

# The Taboo Change Comparison Between Hawaii and Hainan Islands

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**Abstract:** A comparison of taboos between aboriginal peoples in Hawaii and Hainan islands reveals that significant changes have taken place in the taboos of gender, diet, religious rituals and behaviors in Hawaii, while the taboos of Li nationality in Hainan remain relatively intact. The tourist to Hainan should be protected and respected by tourists.

**Keywords:** Hawaii; Hainan; Aboriginal peoples; Taboos; Comparison

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## Introduction

The phenomenon of “taboo” first attracted the attention of cultural researchers in Polynesia Islands of the South Pacific, which was written as “tabu”, and which meant “sacred” originally (Fan, 2020)<sup>[1]</sup>. With the human development, taboo means to avoid punishment, to forbid the use of “sacred” things, and to forbid the violation and contact of “dirty” people and things(Han, 2006)<sup>[2]</sup>. Regarding the origin of taboo, Tian (1995)<sup>[3]</sup> believed that the primitive ancestors could not get rid of the fear of the supernatural force from the outside world, could not understand the doubts and worries about the changes of the sun, moon and stars, and could not solve the contradictions entwined around them. In modern society, understanding and following the taboos of ethnic group’s cultures are also conducive to promoting exchanges between ethnic groups, promoting the harmonious development of ethnic group relations, and promoting the prosperity of ethnic cultures.

## 1. Literature Review

Based on the analysis of current ethnic groups’ cultural literature on taboos, the taboos research can be divided into the following five categories: First, the research on the origin of taboos (Freud, 2015)<sup>[4]</sup>;second, the research on the relationship between taboos and law (Tian, 1995)<sup>[3]</sup>; third, the research on the narrative of taboos among China’s minorities (Yang, 2002; Gong, 1991)<sup>[5,6]</sup>; fourth, the research on the relationship between minority taboos and ecology (Li & Wang , 2005; Bai, 2002)<sup>[7,8]</sup>; fifth, the research on the inheritance and changes of ethnic groups’ taboos (Qie & Liu, 2009; Shi, 2004)<sup>[9,10]</sup>.However, there are very scarce studies on the change comparison of the aboriginal peoples’ taboos in Hawaii (an international tourist island in the United States) and Hainan (an international tourist island in China)which is a research gap in the literature. Therefore, this paper will introduce and compare the aboriginal peoples’ taboos in the two international tourist islands, so as to provide reference for the tourists and also provide insight into the vitality of the aboriginal peoples’ culture in the two international tourist islands.

## 2. A Comparison of Taboo Changes in Hawaii and Hainan

### 2.1 Taboo Changes of Aboriginal People in Hawaii

Polynesians were the earliest aboriginal people to live in Hawaii in about the 4th century. The aboriginal people of Polynesia in Hawaii belong to polytheistic worship, and they mainly formed primitive religious beliefs of nature worship. The earliest god in their

worship was Kane, who was honored as the ancestor of men and the god of fresh water, forest and sunshine (Wang, 2012)<sup>[11]</sup>. In modern times, Ku and Lono were at the center of their beliefs. In the primitive religious beliefs of Hawaiians who believed in the unity of man and god, Ku gave the king the divine power to rule the country, so the king usually represented Ku and was in charge of politics, handicrafts and fishery. Lono was the god of agriculture and peace. Lono was also in charge of peace and fertility, and the priests of Lono represented Lono (Samuel, 1992)<sup>[12]</sup>. People usually worshiped the god of Ku in the temple of Hikio, and worshiped the god of Lono at the various node temples of the New Year parade celebration. Before being conquered and integrated into the United States, Hawaii was an integral and independent kingdom. Throughout their taboos system, their aboriginal taboos can be summarized into the ritual taboos of gods and identity taboos. Because of the strict social hierarchy in Hawaii, identity taboos were reflected in all aspects of Hawaiian life. Identity taboos stipulated the identity and social hierarchy of local people, mainly reflected in people's hierarchical identity and gender identity. Generally, the priests who worshiped the gods had higher hierarchical identity taboos than the general people. There was also a social hierarchy between the chiefs and the people, and the chiefs had taboos from birth, which defined their higher social status and privileges over the common people, and which recognized the inborn divine nature of the chiefs. The taboos therefore stipulated that the common people could not stand in front of the chiefs or touch their clothes. The king, the chiefs, and the high chiefs had higher levels of taboos than the low chiefs, which distinguished them from the low chiefs. And the status taboos between the divine and the common people could not be transgressed. That is to say, there were taboos that could not be transgressed between the king, the chiefs, the high chiefs, the low chiefs, the priests, and the common people.

