

The Formation of *Bon* Dance Repertoire in Japanese Diasporas:
A Comparative Study of Hawai‘i and Southern California
WASEDA, Minako

Bon dance, a Japanese folk dance to welcome the spirits of the deceased, has become an important part of Japanese American culture in Hawai‘i and California. Repertoires developed in the two places are, however, quite distinct because of differences in geography, ethnic and socio-cultural environment, and historical experience. Resisting or adjusting to various factors, or unconsciously influenced by them, Japanese Americans have come to terms with both their ethnic roots and the host society, and have developed *bon* dance as a diasporic culture exhibiting two dimensions: maintenance of home culture and hybridization.

In Hawai‘i, where Japanese Americans form a tightly-knit ethnic community, it was possible to both keep the homeland *bon* dance and create variants with newly-composed lyrics. During the 1930s, a Japanese dance fad using commercially-produced quasi-folk songs spread to Hawai‘i and California through imported records and was soon incorporated into the *bon* dance. For Japanese Americans in California—a minority in the white-dominated society with a growing distance from Japanese culture—*bon* dance with commercial recordings became a quasi-traditional culture to be preserved, transmitted, and accumulated, while in Hawai‘i, geographically and culturally closer to Japan, it became a form for teachers of Japanese dance to constantly cultivate with new songs introduced from Japan. These aspects of home culture maintenance coexist with cultural hybridization. In Hawai‘i, American popular songs were incorporated into *bon* dance, reflecting the Americanization of the younger generation, while in California, hybrid *bon* dance songs were created to express the “Japanese American identity” of the politically-conscious third generation.

The selection and fusion of complex cultural factors vary by diaspora, by individuals within a diaspora, and with the times. To understand the diverse, multi-layered, and variable nature of diasporic culture, it is important to examine the experiences and thoughts of its people from multiple perspectives.