The Authenticity of Hula in Japan

Gianne Shelby Pabustan
Western Oregon University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors_theses

Part of the Hawaiian Studies Commons, and the Japanese Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
The Authenticity of Hula in Japan

By
Gianne Shelby Pabustan

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation from the Western Oregon University Honors Program

Prof. Darryl Thomas,
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

Spring 2017
Abstract

The purpose of this thesis project will be to investigate Hawaiian culture’s emergence—through hula specifically—in Japanese culture and how Japanese culture has adapted to it. Specifically, this project will focus on whether hula in Japan remains pure and close to its Hawaiian roots rather than transformed. Hawaii and Japan are both island cultures, but differences have developed in how hula is portrayed, whether it be more for the entertainment aspect or the cultural aspect. In hula, numerous performance elements symbolize aspects of Hawaiian culture: from the formation of the dancers (representing working together in a community) to the dancers’ adornments (representing a goddess, an island, or even the subject of the mele, or song, itself). Research on Hawaiian and Japanese cultural similarities, such as similarities in spiritual mythology, will reveal the factors that contribute to the continued popularity of hula in Japan. Similarities and differences in hula being taught in Hawaii versus being taught in Japan, such as commercializing hula into an industry, will also be evaluated. Insight from well-recognized kumu hula, or hula teacher, Shane Kamakaokalani ‘Maka’ Herrod, who teaches both in Hawaii and Japan, will also be used to have an inside perspective on how hula hālau, or hula schools, in Japan differ from those in Hawaii.
A Brief Introduction and History

Growing up, I have always been involved in hula and other Polynesian folk dances such as Tahitian dancing and Maori Poi dancing. During my 18 years of dancing hula under instruction, I was part of two hālau. I first danced with Healani’s Hula Hālau & Music Academy under the instruction of Kumu Hula Beverly Muraoka. I danced with her for about eight years, but unfortunately, Aunty Bev\(^1\) couldn’t keep offering classes in Kapa’a, where I lived, and my parents couldn’t bring me to the next closest location, Līhu’e, in time to attend class there\(^2\). I then started dancing for Na Hui O Kamakaokalani, which was under the instruction of Shane Kamakaokalani ‘Maka’ Herrod. Last summer, I started dancing hula professionally in the Smith Family Garden Luau. Since I graduated high school and moved to the mainland to attend college, hula still remains a part of my life. Throughout my college career, I have been actively involved in helping to put on Western Oregon University’s Hawaii Club’s annual Luau for the past four years. Throughout those four years, I have taught and choreographed a few hulas for the show as well as serving as the club’s secretary for two years.

One of my hula teachers, or kumu, Uncle Maka, regularly flies to Japan and teaches with a hālau there. When I traveled to ‘Oahu for a hula competition,

\(^1\) Similar to ‘Mr.’, ‘Ms.’, or ‘Mrs.’ when addressing a teacher, haumana in halau address their kumu as ‘aunty’ or ‘uncle’ as a sign of respect.
\(^2\) Hula classes were being held at three locations: Kalaheo, Līhu’e, and Kapa’a.
there were a few Japanese hālau along with hālau from the mainland that were also competing, and it was interesting to see their performances and how far hula has traveled. Seeing that hula has been especially recognized in Japan has inspired me to write this paper. Hula is clearly not exclusive to Hawaii anymore.

Figure 1. Left to right: Aunty Beverly Muraoka and Uncle Maka Herrod

In both Hawaii and Japan, hula not only serves as a form of entertainment, but it also serves as a tool to record history. Hawaii’s history is preserved in the chants and tales that we hear from our kupuna, or ancestors. Myths and legends passed down through generation after generation narrate how hula became known to the Hawaiians, that the beginning of hula links back to the Hawaiian gods and/or goddesses. According to a Learning Community Center on Hawaiian History, the most widely known story is the involves the goddess Pele and her sister Hi’iaka: The first hula was born when Pele begged her sisters to dance and
sing for her. Only Hi‘iaka stepped forward to perform. She danced for Pele using movements she’d practiced with her good friend Hopoe (Origins of Hula, 2016). There are many more versions of this tale that have been passed down through the generations, and some versions involve the goddess Laka, who is believed to be the keeper of hula dances. All this aside, in her article, *Hula: The Soul of Hawaii*, Tracey Lakainapali states that “The origins of hula are open to interpretation. Some believe it came from the ancient civilization of Mu, some claim it was homegrown, while others trace it to Tahiti or some other foreign land”. Regardless of the source of origin, hula remains to be a way of life for the people of Hawaii and an everlasting tool to perpetuate the Hawaiian culture. Like my *Kumu Hula*, or hula teacher, Shane Kamakaokalani ‘Maka’ Herrod says, “Hula is the heartbeat of Hawaii”.

