forced mobilization was carried out under laws regulating labor, capital, business, and cultural control, resulting in harsh conditions for the laborers. Many of the mobilized Koreans lost their lives due to bombings, accidents, and diseases at the labor sites. As a result, the contemporary

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[102] Ch'oe Sŏnghwan, 315.
[103] Ibid.
[104] "Kungmin Chingyongnyŏng," National Institute of Korean History, http://contents.history.go.kr/front/tg/view.do?levelId=tg_004_2590.

image of Mokp'o is that of a colonial exploitation port, with many remnants of Japanese colonial rule still visible throughout the city. [105]The legacy of forced labor in Mokp'o is commemorated through the National Registered Cultural Heritage No. 588, a structure originally built by the Japanese government as a shelter.

Yi Nanyŏng was born and raised in Mokp'o, where she directly experienced the complexities of Mokp'o's colonial history. Born on June 6, 1916, in Yangdong, Mokp'o (known by her birth name Oklye, but commonly referred to as Oksoon).[106] Despite being one of the most influential popular singers in colonial Korea, Yi Nanyŏng's detailed biography has yet to be thoroughly written. Chang Yujŏn attempted to outline several issues related to her chronology as "many stories about Yi Nanyŏng remain speculative or are inaccurately known."[107] I began understanding her life primarily through Chang's article, along with various newspapers and interviews with Yi Nanyŏng. However, there are still many gaps that prevent me from fully comprehending the events of her life.

In her 1935 interview with the magazine *Samch'ŏlli*, she shared how she ended up becoming a popular singer. Her family was struggling from famine, and this led her to barely graduate from elementary school with the financial help of her uncle. At the same time, she dreamed of becoming a great musician influenced by her brother, who owned a musical instrument shop in Mokp'o. One day, Yi Nanyŏng began her journey in the arts by joining the Tae-yang Theater Troupe when they visited Mokp'o in 1932. For the first eight months, she had to do house

[105] Ch'oe, 315.
[106] Chang Yujŏn, "Haeng (幸) kwa purhaeng (不幸) ŭro ponŭn kasu Yi Nannyŏng-ŭi samkwa norae," 137.
[107] Chang, 135.

chores,[108] and then she went to Osaka with the troupe. While working under the troupe in Osaka, she was tasked with making money for her family, but this was not easy for someone who had only done simple work like house chores. Fortunately, she was able to make her debut with the Taepyeong Record Company with the song "*Toraji Toraji*," which could be interpreted as either sinminyo, a new genre that blends Korean traditional *minyo* with Western music, or minyo, a traditional Korean genre. Although the record has not been found, [109]Yi Nanyŏng mentioned in an interview that it gained popularity following its release in Osaka, Japan.[110]

Yi Nanyŏng's interview about her early life offers us a glimpse into colonial Korea's musical contexts in various ways. Firstly, the demographics of Mokp'o as a "dual city" where both Japanese and Korean populations resided fostered a cultural hybridity that influenced the city's arts. This suggests that Yi Nanyŏng was familiar with the musical language of Japanese music, in addition to her knowledge of Western music. Furthermore, it is intriguing that Yi Nanyŏng spent a certain period of time in Osaka before officially making her debut. Su-Kyung Kwak observed that Mokp'o holds geographical significance due to its abundance of maritime trade routes connecting Osaka and Mokp'o. These trade connections played a pivotal role in introducing Japanese music to the region, ultimately leading to the emergence of hybrid musical genres.[111]

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[108] Ch'oe Yuchun noted that Yi Nanyŏng's experience with the troupe may have been exploitative, as she often performed during intermissions or was relegated to doing menial tasks as a child. He further noted that, due to the fierce competition in the entertainment industry, intermission performances were designed to attract audiences in ways that were considered excessively indulgent or regressive, drawing the ire of theater elites. Ch'oe Yuchun, "Shingminjijŏk Uul: Inanyŏnggwa Han'guk Yuhaeng-ga," 208.
[109] Chang asserted that, since the record has not been found, as of now, "Withering Youth (*Sidŭnŭn Ch'ŏngch'un*)" and "Nostalgia (*Hyangsu*)" should be considered Yi Nanyŏng 's debut songs. Chang Yujŏn, 140.
[110] "In'gi Kasu ŭi Yesul, Sasaenghwal Yŏnae - Hwap'al P'ungdaŭ ŭi Yi Nanyŏng-yang" [The Art and Romantic Life of a Popular Singer - Yi Nanyoung in 'Flowers Bloom, Winds Blow, and Rain Falls'], *SamCheonli* 7 no. 7, August 1, 1935, from the Database of Korean History: Modern Korea. https://db.history.go.kr/modern/level.do?itemId=ma.
[111] Su-Kyung Kwak, "Influx and Development of Popular Culture at the Open Port: Focusing on Trot Inflow of Mokp'o and Its Prosperity," 35-36.

Then, through which media did these diverse music genres spread to the general public and gain attention? Chang Yujŏn highlighted the significant impact of the recording industry. Specifically, she considered the gramophone crucial in driving the widespread appeal of popular music during the colonial period in early 20th-century Korea. The spread of diverse music genres and their growing popularity among the general public were facilitated by the recording industry's ability to mass-produce and distribute records.[112] Hye Eun Choi expanded the discussion to emphasize that the early electronic recording industry in colonial Korea was not so much driven by imperial projects as by economic competition.[113] According to Choi, the Korean peninsula became a transnational space where diverse recording tastes coexisted, and various transnational consumers helped recording companies gain profits. As a result, many recording companies were competing with each other in this dynamic market.[114]

In the late 1920s, record companies like Nippon Victor, Nippon Columbia, and Nippon Polydor spurred transnational and transcultural record production within the Japanese Empire. They extended their operations into colonial Korea by establishing subsidiaries with independent manufacturing and distribution networks. This expansion led to increased production of gramophones and records in Japan and its colonies, particularly Korea, with a focus on gaining market dominance.[115] Six major record companies—Columbia, Okeh, Victor, Taepyeong, Polydor, and Sieron—released a total of 5,377 records, accounting for 80% of the entire industry's sales, demonstrating significant growth. In the 1930s, hit records selling over 10,000 copies also began to emerge, indicating the growing popularity of recorded music in that period. Initially, various

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[112] Chang Yujŏn, *Oppa nŭn p'unggakchaengi ya : taejung kayo ro pon kŭndae ŭi p'unggyŏng,* 56.
[113] Choi Hye Eun, "The Making of the Recording Industry in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945," 53.
[114] Choi, 52.
[115] Ibid.

genres—including traditional music and sinminyo—sold well, but by the midst of 1930s, popular songs dominated the market entirely.[116]

One of the strategies for record companies to promote their records was to put effort into recruitment to find new rising stars. Yi Nanyŏng was the prime example that shows how record companies competed to find new stars. As discussed earlier, her first debut was made through Taepyeong Record Company. However, after the release of "Doraji Doraji" and "*Sidŭnŭn Ch'ŏngch'un* (Withered Youth, 1933)," Yi Nanyŏng was scouted by Okeh Records (1932~ ca. 1945) and began releasing songs such as "*Hyangsu* (Nostalgia)" in 1933.[117] An article in the magazine "*Pyŏlgŏn'gon* (別乾坤)"[118] outlined the detailed process of the Okeh Record Company's efforts to make a contract with Yi Nanyŏng:

> Recently, even in Joseon, there has been a proliferation of foreign-owned record companies, albeit smaller in scale. The fact remains that these companies have expanded their presence in Joseon in recent years, even though they are entirely owned by foreigners. Currently, there are six trading companies located in Gyeongseong (formerly Seoul) - whether branches, agencies, or mere sales outlets. Among them, Victor and Columbia have a long history, not to mention other newcomers like Fordole, Sieron, Okeh, and Taepyeong. In total, these six companies are scattered throughout Gyeongseong, engaging in fierce competition, whispering to each other, and eyeing each other up… The Bureau of Arts within the record company's Literary Department selects and recruits artists, solicits their talents, and sends them to Tōkyō headquarters to produce new editions. This is done with the intention of incorporating them into the publication process.[119]

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[116] "Han'guk Yusŏnggi Ŭmban-ŭi Chŏnsŏnggi" [Heyday of Korean Gramophone Records], Korean Gramophone Archive, http://www.sparchive.co.kr/v2/sub/story/story.php?at=view&bid=11&uid=4177.
[117] Chang Yujŏn, "Haeng (幸) kwa purhaeng (不幸) ŭro ponŭn kasu Yi Nannyŏng-ŭi samkwa norae," 137.
[118] It was a monthly general magazine published from November 1, 1926, to July 1, 1934, and is considered the first true Korean popular magazine in essence.
[119] "Howaesaeng (號外生), Reko-dŭ ŭi Yŏlgwang Sidae Kyŏngjŏng (熱狂時代 競爭) ŭi Hant'omak Iyagi" [Special Issue: Here's a snippet about the fervent competition in the era of records], *Pyŏlgŏn'gon* 67, November 1, 1933, from the Database of Korean History: Modern Korea. https://db.history.go.kr/modern/level.do?levelId=ma_015.

