

The Influence of Environment and Immigrants' Influence on the Hawaiian Indigenous Art

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Abstract. Many people think of Hawaii only in terms of the enthusiastic “Aloha Spirit”, but have very little knowledge of the development and evolution of Hawaiian art. This research paper analyzes the influence of the Hawaiian environment and immigrants from different cultural backgrounds on the development of Native Hawaiian art in three areas: music, painting, and sculpture.

Keywords: Hawaiian Indigenous Art; Native Hawaiian; Immigration; Music; Painting; Sculpture.

1. Introduction

Many people think of Hawaii only in terms of the enthusiastic “Aloha Spirit”, but have very little knowledge of the development and evolution of Hawaiian art.

It is thought that the earliest residents of the Hawaiian Islands arrived there by canoe in the first century AD, first from the Marquesas Islands and then from Tahiti [1]. Over 400,000 workers were sent to Hawaii from all over the world to cultivate the sugar crops between 1852 and 1952.[2] Hall discusses Hawaii's American mythos as a tremendous melting pot of peoples and cultures [3]. The complexity and strength of a local identity is forged in shared (though not identical) oppression in the plantation work economy by immigrants from a number of cultures and countries including Japan, Puerto Rico, Scotland, China, Germany, Portugal, and more. Many aspects of “tradition” in the Hawaiian cultural revival of the 1970s were modeled after the rural Hawaiians' way of life, but this is only one aspect of a complicated, multifaceted process for creating identity [4]. A definition of Hawaiian identity must also take into account a cultural movement of resistance to Hawaii's oppressive colonial past. According to Friedman, cultural identities develop in situations of contrast or opposition: Hawaiian resistance has a history much longer than its current press coverage, and in that resistance... People can discover a great many continuities in what might be called Hawaiian culture. While it is difficult to ascertain at what point Hawaiian collective identity emerged, there is evidence that its contours became increasingly clear throughout the mid-nineteenth century [5]. In many respects, Native Hawaiians have been continually disenfranchised. In 1896, English was proclaimed the official language of public schools in Hawaii, and the Hawaiian language was prohibited. Teachers went so far as to visit parents' homes and chastise them for speaking Hawaiian to their children. Hawaiian educational principles of home, family, community, and collaboration have been assimilated by Western educational values like independence and competitiveness [6].

Following the formation of anthropology as a respectable academic subject in the early twentieth century, interest in Hawaiian archaeological research arose. Studies of Hawaiian artifacts have typically been placed in the context of material culture, emphasizing the pragmatic purpose of things and the information they might provide about how people may have lived in the past [7]. As a result, works on the aesthetics and art of Hawaii are less popular since many anthropologists have an uneasy connection with art discourse, and art historians have not explored this subject extensively.

This paper is an analysis of the cultural and geographic influences on the development of Hawaiian art based on a number of studies that explain the impact of country-specific immigration and Hawaiian geography on more specific sectors of Hawaiian art - music, painting, and sculpture - in conjunction with more historical documents that focus on Hawaiian immigration. Immigrants and environments reshaped Hawaiian artistic expression over time, and we can see this especially in music, painting, and sculpture. This article will allow more scholars to move beyond the stereotypes of Hawaiian art and understand the impact of Hawaii's diverse culture and human landscape on art.

2. Combination of Cultures in Hawaiian Music

The music in Hawaii was influenced by diverse cultural environments, but this happened gradually over time, and imperceptibly. During the eighteenth century, the development of commerce with Asian countries brought lots of their traditions and cultures to the Hawaiian Islands. Later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the increasing populations of Asian immigrants infused more cultural elements, such as different instruments, to Hawaiian music, since they led to the creation of many different cultural and music-related organizations and clubs, allowing more musicians and artists to perform and spread their traditional culture [8]. By playing their own cultural music for their community events in Hawaii, they contributed a lot of new elements for Hawaiian cultural lives. Accordingly, multi-cultural elements were infused into Hawaiian music.

Chinese cultural influence dates back to the late eighteenth century, when the first ship that carried the furs for the trade between China and the Pacific Northwest arrived in Hawaii. This was only a decade after Captain Cook landed on the islands in 1778, thus initiating the commercial trading relations between China and Hawaii [9]. Starting in the 1840s, larger scale Chinese immigration began - around 46,000 Chinese people moved to what they called in Cantonese, Tan Heung Shan (The Sandal Mountain in Chinese), or the Hawaii Islands, between 1849 and 1930 [10]. This immigration was due to frequent attacks by the western countries and several large-scale revolutions inside China that made the Chinese people of the Qing Dynasty too miserable to remain.

Upon their arrival in Hawaii, these Chinese immigrants established a variety of organizations based on their home provinces and different functions, including a few that worked on traditional Chinese arts which allowed many traditional Chinese musicians and artists to perform. It is historically documented that their performances were not just to entertain themselves; instead, they were performing for other Chinese immigrants. There were many opera companies from mainland China and Hong Kong that came to Hawaii to perform different traditional Chinese plays which had unique tones and sounds - the different characters' sharp or rough traditional Chinese singing voices are paired with traditional Chinese instruments [11].