Surprisingly, for a component that is so essential to a culture, hula was not always present within the Hawaiian culture. After the arrival of Captain Cook and Protestant missionaries in 1778, performing hula in public was frowned upon and hula was gradually forgotten (Ka’imi Na’auao O Hawaii Nei Institute, 2005b). For such a modest community, there is no doubt that there was definitely some culture shock when Protestant missionaries walked off the ships and saw the natives swaying their hips in little to no clothing at all. A common misconception is that hula was banned by the missionaries, however, the missionaries never had the authority to enact such a law. In fact, it was Queen Ka’ahumanu who established the law after she converted to Christianity. Even then, the law had almost no effect as the people continued to dance hula. They just didn’t do it in public. It wasn’t until the reign of King David Kalakaua fifty years later, that hula became publicly known again. Known as the “Merrie

Figure 2. Believed to be the oldest hula photograph—an ambrotype—circa 1858, a time of much modesty and severe regulation. Dancers were described as “overdressed” (Hopkins, 44).
Monarch”, Kalakaua was popular for always encouraging hula performances at many gatherings and festivities where he was involved.

Every year in Hilo on Hawaii, the Big Island, The Merrie Monarch Festival, a weeklong event, is held to celebrate Hawaiian culture and showcase the heartbeat of Hawaii’s people. According to the Official Merrie Monarch Festival website, “The Merrie Monarch Festival began in Hilo, Hawaii in 1963 [...] as a way to attract tourists [since] Hawaii Island needed an economic boost after suffering from a tidal wave and business downturn”. Using the Merrie Monarch Festival not only served as a tool to showcase hula to the world but it also served as a tool to commercialize the culture. It wasn’t until 1968, when Dottie Thompson took over the Executive Director position of the festival and changed the theme of the event. In previous years, the festival consisted of events dedicated to King David Kalakaua, including a ‘Best Beard Look-Alike’ contest and a reenactment of his coronation. When Thompson became Executive Director, she had a vision to continue what Kalakaua had done in the past. She brought the best hula dancers together to share their gift of hula. Throughout the years, many outer-island hālau, or hula schools, have travelled to Hilo to perform and showcase their passion for hula on the stage. Hālau from at least California and Japan are known to be invited to perform at Merrie Monarch each year. Hālau Hula ‘O Lima Nani, a hālau from Osaka, Japan was invited to perform at The
Merrie Monarch Festival Hō’ike in 2012, which can be described as a showcase for hula and all of the folk dances around the Pacific. The Hawaiian word “hō’ike” means “to exhibit”. The event also allows dancers to perform without competing.