While other big companies such as Columbia (1928~1945) and Victor (1928) began their business earlier, Okeh Record Company started its business later in 1933. Despite entering the market later than others, Okeh Record sold the second-highest number of records in Korea, with around 1,300 records, following Columbia's 1,470 records. Okeh's success is attributed to several strategic moves. They adopted a low-price policy, selling each record for just 1 won, which made their products more affordable. They also offered a diverse repertoire, including pioneering the comedy genre and incorporating Western accompaniments into sinminyo, which catered well to public tastes. As a result, Okeh record was recognized as the leading label in the popular song market. [120]

Even though the exact history of how Okeh Record Company was founded is not documented, it is known that a Korean entrepreneur named Yi Ch'ŏl (1903~1944) had founded the company. Scholars including Park ChanSeung and Bae Yeonhyung have credited Yi Ch'ŏl being in charge of operating the company, which significantly impacted its success.[121] However, there is a contrasting perspective on Yi Ch'ŏl having authority in the operation, as Okeh Record Company was under Teichiku Record Company as headquarters, and they appointed Yi Ch'ŏl as the director of the literature department.[122] Although it is debated whether Yi Ch'ŏl was directly controlled by the Japanese headquarters, many scholars have argued from a nationalist perspective that his projects were driven by an

[120] "Okeh Records," Korean Gramophone Archive, http://www.sparchive.co.kr/v2/sub/story/story.php?at=view&bid=11&uid=4187.
[121] Choi, "The Making of the Recording Industry," 103.
[122] Wŏn Yongchin, "Ilche kangjŏmgi chosŏn ŭmban'gyeŭi chungshim inmurin munyebujange kwanhan yŏn'gu," 20.

ambition to preserve Korean traditional music.[123] Moreover, he was in charge of leading projects at least in Korea, including recruitment of singers:

> In this story, let's shift the focus to the next meeting and write about the recent battle for newly recruited artists, particularly in detective novels and similar genres, as the rumor goes. The protagonist is a girl named Yi Nanyŏng, just under 17 years old, who emerges as a rising star in the tumultuous world of entertainment. According to the narrative, Yi Nanyŏng left her hometown of Mokpʼo to seek fame and fortune, driven by the desire to support her ailing father and achieve success in the theater. Despite her efforts, her journey through Joseon (Korea) was not smooth, and even the distant stages of Japan failed to bring her the success she longed for. Despite potentially favorable conditions offered by various parties, she faced challenges both on and off the stage. Struggling to make ends meet and facing uncertainty about the future, she relied on her talent and determination to survive. During this time, Yi Nanyŏng formed bonds with a few individuals who shared her struggles, often performing impromptu acts in theaters to earn their meals. Despite facing numerous hardships, her voice resonated with those she encountered, including Yi Ch'ŏl of the Okeh Company, who was captured by her talent and immediately recruited her into the company, recognizing her potential for immediate success. [124]

As recounted in the magazine article, Yi Nanyŏng had been scouted by Yi Ch'ŏl and was an exclusive singer under Okeh Record. Likewise, Yi Choel's Okeh Record employed strategies to survive in the competitive record industry.

Okeh Record's unique approach to the industry led to the creation of one of the most influential early popular songs, "Tears of Mokpʼo." Ch'oe Yuchun, a prominent scholar of early Korean popular culture, observed that "Tears of Mokpʼo" gained significant attention in modern

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[123] Yamauchi explains that there is a nationalistic interpretation of Yi Cheol's patriotism, supported by evidence such as his decision to change the Korean name of Okeh Records from the Japanese name Teichiku, which translates to "Imperial Records." However, he further notes that this decision can also be understood as part of commercialization strategies rather than purely patriotic motives. Fumitaka Yamauchi, "Ilcheshigi Han'guk Nokŭmmunhwaŭi Yŏksaminjokchi: Chegukchilsŏwa Mishijŏngch'i," 178-190.

[124] "Howaesaeng (號外生), Reko-dŭ ŭi Yŏlgwang Sidae Kyŏngjŏng (熱狂時代 競爭) ŭi Hant'omak Iyagi" [Special Issue: Here's a snippet about the fervent competition in the era of records], *Pyŏlgŏn'gon* 67, November 1, 1933, from the Database of Korean History: Modern Korea. https://db.history.go.kr/modern/level.do?levelId=ma_015.

Korea at an opportune moment when colonized Koreans were increasingly exposed to urbanization, Western influences, and modern technologies like the gramophone.[125] Ch'oe Yuchun noted that, prior to modernization, Koreans primarily experienced music within their local physical regions. With modernization, however, a new "center-periphery" imagined geography emerged, influenced by the dynamics of global and local interactions.[126] This concept refers to how Korean urbanites, influenced by transnational mass media, began to perceive a distinction between cultural centers (such as urban, modernized areas) and the peripheries (more rural, traditional regions). The "global" here represents influences from beyond Korea, such as Western and Japanese styles, while the "local" represents more traditional Korean elements. This dynamic resulted in urban areas becoming seen as cultural hubs, while rural areas were viewed as peripheral, creating a hierarchical perception of cultural significance. As a result, Mokp'o, with its modernized atmosphere, thus emerged as a culturally significant city and a hub for these converging cultural elements.[127]

It is worth noting that the creation of "Tears of Mokpʾo" was carefully crafted to capture the essence of Mokp'o during a time when colonized Koreans were beginning to recognize and understand the significance of their locality. The composer, Son Mokin, who studied music in Japan, was chosen for this task because he was born and raised in Mokpʾo. Okeh Record's goal of creating "Local music" is clear from their advertisement, which specifically looked for a lyricist who could authentically represent the region through "*Hyangto Norae Hyŏnsang Mojip* (Local song competition)." In 1934, Okeh Record held a competition in collaboration with Joseon Ilbo to

[125] Ch'oe Yuchun, "Shingminjijŏk Uul: Inanyŏnggwa Han'guk Yuhaeng-ga," 342.
[126] Ch'oe Yuchun, "1930 Nyŏndae Han'guk To-si Ŭmak Munhwaŭi Shingminjŏk Kŭndaesŏnggwa Wŏltŭmyujik P'ŏsŭp'ekt'ibŭ," 212-216.
[127] Ch'oe Yuchun, "Shingminjijŏk Uul: Inanyŏnggwa Han'guk Yuhaeng-ga," 343.

find a lyricist who could "understand the characteristics of regions." The advertisement emphasized that the main requirement for the lyricist was the ability to write a "local song."

Okeh Record's clear vision to create a "local song" raises an important question: What did it mean to create a "local" song under colonial occupation, and what was the idea of “local” being musically represented in such a context? The creation of a local song under colonial occupation carries deep cultural and political significance, as it was not just about representing a specific place but also about asserting a local identity amidst imperial domination. During the Japanese occupation, the colonizers imposed their cultural frameworks, aiming to assimilate Korean identity into the broader imperial vision. In this context, a song like "Tears of Mokpʼo" that has strong locality acted as an assertion of cultural specificity and a subtle form of resistance. It emphasized the uniqueness of a locality—Mokpʼo—and celebrated aspects of Korean life and emotion that contrasted with the imperial narrative.