Gender taboos are mainly embodied in male superiority, which meant that the status of men was much higher than that of women. Because Hawaiian religious concepts believed that men were descendants of gods, while women were descended from the earth rather than gods (Sahlins, 1981)<sup>[13]</sup>. Since men were descendants of gods, they could be with gods, eat with gods, and become representatives of gods. For example, priests were such representatives. While women were considered to pollute the gods, men, and even the sacred objects, religious implements, puppets and temples, etc. associated with the gods. Therefore, the rules were different for men and women. Women could not cook food in the same pot or eat at the same table with men. They could not eat pork, turtles, sharks, bananas, and coconuts, because these foods were usually used as offerings to the gods, and women would pollute these foods and the gods if they ate the foods (Sahlins, 1981)<sup>[13]</sup>. During this period, the common people were also prohibited from going to sea, fishing and conducting trade activities. The king, chief and senior leaders could not eat with the common people. According to the local guide who explained the taboos, if they ate together, it would damage their divine power and also cause harm to the common people. According to Lummis, the meat that women could eat was limited to dog meat and fish, and they could also eat sheep and goat meat that they exchanged from white people. The Hawaiian taboo system changed gradually after the arrival of Captain Cook and his crew. Captain Cook and his crew arrived at the time of the native Makahiki Festival, and so Cook was considered as the return and reliving of the god of Lono. When they visited Hawaii, the native women enthusiastically offered themselves to the crew in exchange for the god's seed. This scene is confirmed by Zhang who translated the description of William Ellis, the doctor accompanying Cook: The women seemed particularly anxious to devote themselves to us. After the death of King Hameha, his wife Kahahumanu publicly declared that we intend to eat pork and bananas and coconuts, and live as the white people do (Alexander, 1917)<sup>[14]</sup>. In 1819, when the new king Liholiho came to power, he announced the abolishment of the taboos on food, and later ordered to demolish temples and idols. Since then, the taboos in Hawaii have been basically demolished. Then Christianity replaced their aboriginal primitive religious beliefs. Now if you go to Hawaii, you can see local men and women eating together, and women eating whatever they want.

## **2.2 Taboo Changes of Aboriginal People in Hainan**

In Hainan island the aboriginal people are Li people. They had many taboos from the ancient time. Gao and Wen (2008)<sup>[15]</sup> pointed out that the taboos of the Li people included some aspects, this paper selected some to illustrate.

Taboos of the Li people in Hainan island were generally related to religion. For example, Dog meat was considered dirty, so the Li people generally did not cook dog meat at home, so as not to blaspheme the Kitchen God. In daily life, the Li people respected their ancestors very much and there was mostly a taboo that made their ancestors' names avoid being mentioned by others. Even if they accidentally blurted out their names, they must explain many times, otherwise quarrels or even fights would be caused. The above-mentioned taboos to ward off evil spirits are still now kept in the mountainous areas where the Li people live in compact communities, and the taboos have become the social norms of the Li people.

Li people thought each animals had their own days. On these days, people should please these animals so as not to harm them. For example, the Li people should not plow or harrow the land with cattle on the "day of cattle", otherwise the cattle's feet would fester. They should not sell cattle on the "day of cattle", otherwise the calves born later will die. Selling pigs on the "day of pig" should be

avoided, otherwise the piglets born later would die. In the mountainous areas where the Li people live in compact communities, these taboos are now still used by the Li people.

### 3. Conclusion

From the comparison of the taboo changes of the aboriginal people in Hawaii and Hainan above, the taboos of the aboriginal people in Hawaii have changed a lot, such as gender taboos, dietary taboos, behavioral taboos, and identity taboos, which have basically changed to achieve gender equality, dietary equality, and identity equality. However, the taboos of the Li people in Hainan island are still relatively intact, especially in some mountainous areas where the Li people live in the relatively compact communities. If you are a tourist to the compact communities that Li people live in Hainan island, you should respect the ethnic groups' taboos.

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