To attend, participate, or even compete in the Merrie Monarch Festival is a high honor for every hula dancer because the competition can be compared to the Olympics of the hula world. There is a difference between dancing in a hula hālau and dancing hula professionally. 2016 Miss Aloha Hula winner, Kayli Kaʻiulani Carr, who also dances hula professionally explains that “dancing for tourists is like American Chinese and not the authentic Chinese food” (Great Big Story, 2016). Kumu Hula Keʻano Kaʻupu of Hālau Hiʻiakaināmakalehua further illustrates, “At hotels, here is what you’ll see. Beautiful men and women, brightly colored hair pieces and leis, which are all plastic. But you won’t see the skill, you won’t see the love that you would at the Merrie Monarch Festival” (Great Big Story, 2016). Aspiring to be a participant in the Merrie Monarch Festival demonstrates Japanese commitment to keeping hula ‘authentic’ as well as their passion for Hawaiian culture.
There are two major styles of dancing hula. *Hula kahiko* is known to be the more traditional style. In ancient Hawaiian times, hula kahiko was performed as a sacred ritual to give praise and thanks to the gods (Lakainapali 2004). It was also performed to uphold traditions and pass down years of knowledge from one generation to the next. The instruments used to accompany the hula also hold more meaning than just pretty sounds to accompany the chant, *mele*, or song. The instruments can also add more meaning or increase the intensity of the performance. Hula kahiko is often accompanied by a percussion instrument, and an *oli*, or chant. Sometimes, there is no accompaniment by a percussion instrument at all, and it is up to the dancers to keep the beat as they chant and dance at the same time. In hula kahiko, traditional instruments that are used include the ipu, pahu hula, and the kilu (Ka’imi, 2005d). The *ipu*, a hollowed
gourd used as a percussion instrument, is the most common instrument used and has two sizes, the ipu and ipu heke. The ipu is more commonly used by the dancer while the *ipu heke*, which has another gourd connected to the top, is more commonly used by the *ho'opa'a*, or the leader of the chant and dance. The *pahu hula* is simply a tall drum that can be struck with one or two hands. Another traditional instrument in hula kahiko is the *kilu* that can be described as a small drum that can either rest on the floor or be tied to the dancer’s thigh.

*Figure 4. Example of hula kahiko using the 'uli 'uli. Hālau Hi’iakaināmakalehua 2017 Merrie Monarch Festival First Place Kahiko & Second Place Wahine Overall Photo Courtesy of Merrie Monarch*
The second style is known as hula ‘auana. *Hula ‘auana* is the modernized style of hula and became popular after Western influence in Hawaii. This style is commonly used at social gatherings and festivities because its main purpose it to entertain (Lakainapali 2004). Costumes for this hula ‘auana is also more modern than costumes in hula kahiko. The music and mele of ‘auana is usually more upbeat and merry. Because this style is the modernized version of hula, lyrics can either be in Hawaiian, in all English, or in half Hawaiian and half English, which is more commonly known as *hapa haole*, which is directly translates into “half foreign”. As opposed to hula kahiko, the instruments used to accompany hula ‘auana are also more westernized and can include anything from an ukulele, acoustic guitar or a piano.

*Figure 5. Example of hula ‘auana. Hula Hālau O Kauhionāmauna*
Hula implements can be interchangeable between both styles of hula. Several of the most common implements include the ‘uli’uli, pu’ili, ipu, ‘ili’ili, kala’au, and papahehi. The ‘uli’uli is described as a decorative feathered top connected to a hollowed gourd filled with pebble by a handle. The ‘uli’uli is usually performed with as a pair but can also be performed with using only one. The pu’ili is a long bamboo stick that is split lengthwise on one side. Like the ‘uli’uli, the pu’ili can be used in a performance with only one. The ‘ili’ili is best described as two pairs of pebbles, one pair held in each hand during a performance. Kala’au are simply two hardwood sticks that can be any length. Lastly, the papahehi is a flat board that is used like a treadle. This implement is seen accompanied in hula kala’au, or dances that utilize the kala’au (Ka’imi, 2005d). Although these implements enhance the performance, they are not necessarily required.

Just like the implements contribute to the meaning of the hula and convey more meaning, the adornments of a hula dancer have the same purpose. Tracy Lakainapali gives a great example of the use of adornments in her article, *Hula: The Soul of Hawaii*. She states that “the forest plants that served as offerings to Laka, which were and today still are an important part of the sacred hula ritual
and preparation. Even today, they are considered a form of the goddess herself, and therefore are still thought to possess her mana or spiritual energy”. Forest plants, especially the ti leaf, was considered sacred to Laka and is used in many rituals to bring good luck and keep evil spirits away. For this reason, the ti leaf plant can be seen in many hula performances and Hawaiian ceremonies.