Moreover, not other cities like Seoul or Busan, but Mokp'o mattered during the colonial period for its representative characteristics as a rising modern city. Its "dual city" structure, with segregated Japanese and Korean communities, fostered a culturally diverse yet tension-filled environment, adding to its unique significance. Unlike other cities, Mokp'o experienced rapid industrialization while maintaining a blend of modernity and local tradition, making it a symbol of both colonial exploitation and cultural resilience—an ideal backdrop for capturing regional identity in songs like "Tears of Mokpʼo." By deliberately choosing Mokp'o, the local song aimed to foster a distinctly Korean collective memory and identity, even as efforts were being made to erase or homogenize these identities within the empire. Therefore, the creation of regional songs might have been more than just artistic expression—it should be seen as a political act that sustained cultural pride and identity in a time of occupation and oppression.

Figure 6 Advertisement of "Local Song Competition"[128]

Accordingly, Mun Ilsŏk, who grew up in Mokpʼo, was selected as the lyricist for "Tears of Mokpʼo." Despite his significant role in the song's creation, much of his life remains a mystery, including his original name, which remains unknown. He adopted the name Mun Ilsŏk out of a desire to give hope to his fellow Koreans through his writing. However, "Tears of Mokpʼo" almost faced a ban due to its controversial lyrics. In his autobiography, Son Mokin revealed that Mun's original lyrics, which referenced the "300 years of enmity" carried by the Korean people, initially

[128] "Hyangto Norae Hyŏnsang Mojip" [Local Song Competition] January 28, 1935, from Joseon Ilbo News Library. https://newslibrary.chosun.com/search/search_result.html?case_num=2&sort=1&page=0&size=10&query=&date=date_select&ds=19350101&de=19350131&field=all&type=all&wrt=&set_date=19350128 (accessed March 10, 2024)

failed to pass Japanese colonial censorship.[129] As a result, the lyrics were altered to sound similar but appear harmless enough to bypass Japanese censorship. The original lyrics, which referenced "300 years of enmity," faced censorship from the Japanese authorities and were altered to bypass colonial control.

In sum, the creation of "Tears of Mokp'o" was deeply shaped by the socio-political context of colonial Korea, where the Japanese Empire sought to impose cultural assimilation while suppressing Korean identity. Mokp'o, as one of the most modernized cities and a key hub for Imperial Japan, embraced diverse cultural influences, which Yi Nanyŏng became familiar with. During Japan's assimilation efforts, Okeh Record Company aimed to create a song that authentically captured local experiences, particularly the locality of Mokp'o—a city both modernized and exploited under Japanese rule. Despite the restrictions imposed by colonial authorities, the song resonated with Koreans, offering a subtle form of resistance by celebrating regional identity during a time of cultural oppression. However, in 1936, the song was re-released in a Japanese version, reflecting Yi's dual role in navigating the demands of colonial power. The next chapter will include musical analyses to further illustrate her dual role and demonstrate the multi-strategic responses that can be heard from colonized individuals.

[129] Son Mokin, 69.

5.0 Between Two Worlds: Resistance and Adoption in "Tears of Mokp'o"

5.1 "Tears of Mokp'o"

Yi Nanyŏng, born and raised in Mokpʼo, became the voice that gave life to "Tears of Mokpʼo." Following its release, the song rapidly became emblematic of colonial resistance, with listeners recognizing its underlying message of defiance against Japanese rule. The lyrics of the first and third verses are connected through a cohesive narrative. They recount the story of someone who leaves for the purposes of survival or independence activism, while the one left behind mourns their absence. Meanwhile, the second verse subtly inserts a commemoration of Admiral Yi Sunsin and his naval victory at the Battle of Okpo during the Imjin War.

Nojeokbong, a nickname for Yudalsan, refers to a historical event where Admiral Yi strategically deceived the enemy by placing stacks of straw on three mountain peaks, making it appear as though abundant grain supplies were stored there. This act gave rise to the term "nojeok" (literally, grain stacked outside). Upon seeing these straw piles, the Japanese forces assumed the Korean army had ample supplies and troops, deterring them from launching an attack. The line, "Underneath Nojeok Peak, we hold three hundred years of enmity (*Sambaek nyŏn wŏnhan p'umŭn Nojŏkpong mit'e*)," evokes the memory of this historical event. Moreso, the word "beloved one(*im*)" directly refers to Admiral Yi Sunsin.[130] As the song gained popularity upon release, an incident occurred that composer Son Mok-in later revealed in his autobiography:

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[130] It is found in the lines such as "Here, I clearly feel traces of you (*Im ch'ach'wi wanyŏnhada aedalp'ŭn chŏngjo*)"and "This is the song of Mokpo. (*Im kŭryŏ unŭn maŭm Mokp'o-ŭi Norae*)"

> The song, “Tears of Mokpʼo,” became an instant hit. With its rising fame, the Japanese police summoned Yi Chul, the president of Okeh Records, suspecting subversive elements in the song. Their concern lay specifically with the second verse, particularly the line " Underneath Nojeok Peak, we hold three hundred years of enmity." They inquired whether "enmity" was an allusion to anti-Japanese sentiment. In response, Yi Chul cleverly explained that a printing error had occurred, and the word “enmity” (*Wŏnhan*) had mistakenly replaced "mandarin ducks" (*Wŏnang*), a symbol of love. In reality, the song was a poignant expression of Korean sorrow and anger toward the Japanese occupation.[131]

Chang Yujŏn points out that the use of "mandarin ducks" does not make structural sense in the sentence.Furthermore, the original record clearly has Yi Nanyŏng singing "three hundred years of enmity." The second verse subtly calls for the return of Admiral Yi Sunsin, expressing a longing for his protection over Korea once more.[132] However, this association with resistance extends beyond the lyrical content; it is Yi Nanyŏng's vocality that amplifies the emotional impact, transforming the song into a powerful expression of "han." Han is a uniquely Korean concept that encompasses a deep, multifaceted emotional state often characterized by a sense of profound sorrow, unresolved enmity, and a longing for justice. It is often considered to embody the collective experiences of suffering, oppression, and resilience, particularly tied to Korea’s historical struggles, such as colonial occupation and war.

Interestingly, Koreans have associated certain vocal timbral effects and techniques with the expression of han, a “Korean collective feeling of unresolved resentment.”[133] As a concept central to Korean emotional and cultural identity, han is regarded as “the soul of Korean art.”[134] In Korean traditional music, particularly *minyo* (folk songs) and *p'ansori* (narrative singing), a husky and raspy timbre is widely understood as conveying Han, a deep emotional state of sorrow,

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[131] Son Mokin, 69.
[132] Chang Yujŏn, *Oppa nŭn p'unggakchaengi ya*, 290-291.
[133] Sandra So Hee Chi Kim, “Korean Han and the Postcolonial Afterlives of ‘The Beauty of Sorrow’,” 254.
[134] Sandra Kim, 253.

pain, and unresolved longing. This vocal effect is representative because it mimics the sound of crying, adding an element of raw vulnerability to the performance. Roald Maliangkay discusses how professional minyo singers use this raspy and husky voice to intensify the emotional depth of their performances, often accompanied by chest, head, and falsetto registers, and vocal ornaments such as appoggiaturas and vibrato.[135] This "unpolished" sound, which feels intentionally broken, is a central feature in capturing the essence of han in minyo performances.