In addition to Chinese immigrants, Koreans, whose presence in Hawaii eventually grew to become the second largest Korean immigrant group in the United States, also brought their special music to the islands. Although music did not play a large role in Korean immigrants' lives, they still brought some of their cultural musical traditions, like the sounds of their traditional instrument that is called kayagum, and the music in their traditional dances, such as Sung mu and salpuri [12]. The song style, called "hole hole bushi," is a really good example of the combination of Asian and Hawaiian country music. The "hole hole bushi" is a type of Hawaiian music that was created by the Japanese immigrants who were working on the Hawaiian plantations, describing their lives and their things in Hawaii [13]. For example, one lyric sentence is Kane wa kachiken / Washa horehoreyo / Ase to namida no / Tomo kasegi, which means My husband cuts the cane stalks / And I trim the leaves / With sweat and tears we both work / For our means [14].

After the development of Asian music in Hawaii for a few decades, it was more and more popular among young children in Hawaii to learn to play Chinese traditional instruments, such as the butterfly harp and erhu fiddle, and learn some cultural dances. Even today, there are three cultural clubs that can teach boys Moo See (the lion dance), dragon dance, and Kung Fu. Although the purpose of the dragon and lion dances is ritual, all the music that accompanies them is played by various traditional Chinese instruments - tanggu, suona, small gong, cymbals, etc. As these instruments became more and more involved in musical performances, these traditional Chinese instruments slowly began to be noticed by indigenous musicians in Hawaii, and little by little, they added these musical elements to their own music. And Hawaiian girls love to learn and sing those acculturated songs with Chinese text [15].

3. Influence of Unique Views and People on Hawaii Paintings

In addition to music as a site of cultural influence, the unique Hawaiian scenery and people have caught the attention of artists, leading to Hawaiian painting traditions being influenced by these contexts. Landscapes such as the ocean, rainbows, and mountains, have immersed many painters and often sparked their related inspiration and desire to create. As a result, there are many wonderful paintings depicting Hawaii's varied and beautiful landscapes and people at different times of the year, in different seasons, and in various colors.

For example, Madge Tennent is a famous female painter who was known for her paintings and drawings of native Hawaiian women. She was born in Dulwich, England, and moved to South Africa near Cape Town with her family when she was five. Her father, who “possessed a great respect for the work of the human hand,” encouraged her to develop her natural drawing skills, and enrolled her into the Cape Town School of Art to learn paintings about still life, casts, and portraits [16]. In 1902, her family moved to France in order to let Madge receive more advanced training in one of five Academies Julian. In the years that followed, she repeatedly traveled between France and South Africa. She had been a youthful director of a government school of art in Johannesburg and headmistress in art for several girls’ schools; she also opened an art school in Cape Town; after her marriage, she went back to live with her in-law parents in France. Later, she spent time in Samoa, Australia, and New Zealand. In 1923, during Madge's planned sojourn in Hawaii on her way back to England from Samoa, “the most compatible of marriages between Madge Tennent the artists and the golden people of Hawaii” arose. Therefore, she chose to stay in Hawaii. And she was inspired by a book of Gauguin reproductions that was given by her friend to start her life’s work—portraying the native Hawaiian people [17]. She saw “the Greek ideal, with the added beauty of dark gold skin and ebony hair” of Hawaiians [18]. As a result, she spent the next fifty years for painting a wide variety of Hawaiian women. She said that she “built my Hawaiian figures in art, in a manner of building a cathedral: cathedrals are built slowly, and the people who build them seldom experience the joy of seeing their life-work completed, but are sustained only by the instinctive faith that their work is important and beautiful.” [19] Her familiarity and fascination with color have allowed her to successfully portray the tropical atmosphere of Hawaiian women's lives with very bright paints. Her pigments are applied very thickly, even gravel-like to the touch, and combined with the lines. She “builds” step by step the texture of the Hawaiian woman's skin while avoiding sensuousness, achieving instead a sense of strength and grandeur [20]. Therefore, she was able to draw the opulence and bounty of those Hawaiian women in the “aesthetic of fullness,” making “heavy forms lyric.” [21] Although she was an outsider from England, she was accepted by most of the native Hawaiians.

There is another outstanding Native Hawaiian artist - Juliette May Fraser, who was born in Honolulu during King Kalakaua's reign, is a well-known artist and former teacher at McKinley High School and Punahou School. She graduated from Punahou when she was roughly 19 years old. She then attended Wellesley majoring architecture for four years and received her B.A.. Upon her return to Hawaii, she became engrossed in the landscape of Hawaii and worked with her mentor to paint different murals of many Hawaiian buildings. They painted royal palm trees, olive trees, mynah birds, angels in Hawaiian feather cloaks, shell trumpets, conch trumpets, and Hawaiian angels in holoku, among other Hawaiian-inspired murals [22].