Figure 6. Hula Implements from clockwise to the front: Pu‘ili, Papahehi, Ipu heke, Pahu hula, Ipu heke ‘ole, Kulu/Puniu, ‘Uli‘uli, Kala‘au, ‘Ulili (triple gourd), and ‘Ilili

In the same manner, hula in Japan carries the same characteristics and styles. Japanese hālau utilize the kahiko and ‘auana styles. In fact, according to
Yujin Yaguchi, who wrote *Longing for Paradise through ‘Authentic’ Hula Performance*, “The more experienced dancers also learn kahiko because this traditional style of hula is considered to be more authentic”. As well as utilizing the same instruments and implements within their performances, Japanese hula students are also required to make their own hula supplies because that’s how it’s done in Hawaii. To show their dedication, Japanese hālau are willing to pay high costs to bring in lei materials directly from Hawaii for their hō’ike because “it was important to the students and their teachers to use ‘authentic’ materials” (Yaguchi, 2015). But their dedication didn’t stop there. The Japanese adherance to keeping hula in its original form with the phrase ‘the same as in Hawaii’, which serves as a marker of truthfulness and correctness as well as one’s commitment (Yaguchi, 2015). The use of both the hula kahiko and ‘auana styles in addition to the use of ‘authentic’ performance materials from Hawaii illustrate the Japanese commitment to honoring the Hawaiian culture and validating its authenticity in hula.

**Hawaii Meets Japan**

Being two distinct cultures, isolated in the Pacific Ocean, and with 4,117 miles between them, Hawaii and Japan managed to establish a connection during the 19th century. The first generation of Japanese settlers, often referred to as
the Japanese Issei, arrived in Hawaii in 1868. However, Japanese immigration was banned for almost 20 years, and it wasn’t until labor laws were improved and enacted by the Hawaiian government that Japanese immigration was permitted\(^3\).

With a dream to better the future of their families, Japanese immigrants again arrived in 1885 to work in the sugar and pineapple plantations (Ogawa & Grant). New employment opportunities and immigration resulted in Hawaii becoming a ‘melting pot’ of cultures. According to the 2010 census, Hawaii’s population consists of more than a dozen ethnicities. with Caucasian, Filipino, and Japanese being the largest groups. The abundance and variation of so many ethnicities in the population, make Hawaii a diverse fusion of Asian-Pacific Islander culture.

\(^3\) It was a common belief that these men would get to live in a “Hawaii where they would no longer have to endure harsh winters or scalding summers. They also expected they would earn lots of money so that when they returned to their hometowns they would be wealthy men (Wright).
With the flow of Japanese immigrants into Hawaii, Japanese cultural traditions also followed. In fact, some of the Japanese traditions that were introduced also became traditions for the whole state of Hawaii. Throughout the state, Japanese Buddhist temples can be found in almost every community where during the summer months, from June to August, Obon festivals, also commonly known to the locals as Bon Dance, are held. *Obon* can be best described as a Japanese festival that honors the spirits of departed ancestors (Sweeting, Werner, Williams, & Crump, 15). For many families in Hawaii, attending Bon Dance festivals have become a ritual similar to lighting fireworks on Independence Day. Just like how hula performances were used to bring people
together to celebrate, Obon can also be described as “associated with reuniting with family and old friends, and it promotes a strong sense of community and solidarity” (Sweeting, Werner, Williams, & Crump, 15).

Similar to Hawaii’s Merrie Monarch Festival, Japan also has a similar event called The Ikaho Hawaiian Festival. But unlike the Merrie Monarch Festival that occurs annually, The Ikaho Hawaiian Festival only occurs every four years in Shibukawa and the winning hālau gets to perform on the Merrie Monarch stage. Hālau Na Mamo o Kaleinani, a hālau under the direction of sensei Seiko Kaleinaniikawekiu Okamoto, exhibits the unique relationship between Hawaii and Japan. Studying under Hawaii’s own kumu hula, Aloha Dalire, Okamoto started her own hālau. Describing their dedication, Dalire says, “I worked with this hālau for about 20 years. They really take it seriously, they love hula so much, and I'm happy for them, that they're able to be here and share their hula with everyone” (Dudley, n.d.). In showing their authenticity, Okamoto describes her hālau by saying, “We try to follow the tradition and not try to be Japanese like” (Dudley, n.d.). Their authenticity shows that the Japanese hālau Na Mamo O Kaleinani, strives and aspires to maintain hula’s original Hawaiian roots rather than incorporating their Japanese culture and transforming the dance.