Similarly, Heather Willoughby's study on *p'ansori* emphasizes that the rough timbre and voice breaking techniques in p'ansori are critical for communicating han. As the singer's voice strains and cracks during moments of high emotional intensity, it mirrors the act of crying, allowing the performer to communicate both individual and collective grief.[136] This emotional intensity is central to the cathartic power of p'ansori and is key to evoking the deep sorrow and resilience embedded in han. Together, these vocal techniques in minyo and p'ansori not only convey personal sorrow but also transform it into a shared cultural expression of han, resonating deeply with audiences who view this emotional state as an integral part of the Korean collective historical memory.[137]

Likewise, the han aesthetic has played a crucial role in shaping Korean identity and is closely tied to several musical characteristics. However, because it is so strongly associated with Korea's painful history, some people intentionally avoid singing it. Hyun Kyong Hannah Chang examines how members of the Korean Christian diaspora resist musical features such as "slow tempo, slow harmonic rhythm, the minor pentatonic scale, and short descending figures that

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[135] Roald Maliangkay, "Defining Korean Folksongs: Characteristics and Terminology," 59-61.
[136] Heather Willoughby, "The Sound of Han: P'ansori, Timbre and a Korean Ethos of Pain and Suffering," 17-19.
[137] Maliangkay, 62-64 and Willoughby, 19.

express sadness."[138] In Chang's study, many church choir members rejected neotraditional Christian choral music that incorporated han-infused aesthetics, expressing discomfort with its melancholic timbre and vocal techniques. Instead, they preferred Euro-American hymns that symbolized joy, salvation, and progress.

As seen in Chang's study, han is expressed through pain, sorrow, and resentment, often understood as evoking a crying-like sound. Yi Nanyŏng's Korean version of "Tears of Mokpʼo" exhibits a similar aesthetic in her vocality. The use of melisma—an ornamentation technique where a single syllable is sung over multiple notes—in her Korean performance of this song creates a sense of yearning and sorrow. While her delivery in the Japanese recorded version is smooth and continuous, with powerful, sustained vocal lines that carry emotional weight throughout. However, in the Korean version, although she also employs melisma, her voice has a more broken, anguished quality. There's a subtle sense of the voice "breaking," creating a more emotionally charged, heart-wrenching effect, as if the singer is on the verge of tears, aligning with the expression of han. This vocal texture gives the song a unique intensity, leaving listeners with a profound emotional impact.

The broken, interrupted quality in Yi Nanyŏng's Korean version of "Tears of Mokpʼo" seems to be achieved through the use of small dynamic shifts. The crescendo and decrescendo within a single phrase are more pronounced and distinct in the Korean version compared to the Japanese version. This subtle manipulation of volume and intensity throughout the phrases gives the vocal delivery a more nuanced, emotionally charged quality. In contrast, the Japanese version features smoother transitions, with less emphasis on these dynamic variations, making the Korean version feel more raw and emotionally heightened. These dynamic shifts contribute to the overall

[138] Hyun Kyong Hannah Chang, "Transcending the Past: Singing and the Lingering Cold War in the Korean Christian Diaspora," 456.

expression of han, allowing the listener to hear the emotional peaks and valleys, as though the singer is constantly fluctuating between control and vulnerability. This creates a powerful contrast with the continuous, more stable vocal style in the Japanese version, where the emotional intensity is carried through sustained, uninterrupted lines.

In 1974, Tears of Mokp'o was re-released on the album *Hŭllŏgan Norae T'ŭksŏnjip* (*Old Song Compilation)*, with improved audio quality compared to the original. In this version, Yi Nanyŏng's vocal delivery introduces a more pronounced breaking sound and staccato phrasing between syllables, creating a heightened sense of rhythmic sharpness and emotional intensity. Each syllable is more distinctly separated, adding tension and accentuating the song's deep themes of sorrow and longing. The staccato phrasing enhances the suspended, fragmented quality of the performance, amplifying the raw emotional depth associated with han.

The more pronounced breaking sounds in the 1974 re-release likely aimed to convey heightened vulnerability and emotional fragility. By introducing sharper breaks between syllables and pronounced staccato phrasing, Yi Nanyŏng intensifies the feeling of han, the deep-seated sorrow and unresolved grief that pervades the song. The staccato technique adds weight to each pause, making every break and silence a reflection of profound loss, longing, and the historical struggles of Korea under colonial rule. For example, in the line "The sorrow of Mokp'o (*Mokp'o-ŭi Sŏrum*)," Yi's breaking voice mirrors an emotional breakdown, echoing the pain of confronting profound sadness. The cracks and strains in her voice not only mimic the act of crying but also deepen the listener's perception of her emotional vulnerability. Each vocal disruption feels like a moment where language fails to fully convey the depth of her pain, reinforcing the ineffable nature of han.

Yi Nanyŏng's vocal technique is characterized by her frequent use of a nasal tone and a wide vocal range. As she ascends into her upper register, her use of melisma becomes more pronounced. This creates a sense of emotional tension for the listener, as her voice often teeters on the edge, evoking fragility and vulnerability. This technique contributes to an almost precarious feeling, making the audience feel that the voice might "break," enhancing the emotional depth of her performances.

Yi Nanyŏng's breaking sound can be seen as an artistic device that connects personal suffering to broader collective grief. Emily Wilbourne's work, particularly her exploration of vocal timbre and the concept of "vocal failure," offers a deeper understanding of Yi Nanyŏng's use of breaking sounds in the song. By examining vocal failure in the seventeenth-century Italian opera *Il Giasone*, Wilbourne suggests that while these vocal disruptions—such as cracks, breaks, and faltering—may seem like signs of vulnerability, they are in fact markers of technical mastery.[139] In Yi Nanyŏng's case, the pronounced staccato phrasing and sharp breaks between syllables demonstrate a highly controlled form of vocal technique, where the fragility in her voice is not an unintentional flaw but a deliberate artistic decision. Wilbourne argues that vulnerability in the voice, especially when it seems to fail or break, demands an extraordinary degree of skill. This is clearly seen in Yi Nanyŏng's "Tears of Mokpʼo," where each vocal crack serves to heighten the emotional depth of the song, but remains perfectly placed and carefully executed. The tension between vulnerability and control aligns with Wilbourne's assertion that such vocal effects highlight the performer's ability to manage emotional expression through precise technique. The breaking sounds in Yi's performance thus do more than express personal sorrow; they also serve

[139] Emily Wilbourne, "Demo's Stutter, Subjectivity, and the Virtuosity of Vocal Failure," 663.

as an aesthetic tool that amplifies the collective experience of han, linking individual vulnerability to broader cultural grief.

Olivia Bloechl's discussion of vocal vulnerability, building on Emily Wilbourne's concept of the "virtuosity of vocal failure," offers valuable insights into the Korean reception of Yi Nanyŏng's performances. Bloechl explores how the "vulnerable voice" fosters an intersubjective exchange between performer and audience, creating a space for empathy.[140] Bloechl's insights help us understand how Koreans likely perceived and resonated with Yi Nanyŏng's vocality. Much like the survivors in opera that Bloechl discusses, Yi Nanyŏng's performance used vocal fragility to communicate both personal and collective trauma. The vocal cracks and disruptions in her voice did more than reflect her own emotional state—they connected with the broader historical context of Korean suffering under Japanese colonization. Her vulnerable voice became a powerful symbol of resistance, giving voice to the shared experiences of loss, displacement, and longing that Koreans felt during this period.

5.2 "Farewell Boat Song"

<The lyrics of "Farewell Boat Song">
The ship fades away, far beyond the horizon.
And even the boat song drifts into silence.
With tears welling up, tonight we part.
Lingering regret remains, yet only the moonlight shines.
This heart, still clinging with sorrow.
The ship does not return, lost beyond the sea.
Parting like this, when will we meet again?

[140] Olivia Bloechl, "Survivors' Songs in Opera: What the Vulnerable Voice Can Do," 40.

Dreams vanish like foam, fleeting and vain.
Yet in the memories that remain, you still sing the boat song.
Under the moonlight, the harbor's night passes.
With unwavering heart, tears fall like rain.[141]

波路遥か 船は去り
君が船歌 消えてゆく
涙ためて 見送る今宵
こころ残りな 月明り
思い乱れて 悲しいのよ
船は帰らぬ 海のはて
別れあえば いつまた逢える
夢ははかない うたかたよ
せめて尽きぬ 思い出に
君が船歌 口ずさみ
月に流れる 港の夜は
一途ごころの なみだ雨[142]

The Japanese version of "Tears of Mokpo," titled "Farewell Boat Song," was translated by Shimada Kinya (島田磬也), arranged by Sugita Ryozo (杉田良造), and sung by Oka Ranko (Yi Nanyŏng's Japanese name). Notable changes are immediately evident, particularly in the instrumentation. The accompaniment features what is presumed to be a shamisen (Japanese guitar), creating a distinct sound, and the scale used differs from the original, reflecting the adaptation to Japanese musical aesthetics. The Japanese version of "Tears of Mokpʼo" is set in the D pentatonic scale (D E F A Bb), whereas the Korean version uses the C# scale (C# D# E G# A). This difference in tonal structure contributes to the distinct emotional qualities of each rendition.