However, some people have noticed that many Hawaiian painters find it difficult to think or create more deeply about the beauty of Hawaii while enjoying it. As a result, one often sees very cliched paintings of young girls with fresh hibiscus flowers on their heads, dancing barefoot in the middle of the mountains; black reefs on the beach, people surfing in the distance; moonlight on the beach, a few palm trees reflected in the water, etc. [23] But this initial, relatively one-dimensional, painting also has a lot to do with Hawaii's geographical location. Hawaii’s location on the vast Pacific Ocean placed it very far from any of the more artistically developed continents and cities, and transportation was very difficult, so Hawaiian paintings had a relatively independent and homogeneous style and system. But as transportation and communication improved, Hawaii became less than fifteen hours flights away from both the East and the West. Gradually, Hawaii has gone from having an unbelievably

independent art system to being one of the most important centers for the exchange of Eastern and Western paintings. And Hawaiian artists have an infinite variety of cultural elements and materials to use in their paintings, from the original Hawaiian totems, the unrestrained Chinese paintings of the Chinese masters, to the delicate and unique strokes of European oil paintings [24].

The surviving Hawaiian paintings include depictions of the unique Hawaiian landscape and people, as well as many Asian and European cultural elements.

4. The Development of Hawaiian Sculptures and Influences on it by Others

The introduction of foreign carving techniques, as well as foreign artistic designs, had a profound impact on the patterns and shapes of Hawaiian sculpture.

First of all, a seminary introduced the technique of engraving - Lahainaluna Seminary, which is located at the base of Pu'u Pa'upa'u (Hill of Struggle), was built in 1831 by American missionaries with the intention of constructing a high school to educate the broader populace. This was made possible by a parcel of land given to Lahainaluna by Chiefess Kalakua Hoapiliwahine, Governor Hoapili's wife. With the installation of the first printing press in Hale Pa'i, instructors and students were able to print books, periodicals, and newspapers to supplement their studies and to meet printing demands from the other islands [25]. It is recorded that some students of the seminary had already started engraving on copper for the purpose of writing and preserving maps and other materials. More than thirty local people were taught to set type, correct type, print and bind. And the local engravers in Lahainaluna were very skilled [26]. And there are twelve engraved prints of works by locals of Lahainaluna. Most of these prints were made between 1837 and 1840, and they all demonstrate the engravers' considerable drawing and engraving skills. Although these prints are few in number, and even fewer have been preserved intact, they are evidence of the adaptation and application of the newer aspects of art by the native peoples of the Hawaiian Islands [27].

Hawaiian sculpture is also influenced by many foreign cultures, such as that of Indonesia. First of all, Sumatran textiles are very similar to the artistic designs of the Pacific region. Sumatran textiles are generally 40 x 40 cm in size, and they are mainly used to cover containers of food during religious festivals [28]. They are produced only in a limited region around Kroe, a small town on the Westcoast of South Sumatra, not far from Java. They are sometimes stylized, but sometimes very realistic, with images of boats, trees, birds, animals, and even people. Some of the human figures are standing on their own, and some are standing together. At the same time, the square beast heads with open mouths in them are very similar to the Hawaiian Kukailinioku-heads. For example, the famous Hawaiian feather helmets - mahiole, where the figures stand in a frame, similar to some of the more typical buildings in Indonesia, and the whole scene is placed in a crocodile pattern, according to Indonesian beliefs - ancestors often return in the form of crocodiles, and this figure obviously represents an ancestor. There is a similar representation in the tile design of Mindanao in the southern Philippines - interpreted as man being eaten by a crocodile [29]. This suggests beliefs and designs dating back to the oldest Indonesian immigrants - Proto-Malays.

And many of the designs on Sumatran textiles are very similar to Hawaiian amnakuafigures: their body positions are the same, they all have their mouths open; their cheeks are all facing down, and their faces are long. These features are clearly Sumatran in origin: including their small roofs, the four poles, and even the gaps in the houses are evident in the decoration of the heads of the amnakuafigures, especially in the hanging cheeks. These are also confirmed by a large Hawaiian idol in the British Museum, because looking at this Hawaiian idol from the back, we can see exactly the shadow of an Indonesian hut: the vertically pulled-out cheeks reach the ground, like the notches of the original poles, and the numerous roofs have been transformed into a typical hairstyle [30]. These also show that the Sumatran textiles, as well as the design on the mat, were transmitted to Hawaii, rather than being a product derived from the original Hawaiian carving.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Hawaii's unique geography and environment created special inspiration for artists; in addition, immigrants from Asia, Europe, and other parts of the world brought their own cultures to the land, which had a profound impact on Hawaii's art.

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