Hula’s Appeal to the Japanese Culture
Even though they are two different and distinct cultures, both Hawaii and Japan are more similar. Generally speaking, Japan and Hawaii are both island cultures and both are isolated in the Pacific. But hula’s appeal to the Japanese may be simple. Debbie Boehm, author of *E Maukaukau!* says, “The appeal of hula is obvious, especially for a people like the Japanese who have historically been drawn to foreign cultures and to the beauty of nature and art” (2011). The similarities between these two cultures may also be due to the fact that Hawaii’s population demographic is generally Asian dominated, which was a result by immigration during the working plantation days. As a result of immigration, a fusion of Japanese culture into the Hawaiian culture led to hula’s growing appeal. This characteristic is displayed in the resemblance of the steps used in Japanese folk dances and the steps that are used in hula.

Officially, there are 26 hula steps that have been recorded in the Hawaiian dictionary written by Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert. A lot of these steps are still popular and used today. However, modern day hula students are not familiar with most of these steps either because the steps have faded out over the course of time or the steps have simply been renamed, or taught under another name while others have multiple names. One of the most common and most used step is called the Kāholo which is described as:
Kāholo: the haʻa vamp step, more common in modern than in ancient dances, consisting of 4 counts:

#1 one foot is extended in a straight line to the side

#2 the other foot is brought alongside

#3 first foot is again extended in a straight line to the side

#4 the other foot is again brought alongside the first foot

(Po'omaiahealani, K., 2015).

Perhaps one of the main reasons that the Japanese become so enamored and are quick to learn how to dance hula is that some of hula’s basic steps are similar to steps in their own cultural dances. The kaholo step can be compared to similar feet shuffling in traditional folk dances used in Bon Dance festivals. During these festivals, a series of traditional folk dances are performed. Tanko Bushi is one of the types of traditional folk dances that can be seen in Bon Dance festivals. In their article, *Tanko Bushi: Designing a Japanese-American Dance Experience*, Terry Sweeting, Peter Werner, Lori Williams, and Alyssa Crump explain that “Tanko Bushi, like many Bon Odori dances, travels in a counterclockwise circle as the dancer repeats the same movements, mimicking typical actions of a coal miner” (15). In hula, there are approximately four basic fundamental steps that may be used throughout every dance, the kāholo, hela,
‘ami, and ‘uwehe. Similarly, Tanko Bushi dances all utilize the same five motions of “Dig the coal”, “Throw the sack”, “Shade the eyes”, “Push the cart”, and “Spread the coal”. Other similarities between Hawaiian and Japanese dances are that both dances have a purpose, they tell a story and both dances utilize the hands to tell the story. Not only do Japanese traditional dances have a similar repetition of motions as hula but both dances hold the same purpose as belonging to the people and sharing their histories. Folk dances are commonly known to be the dance of the people. In the words of Sweeting, Werner, Williams, and Crump, “[m]any folk dances reflect the everyday activities of the people, celebrating the commonplace through physical forms of expressions” (15). In this way, hula can also be considered a folk dance because it shares similar characteristics by telling a story through various hand motions.

Adhering to Authenticity

Hula in Japan is very similar to its counterpart in Hawaii because of their commitment to keep hula just as it is in Hawaii. Just like it is commercialized in Hawaii to boost their economy, the Japanese have also invested in hula. However, hula in Japan wasn’t always the same as hula in Hawaii. Historically, hula schools in Japan used to differ than hula schools, or hālau, in Hawaii in terms of administration and operation. In Japan, hula was studied in cultural centers
throughout the 1980s and the style that was taught was apparently different from the styles popular among hālau in Hawaii. However, in the 1990s, a new contemporary style that was more similar to what was popular in the Hawaiian Islands was established for the younger generation. According to Yoro Kurokawa,

“Classes in the schools operated by this second generation of teachers differ from those in the culture centers of the 1980s. They aim to teach dance as currently performed in Hawaii and offer both ancient and modern hula. [...] Some of the classes are geared toward participation in the competitions held in Hawaii, and the schools often have a close relationship with a Hawaiian hula master.