Though the Korean version of "Tears of Mokpʼo" and the Japanese version share similar interval structures, their difference in pitch subtly impacts the emotional quality of each rendition. The Korean version, set in a slightly lower key, creates a deeper, more grounded tonal center. This

[141] The English translation of the lyrics of "Farewell Boat Song," as translated by Auo Jiyoon.
[142] The original lyrics of "Farewell Boat Song," as transcribed by Pak. Pak Chinsu, 76.

lower pitch adds weight to the emotional delivery, allowing the singer to project feelings of han. The depth of the C# scale emphasizes a fuller, more resonant vocal tone, evoking the collective endurance and emotional burden that han represents.

In contrast, the Japanese version is set in a higher pitch (D pentatonic), which lends itself to a more nasal vocal timbre that is characteristic of enka music. This higher range often creates a sharper, more piercing sound, giving the song a sense of emotional yearning and nostalgia. The nasal quality emphasizes a reflective, almost distant emotional tone, which contrasts with the heavier sorrow found in the Korean version. While the Japanese version taps into personal longing, typical of ryūkōka's style, the lower pitch in the Korean version draws out the communal and historical sorrow that defines the emotional landscape of tʼŭrotʼŭ. Thus, while both versions evoke deep emotions through similar musical intervals, the Korean version's lower pitch reinforces the expression of han, making it feel heavier and more somber. Meanwhile, the Japanese version's higher, nasal tone gives it a more reflective and contained emotional quality, aligning with the enka tradition. These differences highlight the distinct ways in which each culture expresses grief and longing, despite the shared musical foundation.

Pak Chinsu's research focuses on the adaptation of the Korean song "Tears of Mokpʼo" into its Japanese version, "Farewell Boat Song," examining how popular music in the 1930s facilitated cultural familiarity between Korea and Japan.[143] Pak's analysis highlights how this musical adaptation served as a form of cultural exchange during the colonial period, allowing audiences in both countries to become accustomed to each other's cultural expressions despite the complex political dynamics of the time. He argues that the adaptation did more than simply

translate lyrics; it modified emotional and cultural nuances to fit Japanese sensibilities while retaining the core emotional themes of the original Korean song. This process reflects broader patterns of cultural negotiation, where elements of one culture were selectively embraced and altered to fit the historical and emotional contexts of the other.[144]

One of Pak Chinsu's central findings is that the adaptation of "Tears of Mokpʼo" into "Farewell Boat Song" involved significant shifts in how the story and emotions were framed. In the original Korean lyrics, specific geographic references such as Mokpʼo, Samhakdo, and Yudal Mountain evoke a strong sense of national identity and cultural specificity. These local elements were removed in the Japanese version, which opted for a more universal theme of personal separation and reflection. Pak Chinsu argues that this "localization" of the song not only made it more accessible to Japanese audiences but also softened the political and cultural significance carried by the original.

In addition to these lyrical changes, Pak Chinsu observes a shift in the emotional focus of the song. He explains that in the Korean version, the bride (*saekssi*) is initially captured as a figure in the background, but gradually becomes the central subject of the narrative, sharing her inner emotions in a way that makes it easier for listeners to empathize with her. In contrast, the Japanese version completely omits the story of the bride. While the Korean version portrays the bride as the one singing the boat song, the Japanese version replaces her with a boatman as the singer of the song.[145]

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[144] Pak Chinsu, "Hanguk-eo Geundae Daejunggayowa Beonyeok - Ilbon-eo Tekseutewa-ui Munhwajeok Sanghojakyong," 57-59.
[145] Pak Chinsu, 77.

The shift in emotional focus that Pak Chinsu observes highlights significant changes in how the song conveys its affective content in the Korean and Japanese versions. In the Korean version, the bride gradually moves from a background figure to the emotional center of the narrative. This transition allows listeners to connect more deeply with her personal emotions, turning her into a relatable subject whose feelings are foregrounded. The bride becomes the voice of the song, expressing her inner world and making her emotional journey more accessible to the audience. In contrast, the Japanese version omits the bride entirely, replacing her with a boatman as the singer. This change not only removes her emotional perspective but also alters the song's affective resonance. The boatman, as a male figure and an outsider to the bride's personal emotional experience, presents a more detached narrative. The affective quality shifts from the intimate, personal feelings of the bride to a broader, perhaps more neutral, depiction of the journey or landscape.

This change in perspective and focus suggests that the Japanese version de-emphasizes the individual emotional narrative found in the Korean version, leading to a less intimate, more generalized portrayal of the song's themes. The bride's personal sorrow and longing are replaced by a more external or observational emotional tone, which alters how the song evokes empathy in listeners. The Korean version's strong sense of subjectivity, as expressed through the bride, aligns with a deeper symbolic layer that connects her longing to the historical figure of Admiral Yi Sunsin. The bride's yearning for her loved one can be interpreted as more than a personal sorrow—it reflects a collective longing for national heroism, protection, and identity during a time of colonial subjugation.

The Korean version's personal narrative expands into a collective emotional expression of national grief and the desire for restoration, which resonates with Korean audiences under

Japanese occupation. By portraying the bride as the emotional center, the Korean version embeds her personal sorrow within a larger historical and cultural framework, where her yearning reflects the nation's collective hope and resistance. In contrast, the Japanese version's omission of the bride and the shift to the boatman as the singer removes this symbolic connection to Admiral Yi Sunsin, thereby reducing the song's potential as a vehicle for collective Korean identity. The focus on the boatman depersonalizes the narrative, diluting the strong emotional resonance tied to Korean history and diminishing the patriotic and symbolic dimensions of the song's original context.

This adaptation appears to be even more deliberate when considering Pak Chinsu's findings. He observed that, while the Japanese would often create entirely new lyrics when adapting Western pop music in its early stages, they took a different approach when adapting Korean songs. Instead of direct translations, they opted for a "Pŏnan" (adaptation or reinterpretation), which suggests a more thoughtful transformation.[146] Western pop music, which was perceived as foreign, could be freely appropriated with little concern for its original cultural context, as it carried no direct political or historical implications for Japan. In contrast, Korean music, particularly songs like Tears of Mokpʼo, was deeply embedded in Korea's national identity, historical memory, and emotional expression. Therefore, simple translation or lyric substitution would not suffice, as the original meanings of these songs had strong ties to Korean collective consciousness.

By choosing to adapt rather than translate, the Japanese approach to Korean songs involved a deliberate reworking of the emotional and cultural content to suit Japanese tastes and ideologies. This is evident in the way Korean sorrowness is reinterpreted in the Japanese versions

[146] Pak, 58.

to focus on more personal, introspective emotions typical of ryūkōka. The omission of culturally specific elements, such as references to Korean geographical landmarks, and the shift in narrative perspective—from the *saekssi* (bride) in the Korean version to the boatman in the Japanese adaptation—aligns with intentional reworking that goes beyond linguistic translation. It signals a conscious effort to reinterpret the song's meaning to fit a different cultural and political context.

Christine Yano's insights into enka (ryūkōka) help clarify why this transformation appeared so seamless. As Yano points out, enka evokes tears through *naki-bushi*, a central feature of the genre that expresses individual sorrow and romanticized longing.[147] This emotional quality allowed for the smooth adaptation of the song into enka's framework, as both han and naki-bushi still retain a sense of sorrow. However, the sorrow conveyed through naki-bushi is distinct from han. While naki-bushi focuses on personal sorrow, han embodies collective suffering and historical trauma. Despite the seamlessness of the transition, this shift reflects a deeper cultural transformation—from the communal grief and resistance of han to the more personal, romanticized sorrow of ryūkōka. The transition between these emotional frameworks, though seemingly seamless, ultimately represents a shift from the collective suffering central to han to the more personal, introspective sorrow characteristic of ryūkōka.

