

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL FOCUSED ISSUE ON  
HAWAIIAN CULTURE, GENDER AND CLOTHING

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While Hawai'i became an American state in 1959, until 1898 it was an independent monarchy with a long and interesting history. The Hawaiian Islands and their diverse population provide a rich example of cultural exchange. With a history of explorers and immigrants to the Islands, Hawai'i is a constellation of different races, ethnicities, and cultures. Likewise, the dress of its Islanders is a reflection of its peoples, their histories and backgrounds. Cultural adaptation is a key issue that is seen in numerous areas of Hawaiian life, whether it is how the people of Hawai'i integrated new cultures into their self-presentation, or how what became known as aloha attire influenced the rest of the world.

What exactly constitutes *Hawaiian* can be debated. Some argue that Hawaiian culture ended when James Cooke landed at Waimea in 1778, an event that set the process of rapid westernization into motion, and conclude that authentic Hawaiian dress ceased with the advent of outside influences. Others maintain that Hawaiian dress refers to clothing and accessories made from natural materials indigenous to the Hawaiian Islands until they were annexed by the United States in 1898. After Cook's arrival, many ships came to Hawaii and the introduction of woven fabrics as trade goods set about significant changes in dress. The arrival of missionary women in 1820 brought in entirely new notions of dress, and by the early twentieth century, led to the development of what came to be referred to as aloha attire; garments made of Hawaiian print fabric. Generally, scholars take a postmodern approach and view Hawaiian dress as an assemblage of design influences from the diverse cultures that have made Hawai'i culturally

unique today. That ethnic diversity is visible in aloha attire. The articles in this volume will touch upon these differences as the authors explore the histories and present-day interpretations of Hawaiian dress.

The Hawaiian garment industry was very important during the mid to late twentieth century and its clothing, referred to as aloha attire, was well known for its colorful and culturally interesting textiles. However it was not until the late 1980s that academics began to research and write about dress in the Islands. The impetus was the publication of a trade book about aloha shirts in 1984 that was filled with misinformation. In the intervening years several good books, chapters and journal articles have been written to shed light on aloha attire, its design and symbolism, while concurrently providing accurate history (a list of suggested readings is provided).

This volume came about following presentations and discussions from four different research conferences attended by the Guest Editors of this volume of *Paideusis; Journal of Interdisciplinary and Cross Cultural Studies*. The conferences included the Textile Society of America, the International Textile and Apparel Association, the Costume Society (US), and Pacific Sociological Association (US). Dr. Andrew Reilly and Dr. Linda Arthur Bradley worked together to disseminate a call for papers on Hawaiian dress. Following paper submission, a blind peer review process was used. The acceptance rate was for this volume was 39%.

Four articles that examine cultural exchange among Hawaiian dress are found in this volume. In "Fusion Fashion: East Meets West," Linda Arthur Bradley first sets the historic context for understanding Hawaiian clothing, and then documents how Hawai`i was the site of a unique blending of many different immigrant cultures and ethnicities into a distinctive fusion fashion style that is called aloha attire today. The idea of fusion fashion began in Hawaii in the mid twentieth century with the work of Alfred Shaheen who brought a unique perspective to textile and apparel design in Hawaii. Continuing on with a discussion of Shaheen's influence, Jo Ann C. Stabb reflects on a travelling exhibition of Alfred Shaheen's work that debuted in San Jose California. It was entitled "Hawai`i's Alfred Shaheen: Fashion to Fabric," and the exhibit

effectively captured the visual quality of the textiles Alfred Shaheen produced with bold colors, diverse prints, and iconic patterns. She recounts how Shaheen's approach to design incorporated a merging of different cultures into a unique style called "Hawaiian." Marcia Morgado and Andrew Reilly examine semiotics of the Hawaiian Shirt by examining cartoons in "Funny Kine Clothes: The Hawaiian Shirt as Popular Culture." They identify three themes that are used repeatedly in the interpretation of the Hawaiian shirt today. While the term "aloha shirt" and "Hawaiian shirt" generally refer to button-down shirts made of woven materials, most people in the Hawaiian Islands wear T-shirts which are less expensive and much more ubiquitous. Cultural and political meanings are embedded in some of these T-shirts. Marjorie Kelly, in "T-Shirts That Tell Tales: Remembrance and Resistance in T-Shirt Design in Hawai'i" investigates the politics of shirt design and consumption in Hawaii.

It is hoped with this volume that readers will gain a deeper understanding of the Hawaiian culture. While the beauty of the Hawaiian environment is easy to see reflected in Hawaiian textiles, what is more difficult is to interpret the complexities, idiosyncrasies, and nuances surrounding Hawaiian dress as a cultural artifact representing hybridization that resulted from cultural interaction on a set of remote islands where ethnic diversity has been celebrated. We hope that this volume provides some illumination on this topic.

### **Suggested readings**

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