In the 1990s, hula schools in Japan took a more authentic direction in teaching hula that was more closely related to hula in Hawaii rather than just teaching their own version. In the 1980s, the style that was being taught was the more modernized version of hula but more students started to become interested in the traditional hula, they sought out to learn from well-known hula masters in Hawaii. That the Japanese students went out of their way and sought out to learn from kumu hula in Hawaii shows their dedication to learning the dance from an authentic source. For example, Seiko Shimizu, 45 years old, spent 17 years studying hula. Shimizu even traveled to Hilo to learn from well-known
kumu hula Johnny Lum Ho for 15 months before starting her own hālau in Tokyo, Hālau Na Pua ‘Ala Onaona, in 2002. Rather than learning from instructors that don’t fully understand the culture, it shows that the hula the Japanese are learning is, in fact, the same as the haumana, or hula students, in Hawaii. Shimizu’s commitment to learning directly under Lum Ho also displays the authenticity in her hālau that she went through the necessary rituals to become certified to form her own group.

Looking at the demographics of the haumana in Japan, it was interesting to see another similarity. That there is as much female and male interest in dancing hula in Japan than there is in Hawaii. In Hawaii, you are more likely to see female hula dancers than men and the same happens in Japan. And it’s not that men are frowned upon for dancing hula, it’s just that women are more likely to draw interest in the art form. According to Kumu Hula Maka Herrod, who teaches in Japan, “Just like in Hawaii, there are more female than male dancers because of what was perceived in years before that hula was only done by women and also because of its femininity⁴”.

In the Japanese culture, the use of Japanese system of traditional art schools, the iemoto system, causes a willingness to pay high tuition fees (Kurokawa). Further explaining this system, Yoko Kurokawa describes it by saying,

---

⁴ Personal communication with Maka Herrod on June 5, 2017.
“In the iemoto system, if one wants to study with the iemoto, the master of a school, the student can expect to pay the equivalent of several hundred dollars per lesson. Instead, beginners and intermediate students often take lessons with instructors who have received a professional name and teaching certificate from their respective schools.

The respect and dedication that the Japanese have for Hawaiian culture is shown in their passion to learn hula and to learn it the right and truthful way. In Yurukawa’s study, she illustrates their passion and the authenticity of hula in Japan in an example of a hula teacher she knew. In Yurukawa’s words:

[A] teacher in her late thirties said that she was fascinated by a hula performance she had seen in Hawaii in the mid-1980s. On returning from her trip, she joined a hula class taught by a Japanese teacher. Seven years later, she decided to come to Hawaii to study with a Hawaiian hula master because her teacher in Japan did not know the ancient-style tradition in which she was interested.

This shows that her passion in learning Hawaiian culture and that she was so committed that she was willing to leave her life in Japan and travel across the Pacific to learn from authentic hula teachers and ensure that she was getting the best and most correct education.
On the other hand, with hula having worldwide popularity and recognition, there is also some concern with hula being taught outside of Hawaii, that hula is being transformed away from its Hawaiian roots. However, that isn’t the case because hula taught in Japan is hula taught in Hawaii. Well-known Kumu Hula Nani Lim-Yap of Nā Leo O Kaholokū describes her teaching method by saying, “In two hours, I’ll give you a mele but did you really know what that mele was about? You couldn’t see the mele in their eyes, there was no understanding of it. So that for me was when I said ‘Stop. Hula has so much meaning behind all of that’. And for me that was important for me to let them know that” (Oiwi TV, 2012). Rather than learning the motions to a beautiful song, Japanese hula dancers are also being taught the true meaning behind the song because knowing the hula and understanding the hula are two different things.

**Contributions to Japan’s Strong Level of Interest in Hula**

Surprisingly, the popularity of hula in Japan continues to increase. With respected and well-known kumu hula from Hawaii traveling to teach in Japan and Japanese students traveling to learn from famous kumu hula in Hawaii, more and more hula groups and hula hālau continue to emerge, more hula workshops appear, and participation in hula competitions become greater.
Although there are no known statistics of the number of hula students in Japan, Ikaros Publications Ltd. conducted a study in 2004 that estimated there were more than 250,600 Japanese haumana (Schaefers 2012). Hula’s growing popularity can be illustrated through Seiko Shimizu, who now has three hula schools in Tokyo and classes in Kanagawa and Kumamoto since starting her own hālau in 2002. Shimizu says, “I started with 10 students and now I have more than 200” (Schaefers 2012).