More importantly, both yuhyŏngga in Korea and ryūkōka in Japan played a significant role in the construction of national identity. Both genres officially adopted their names, t'ŭrot'ŭ and enka, during the 1960s and 1970s, solidifying their cultural significance in Korea and Japan, respectively.[148] Christine Yano explores how enka in the post-war era helped construct the national identity of the Japanese people by fostering a nostalgic view of Japan. Through collective emotions

[147] Christine Yano, *Tears of Longing*, 4.
[148] Chang Yujŏn, *T'ŭrot'ŭga muŏnyago murŭshindamyŏn*, 84.

like longing, heartache, and nostalgia, enka connects individuals to an idealized, mythic past, reinforcing a shared sense of national belonging. This romanticized version of Japan, rooted in pre-industrial values, reflects a cultural longing for simpler, "authentic" times.[149]

Taylor Atkins' work complements this by discussing how Imperial Japan's colonial ideology often emphasized an idealized, pre-modern identity as part of its national narrative. During the colonial period, Atkins argues that "colonial access to Korea gave Japanese an opportunity to meditate intensively on their own historical and modern identity."[150] This ideology not only asserted Japanese superiority but also reinforced the notion of shared racial roots between Korea and Japan. In Atkins's analysis, the Japanese imagined Koreans as their "primitive selves," viewing them as a reflection of Japan's own past.[151] Atkins describes this process as the Japanese gazing at Koreans "into a mirror through a time warp," where Korea was not simply an "other" but a version of Japan's own historical roots, frozen in time,[152] which they lost through modernization. This perception cast Koreans as living embodiments of a more traditional, pre-modern state that Japan had supposedly lost through its rapid modernization.

Even though Yano's argument focuses on the post-war era, the longing for a romanticized, pre-modern Japan and the portrayal of "authentic" Japanese values were already at play during the colonial era, as Taylor Atkins explains. Building on both scholars' arguments, ryūkōka, which

[149] Christine Yano, 148.
[150] Taylor Atkins, *Primitive Selves*, 3.
[151] *Arirang*, a representative Korean folk song that served as an anthem of resistance during the colonial era, is another example that highlights the ambivalence of imperial subjects. As Atkins highlights, Arirang became a vehicle for expressing Korean resistance against Japanese colonial domination, particularly after its association with the March 1st Movement of 1919, when the song was imbued with nationalist sentiment. However, Japan also commercialized Arirang, transforming it into a popular entertainment piece that catered to Japanese tastes. This duality, where the same cultural artifact serves both as a tool of resistance for the colonized and as a commodified, neutralized product for the colonizer, reflects the broader complexities of colonial cultural dynamics. E. Taylor Atkins, "The Dual Career of 'Arirang': The Korean Resistance Anthem That Became a Japanese Pop Hit."
[152] Taylor Atkins, *Primitive Selves*, 57.

emerged during this earlier period, likely played a key role in expressing this collective yearning. Through its emotional appeal and connection to a mythic past, ryūkōka helped reinforce a nostalgic national identity that aligned with Japanese authorities' imperial ambitions. It became a vehicle through which the Japanese people could express their desire to reconnect with a past they felt was slipping away, particularly in the context of rapid modernization and imperial expansion. At the same time, these efforts appropriated the identities of colonized cultures like Korea, further complicating the relationship between national identity and imperialism.

Then, how did "Farewell Boat Song" contribute to the reconstruction of Japanese identity? More importantly, how did the adaptation of "Tears of Mokpo" into "Farewell Boat Song" reflect Japan's construction of imperial subjectivity? "Farewell Boat Song" is intriguing in that it retains melancholic nuances while deliberately erasing overt markers of Koreanness with han. It might have been crucial for them to retain certain elements of Korean han, though in a more subdued and less explicit form, as ryūkōka itself also conveys sadness. Sandra So Hee Chi Kim explains that han was exoticized by Japanese colonizers and constructed as an "aesthetic of sorrow" portraying Koreans as inherently melancholic and helpless. This portrayal reinforced the colonial image of Koreans as a "sorrowful" people needing Japanese guidance, thereby justifying colonial control.[153]

While portraying Koreans as essentially sorrowful people, Imperial Japan neutralized the deeper, resistant qualities of han, transforming it into a more manageable and non-threatening sentiment that aligned with Japanese sensibilities. By adapting "Tears of Mokp'o" into an enka version, Imperial Japan erased the song's anti-colonial sentiment, instead presenting it as an exotic yet controllable cultural product that fit within its narrative of a harmonious cultural union. This

[153] Sandra So Hee Chi Kim, "Korean 'Han' and the Postcolonial Afterlives of 'The Beauty of Sorrow'," 253–79.

transformation allowed the song to be appreciated in a way that supported Japanese authorities imperial agenda, while diminishing its original expression of resistance and grief.

In this context, transforming “Tears of Mokpo” into “Farewell Boat Song” was more than a simple musical adaptation—it was a strategic cultural act. The song, originally rich with han, a symbol of Korean collective grief and resistance, was reframed within the emotional tone of ryūkōka to make it more palatable to Japanese audiences. This process of transformation allowed Japan to maintain a fascination with the "exotic" elements of Korean culture while simultaneously stripping it of its subversive potential. The colonial authorities could now present Korean cultural products as part of a harmonious cultural union, reinforcing imperial narratives of assimilation, while concealing the underlying tensions and resistance. Thus, the ambivalence of Japanese imperial subjects becomes evident—they reflected their pre-modern identity through the authenticity of Korean cultural expressions yet sought to reshape and control them to fit their own ideological frameworks. This duality of romanticization and domination reveals the complexity of cultural appropriation under colonial rule, where expressions of fascination are intertwined with efforts to suppress and manage resistance.

Yi Nanyŏng's role in this adaptation, under her Japanese persona Oka Ranko, further illustrates the complex dynamics of Japan's cultural assimilation efforts. By performing as Oka Ranko, Yi Nanyŏng embodied the imperial narrative of cultural unity. Her adoption of a Japanese stage name and the associated persona allowed Japanese record company to effectively mask the resistant elements of the song and instead portray it as part of a nostalgic, sentimental repertoire suitable for Japanese audiences. This role also contributed to the dynamics of gender within imperialism. As a female singer, Yi Nanyŏng, in her role as Oka Ranko, represented the exoticized and domesticated Korean femininity that Japan sought to portray. Her vocal style in the Japanese

version, marked by smooth, continuous lines and an emphasis on the upper range, serves to exoticize and feminize Korean identity in line with Japan's imperial narrative. This controlled, polished vocality presents her as a figure of refined sentimentality, embodying traits traditionally associated with femininity—softness, gentleness, and emotional expressiveness—that resonate with Japan's portrayal of Korea as compliant and sentimental. By rendering her voice in this stylized manner, her identity is reshaped to reflect a domesticated Korean femininity, reinforcing the idea of Korea as both culturally rich yet inherently passive and in need of Imperial Japanese stewardship.

As a result, this adaptation fulfilled multiple purposes: it enabled Japanese authorities to assert cultural dominance, neutralized resistance by rebranding han as an exoticized yet manageable sentiment and addressed Japan's own longing for a pre-modern identity. Ultimately, the transformation of "Tears of Mokpʼo" was not only about assimilating Korean culture but also about reframing it in a way that erased its subversive potential, presenting a controlled, nostalgic image suitable for the Japanese empire's imperial narrative.

Taylor Atkins argues that Japan's obsession with Korean culture had the unintended positive effect of enabling Koreans to renegotiate their cultural identity after independence, with the Japanese gaze "fundamentally transforming both the observer and the observed."[154] However, scholar Kim Hoi-eun questioned Atkins' extensive reliance on Japanese-translated Korean arts and literature, asking whether Atkins truly explores how the colonial experience has constructed Koreans' modern identity after liberation.[155] In response to Kim, I will further examine Yi Nanyŏng's activities under the imperial agenda in the conclusion, helping historians understand

[154] Taylor Atkins, 3.
[155] Kim Hoi-eun. "Review," 81.

how the imperial gaze ironically helped colonized Koreans, thus complementing and expanding upon Taylor Atkins' argument.

6.0 Conclusion: Preserving Culture and Offering Comfort—The Role of the Joseon Opera Troupe During Assimilation

In April 2024, "Tears of Mokpo" was once again performed by a young Japanese enka singer on the Korean TV show *Han'ilgawangjŏn* (Korean and Japanese Singing Competition).[156] Azma Aki, a 16-year-old enka singer from Japan, has continued Yi Nanyŏng's legacy, earning a nickname of "the rebirth of Yi Nanyŏng."[157] Her rendition of "Tears of Mokpo" has garnered over 306 million views on YouTube, with more than 5,000 comments, most of which are filled with praise. Viewers expressed admiration for her performance, with some commenting, "I never thought I'd find myself crying to a Japanese singer's rendition of 'Tears of Mokpo,'" while others remarked, "She surpasses other Korean singers. No wonder Japan is the origin of tʼŭrotʼŭ."

This last comment, questioning the origins of tʼŭrotʼŭ and the role of enka, reveals the underlying complexities and tensions between the two genres. While both yuhyŏngga and ryūkōka share stylistic similarities, they are deeply rooted in different cultural and historical contexts. The sharp distinction between Korea and Japan, as well as between tʼŭrotʼŭ and enka, remains a sensitive issue for many Koreans. To them, "Tears of Mokpo" is not just a song—it is a symbol of colonial resistance, resilience, and Korean identity. The performance of such a historically and emotionally significant song by a Japanese artist inevitably stirs conflicting emotions.

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[156] It is described as the first South Korean entertainment and music program where active singers from South Korea and Japan compete in vocal performances, while also creating a space to promote friendship between artists from both countries.

[157] MBN Music, "Azuma Aki (木浦の涙) - Mokp'o-ŭi Nunmul (Mokp'o no Namida): Han'ilgawangjŏn 3hoe," YouTube, April 16, 2024, performance video, 3:56, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3feaLericM.

For many Koreans, it is difficult to accept that a non-Korean, particularly a Japanese singer, could fully express the essence of "Tears of Mokpo." The song, which embodies the sorrow of Korean han and the struggles endured during Japanese colonial rule, holds deep national and cultural significance. The idea that a Japanese singer could capture that han feels paradoxical to some, as it was under Japan's occupation that the very grief expressed in the song was born. This ambivalence highlights the enduring complexities in the cultural relationship between Korea and Japan, even in contemporary performances. While Aki's rendition has been widely admired, with many recognizing her talent, it has also reignited discussions on whether the essence of Korean cultural expressions like han can be authentically conveyed by non-Koreans, especially those from Japan, the country historically implicated in the suffering "Tears of Mokpo" represents.

The colonial legacy has continued down through generations, influencing how Koreans perceive figures like Azama Aki, and more importantly, Yi Nanyŏng. She is often seen as a symbol of colonial resistance while simultaneously being viewed through the more complex lens of a t' ŭrot'ŭ singer, a genre tied to both Korean identity and Japanese imperialism. This binary framework—resistance versus collaboration—has often shaped discussions around her life and career. However, as analyzed in Chapter 3, her role cannot be confined to such a simplistic narrative. Rather, Yi Nanyŏng's dual position, moving fluidly between empire and colony, reveals a more nuanced understanding of how colonized people navigated the pressures of imperial power.

Her ability to traverse both worlds—performing within the structures of Japanese cultural expectations while simultaneously embodying Korean sorrow and resilience—demonstrates how adaptation to imperial systems could allow colonized individuals to assert a form of agency. Rather than seeing her as a passive recipient of colonial control or a straightforward resistor, Yi Nanyŏng's career illustrates how assimilation could be used as a tool for survival and cultural assertion. This

adaptability enabled her to create a space for herself and other Koreans within the empire's cultural framework, without fully succumbing to its demands for complete assimilation.

This complexity is further exemplified by her later work, especially during her Japan tour, where she navigated the complexities of being a Korean artist under Japanese colonial rule. On one hand, she participated in performances that could be seen as reinforcing the imperial agenda, but on the other, her presence as a Korean performer in these spaces subtly resisted complete erasure of Korean identity. Her music, especially songs like "Tears of Mokpo," carried emotional weight that transcended borders, and her ability to move between these cultural spaces blurred the lines of empire and resistance.

After gaining huge success in Korea which later led to the release in Japan in 1936, Yi Nanyŏng joined the Joseon Opera Troupe (*Chosŏn Akgŭktan*). The Joseon Opera Troupe was a prominent performing arts group established in 1932 by Yi Ch'ŏl under the auspices of Okeh Records. The troupe was composed of some of the most celebrated artists of the era, including singers Go Boksu, Nam Insu, and Kim Chŏnggu, as well as composer Kim Haesong and choreographer Kang Yunbok. This ensemble was renowned for its large-scale productions, showcasing a wide variety of musical genres such as modern Korean folk songs (*shinminyo*), popular songs (*yuhyeongga*), comic sketches (*mandam*), satirical songs (*manyo*), and Western-style jazz songs.[158]

Despite the Joseon Opera Troupe showcasing a wide range of traditional and transcultural Korean music, scholars often highlight its role as an imperial product. Originally named the Okeh Grand Show, the troupe gained popularity after successful performances in major cities across

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[158] Ch'ŏnggang Kim, "Positioning Koreanness in Japanese Empire: Chosŏn Akgŭk Troupe and its Performance," 185.

colonial Korea, such as Kyung Seong (formerly Seoul), Pyongyang, and Busan in 1933. This popularity eventually allowed them to expand their reach to Japan in 1935, performing in cities like Tōkyō, Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, and beyond.[159] This success led the troupe to be recognized by one of the leading Japanese entertainment companies, Yoshimoto. In 1939, the Okeh Grand Show changed its troupe's name to Joseon Opera Troupe after consulting with Yoshimoto. The Yoshimoto planning department suggested that although the Okeh Grand Show was famous in Joseon, it would be better to emphasize the "Joseon characteristic" in Japan for further success. Therefore, the Okeh Grand Show was renamed into the "Joseon Opera Troupe."[160]

Roald Maliangkay noted that the troupe's performance of Korean traditional music was seen as a symbol of "Oriental" culture, thus their perception may have underscored Japan's perceived superiority over Korea due to its modernization.[161] Maliangkay's emphasis allows us to understand the power relation between Japanese audience and Korean performers, in which Koreans were reduced to inferior and exotic beings. Ch'ŏnggang Kim further explained that the entertainment was for "the work of foreign entertainers," characterized by distinct racial features and often performed by individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Among foreigners, Chinese, Koreans, and whites were mainly consumed as women and even as sexual objects.[162] Put differently, Korean performers were expected to embody exotic, feminine, and Joseon characteristics to provide Japanese audiences with a sense of superior feeling.

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[159] Kim, 177.
[160] Ibid., 177.
[161] Roald Maliangkay, "Koreans Performing For Foreign Troops: The Occidentalism of the C.M.C. and K.P.K.," 60.
[162] Kim, 185.

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Figure 6. Japanese advertisement of the Joseon Opera Troupe's performance, featuring female performers wearing Korean traditional clothing such as *chokturi* and *hanbok*.

It is true that the troupe was fulfilling imperial desires, acting as seemingly objective and passive subjects in response to colonial pressures. However, their actions also reveal a more complex negotiation of identity and agency within the constraints of colonial rule. As discussed in Yi Nanyŏng's survival tactics in her artistic choices in the chapter 3, cooperating with imperial forces was at times a safer strategy, given the "dangers inherent to the engagement in resistance practices."[164] This illustrates that collaboration and conforming to colonial expectations were, for many, practical ways to navigate the challenging colonial environment while maintaining cultural continuity.

More importantly, by conforming to the imperial narrative, the Joseon Opera Troupe provided forcibly migrated Korean laborers in Japan an opportunity to explore an exoticized yet authentic

[163] 朝鮮樂劇團 大擧上京 [The Joseon Opera Troupe Coming to Tokyo], March 1, 1939,from the Yomiuri Datbase. https://yomidas-yomiuri-co-jp.pitt.idm.oclc.org/yomiuri/mts/articles/2365926/en (accessed July 17, 2024).
[164] Nuno Domingos, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, and Ricardo Roque, "Rethinking Resistance and Colonialism," 21.