In a short segment of Oiwi TV’s coverage on the Merrie Monarch, Maki Inouye of Hālau Hula Kou Lima Nani stated that “For Japanese women in Japan, it’s such a liberating experience because we’re sort of a closed culture. Through hula, I think they are encouraged to think that it’s okay to be happy, to show people that they’re touched by something”. In the same video, it was also discussed that the Japanese hula students want to do more than just dance hula and hear the mele. They want to understand it. For Japanese students, it is a longer process and
even more difficult to learn and to understand what the mele is about because there are Hawaiian words that even the English language is not able to describe (Oiwi TV 2012). But despite the language barrier, Japanese hula students in Japan are willing to immerse themselves within the Hawaiian culture to learn.

Throughout the year, my kumu, uncle Maka travels to Japan to teach hula workshops. I was able to obtain a short clip from him during one of his workshops in Nara, Japan. In the video\textsuperscript{5}, Nani Helena sung by Waipuna is being performed with uncle Maka is seen positioned in the front and the students are in rows behind him just as it would be during a regular hula practice in Hawaii. As the song starts and the dancers start to move, there is a mirrored-like effect. Every Japanese dancer moves and dances the same as uncle Maka does. When his head turns, their heads turn. When he bends his knees for a slight dip in his kaholo so do they, and they all do it gracefully. This video was evidence of the authenticity of hula in Japan. Not only can you see the skill of the dancers but you can also see the love that they have for hula in their expression and in the way they dance.

Another example of the Japanese adherence to the authenticity of hula can be shown through Junko Shimaura, who is Uncle Maka’s translator for his workshops in Japan. Shimaura and Uncle Maka met at E Pili Kākou, a hula conference and retreat, when she was Uncle Maka’s translator for his workshop

\textsuperscript{5} Refer to included video
in Japan. Although she lives in Japan, Shimaura is fortunate enough to take hula lessons from Kumu Blaine Kia in Hawaii because she is a flight attendant. “I make my work schedule to fly to Honolulu every Wednesday, because our hula class is Wednesday evening,” explains Shimaura. She also says that she has been doing this for fifteen years. Her commitment and passion for hula was clear as she further said, “Sometimes it's hard when I'm too tired with all kinds of difficult passengers, troubles, and time differences, but so far I'm managing to go to hula almost every week.”

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate hula in Japan in comparison to hula in Hawaii and to evaluate whether or not the dance has been transformed away from its origin. Through my investigation it was discussed that hula in Japan follows the same styles, rituals, and trends as it would in Hawaii. Hula kahiko, hula ‘auana, are being learned and performed by Japanese hula students as well as following the same Hawaii rituals by importing ‘authentic’ hula materials to make their own hula performance materials, such as lei adornments, costumes, and implements.

---

6 Personal communication with Junko Shimaura on August 11, 2017
Similarities between hula in Japan and hula in Hawaii include real and true teaching methods and using hula as a commercialization aid. Well-known and respected kumu hula from Hawaii travelling into Japan to teach hula to the Japanese contributes to keeping hula ‘authentic’ by teaching students hula in Japan just like how students in Hawaii would be taught. With this in mind, it is revealed that there are little to no differences between hula hālau in Japan and hula hālau in Hawaii.

For most hula dancers, even in Hawaii, the main goal of their hula journey is to one day, in any form, participate in hula’s most prestigious hula competition in Hawaii, the Merrie Monarch Festival. For hula hālau in Japan to pursue the same goal truly shows the Japanese commitment to authenticity and how they fully and whole-heartedly understand and embrace the Hawaiian culture.

This thesis concludes that hula in Japan remains authentic due to the many parallels in how hula is taught, honored, and embraced between hula in Japan and hula in Hawaii. The dedication and willingness by the Japanese hula students allows hula in Japan to adhere to its original Hawaiian roots. Hula has managed to gain the interest of the entire world, but the Japanese people have become one of hula’s most dedicated fans.
References

“Bon Dance Festivals on Kauai”. Soto Zen Bon Festival.

www.Hawaii.com/event/kauai-bon-dance-festivals/


Oiwi TV. Japanese Hula Hālau at Merrie Monarch. Oiwi TV, 4 May 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_UZmLcK9dY.


<http://www.umbc.edu/eol/2/kurokawa/>.