Korean culture, offering a sense of cultural connection amidst the pressures of assimilation policies. The diaries of Hyŏn Kyŏngsŏp (1913–?),[165] a trumpeter in the troupe, provide insight into how colonized musicians were able to reach Korean forced laborers living in Japan on May 4, 1939.

> The theater was small, and the stage was so cramped that we could hardly move. The area was home to only Korean laborers. In this Kyūshū region, we were allowed to use Korean freely, so everyone spoke Korean without restraint and sang the words they had not been able to use until now with great vigor.[166]

The use of Korean seemed to be extremely happy as a few days before in April 24, he explained how the Japanese police was strict about Korean language.

> Today, several detectives from the Ōsaka police station came and conducted a thorough investigation. Although the use of the Korean language had been strictly prohibited up until now, we thought it wouldn't be an issue here and continued using it. However, today in Kansai, they found a Korean flag depicted in one of the dances, which became the main focus. They took two people, Kŭm Sangjin and Yongho, for questioning for the second time, but there has been no news from them all day, indicating that the matter seems to be growing more serious.

Their purpose of the tour, in fact, had been explicitly revealed in the interview. In 1936, the Joseon Newspaper reported that Okeh Records would hold concerts in Korea as part of the ongoing tour schedule in Japan. Interestingly, the purpose of the tour in Japan was described in this article as:

> Okeh record's cultural department, with the aim of the purification of Korean art, has decided to hold concerts in major cities in Japan in order to *comfort* tens of thousands of compatriots who are painfully working across various labors after crossing the faraway Genkai Beach. It purposes to comfort excellent students as well as to invest a small partial of the income making from this tour in Japan, if available, to beneficial projects for helping our compatriots. This tour is supported by newspaper companies including *Chosŏn Ilbo* and *Minjung Sibosa* (People's Poetry Magazine). In Tōkyō, it is scheduled to be held with the sponsorship of the Korean Christian Youth Association Business

[165] *Taehanmin'guk Yŏksa Pangmulgwan Sojangjaryojip 2: T'ŭrŏmp'et Yŏnjuja Hyŏn Kyŏngsŏp* (Seoul: National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, December 22, 2014).
[166] Not only on this day, but also in the diaries from May 3rd, 5th, 9th, and 11th, the diaries illustrate how the performers of the troupe eagerly anticipated and were happy to see the Korean laborers.

Department and jointly sponsored by the Korean Cultural *Samshin* Magazine Office.…[167]

According to the news press, the title of the tour was "The Tour for Comforting Koreans Living Abroad." In the news press, they revealed that they aimed to comfort Koreans who are suffering from the harsh labor environment, indicates that they were acknowledging the effect of the tour to Koreans: comfort. This aligns with their effort to keep performing Korean traditional music as well as popular songs that were signaling Koreans suffer from the colonial system.

[168]

Figure 7. Picture of the Joseon Opera Troupe. They are wearing *hanbok,* Korean traditional clothing.

[167] 在留同胞慰安 音樂大會開催 [*Music Contest for Overseas Compatriots' Comfort*], Feb. 4, 1936,from the Joseon Ilbo News Library. https://newslibrary.chosun.com/view/article_view.html?id=528119360204m10335&set_date=19360204&page_no=3 (accessed March 13, 2024).

[168] "Chosŏn Akgŭktan Tonggyŏngsŏ Taehopyŏng" [Joseon Opera Troupe Receives Great Acclaim in Tokyo]] January 28, 1935, From the Donga Ilbo News Libraryhttps://www.donga.com/archive/newslibrary/view?ymd=19390513 (accessed April 12, 2024).

Figure 8. Picture of the Joseon Opera Troupe on stage, appearing to perform a Korean traditional dance while dressed in hanbok. [169]

Yi Nanyŏng played a central role in the troupe, as Hyŏn Kyŏng-sŏp highlighted in the diary (August 24, 1939).[170] She later reflected during Go Boksu's retirement show on how the colonized Korean laborers were thrilled to experience Korean traditional music during that tour. In his retirement show, Go Boksu also reflected the tour in Japan under Joseon Opera Troupe as such:

> Especially, the story I'm about to tell happened approximately 23 years ago. Many Joseon Opera Troupe performances took place in various cities in Japan. At that time, there were five leaders, one of whom was Mr. Yi. Our compatriots truly desired to hear our folk songs and all the sounds of our people. However, it was so hard to achieve that because even our language had been erased. We devoted much effort to rescue Korean culture, enduring much racial discrimination and failure along the way. However, as we

[169] "Oke Kŭrande Syo Tonggyŏng Gŭkchang Sŏ Taegongyŏn" [OKeh Grand Show Performing in Tokyo's Grand Hall] January 28, 1935,from the Joseon Ilbo News Library. https://www.chosun.com/subscribe/signin/ (accessed April 5, 2024).

[170] When Yi Nanyŏng was not performing, the troupe struggled to draw audiences. *Taehanmin'guk Yŏksa Pangmulgwan Sojangjaryojip 2: T'ŭrŏmp'et Yŏnjuja Hyŏn Kyŏngsŏp* (Seoul: National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, December 22, 2014).

> played, those compatriots began to talk more, and the joy and excitement of that time still are lingering in our minds.

Yi Nanyŏng, followed by Go Boksu further illustrates how Koreans were excited to see performance in Japan.

> When I crossed over to Japan with the teacher Go (Go Boksu), and played the *changgu* (Korean traditional percurssion) enthusiastically in front of our compatriots, the Zainichi Koreans were so deeply moved. Thinking about those times now, it feels like I am re-living that moment today. [171]

Indeed, the story of the Joseon Opera Troupe serves as a microcosm of the broader struggle for cultural preservation and resistance against Japanese colonialism in Korea. Through their performances and actions, the troupe exemplified the resilience and agency of the Korean people in the face of cultural suppression and assimilation. By adopting and subverting Japanese imperial norms, the troupe navigated the complex terrain of colonial power dynamics, offering comfort to both Japanese audiences and their fellow Koreans. Through their performances, they provided solace and support to their compatriots, acknowledging their struggles and offering a form of cultural self-comforting that stood in defiance of colonial hegemony. Yi Nanyŏng's career during the colonial period was defined by a complex navigation between adapting to Japanese imperial demands and preserving Korean cultural identity. Performing under the Japanese name Oka Ranko, Yi became a prominent figure in the Joseon Opera Troupe, an ensemble that occupied a unique role in both entertaining Japanese audiences and providing comfort to Korean expatriates and laborers. Despite the troupe's adoption of Japanese imperial narratives, it carved out a space for

[171] I transcribed the voice recording of Ko Boksu and Yi Nanyŏng from a non-public KBS radio program recording related to Go Boksu's retirement concert. This recording was privately held by Professor Lee Junhee, who generously provided the radio recording, containing their voice. Lee stated that the program was assumably broadcasted in October 11, 1957. Auo Jiyoon, email message to Lee Junhee (Yi Chunhŭi), June 1, 2024 and October 27, 2024.

Korean cultural expression within a colonial framework designed to suppress it. The performances offered by the troupe served not only as entertainment but also as a symbolic act of resistance—preserving Korean culture and providing a source of solidarity and comfort for Koreans abroad. Thus, Yi Nanyŏng's work transcended individual artistic strategy, evolving into a collective memory and a symbol of cultural preservation that resonated deeply with the broader Korean community. What began as her personal artistic tactic became the collective strategy of the Joseon Opera Troupe, and, over time, it grew to represent the shared cultural resilience of Koreans as a whole. Her music became a communal form of survival and resistance, embodying the struggles and enduring spirit of a colonized people striving to maintain their identity.

In conclusion, Yi Nanyŏng's story—and the legacy she left behind through her involvement in the Joseon Opera Troupe—serves as a powerful reminder of the resilience of cultural identity against the pressures of imperial power. Her influence has not only transcended generations but has also contributed to a more complex and interconnected cultural landscape between Korea and Japan.

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