

A Study of Interaction between Ethnic Culture and Mainstream Culture - With Regard to Maori Culture in New Zealand

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s with the development of the Civil Right Movement in the U.S., there has arisen an intense interest in the study of ethnic cultures. As a part of cultural studies, ethnic studies have gained world-wide attention. With identity study and claim for equal rights of the minority groups its focus, cultural studies soon become one of the hottest topics throughout the world, drawing attention of researchers and critics in many countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which suffered colonialism in history. Influenced by the European culture, the culture of the native people was either assimilated or suppressed, bearing many changes in different aspects. With more attention to the marginal groups, the once ignored culture of the minority groups got to be rediscovered and people that once went unnoticed come to be recognized. The past several decades has witnessed a great progress in cultural studies. Maori people, the indigenous people of New Zealand, offer us a good case in point in studying ethnic culture survival and its interactions with mainstream culture in bicultural contexts.

This paper will fall into two parts. The first part is concerned with resistance against assimilation, with special attention to the development and changes of Maoris' race awareness. The second part intends to reveal the influence Maori cultural heritage bring to New Zealand culture in such aspects as language and culture as a result of the interaction between them.

With the development of globalization, the various cultures in the world begin to encounter much more frequently. This study can cast some light on how ethnic culture ought to be protected and preserved. Only when the mainstream culture and ethnic cultures are equally treated, can people of different races live in harmony with each other, making the world a better place to live in.

RESISTANCE AGAINST ASSIMILATION

Challenges to “Kawanatanga” (1840s-1940s)

Treaty of Waitangi is the agreement between Maori and Queen of England in 1840. This treaty is to transfer the sovereignty of Maori people's land to the Queen of England and to guarantee that the Maori would gain the better protection from the Crown. **It's** clear that the Treaty of Waitangi indicates the beginning of the bringing New Zealand under subjugation of the British Empire.

After the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, the sovereignty of New Zealand belonged to Britain. In other words, New Zealand has become one of the colonies of Britain. The sovereignty of the colony country was violently infringed and the dignity of the colony people was cruelly trampled. Certainly, Maoris cannot escape from the tragic fate. **It's** quite true that where there is suppression, there is rebellion. “From the 1840s, Maori people have contested the Crown's concept of kawanatanga, particularly where it has affected their mana and rangatiratanga, using various forms of challenge, depending on historical circumstances”

(Lachy Paterson, 2004:163). However, the colonists are more powerful and dominant than Maoris. The British Crown ruled the policies and laws of the society. Besides, their culture brought tremendous impact on Maori culture. What's the worse, "Maori were also preoccupied with their own survival as a people – Maori suffered poor health due to a lack of immunity to imported disease, cultural assimilation, and economic and political marginalization due to land loss. Therefore they often had little strength to mount challenges against Pakeha institution" (Lachy Paterson, 2004:163).

Though Maori was in a tough time, they never gave up challenges with multifarious tactics and practices, including "open warfare, separation from Pakeha influences, the establishment of pan-Maori bodies, legal maneuvers, land occupation, protest marches, setting up Maori educational institutions, even speaking te reo Maori" (Lachy Paterson. 2004:164). Later, Maori gave up warfare but began to fight in new ways, such as running schools by themselves, retaining some strategies (Lachy Paterson. 2004:164). This helped a lot in maintaining their own culture.

One of the most admirable and famous activities at that period is the story of Parihaka. In the 1870s, Parihaka was the largest Maori village in the country, which was led by two great people, Te Whiti O Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi. They both asserted non-violence, drawing on ancestral Maori as well as Christian teaching, because they both believe in the possibility of a bicultural New Zealand, so long as Maori ownership of their lands was respected.

In 1879, Te Whiti ordered his inhabitants to plough the fields that were being confiscated by Europeans in 1860s. The year 1879, in history of Parihaka is called "the year of plough". Te Whiti instructed his followers when they are arrested: "Go, put your hands to the plough, and look not back. If any come with guns and swords, be not afraid. If they smite you, smite not in return. If they rend you, be not discouraged—another will take up the good work." (Jenny Bornholdt, Aug. 2008).

"The following year, another phase in the non-violent campaign began. This time, men from the Parihaka—"that headquarters of fanaticism and disaffection", as the Native Minister John Bryce called it—erected fences across land and roads, ignoring surveyors, road-builders and constabulary...the Taranaki settlers continued to survey the land, breaking down fences on a daily basis only to find them rebuild a matter of hours later." (Jenny Bornholdt, Aug. 2008).

On 5 November 1881, the army invaded Parihaka where over 2000 villagers sat quietly on the marae to greet the intruders. Te Whiti and Tohu were arrested and the inhabitants were banished from the area. The crops were destroyed and the livestock was killed. Te Whiti and Tohu were released after 2 years. Between 1883 and the deaths of the two leaders in 1907, Parihaka was better rebuilt than before.

This story shows a spirit of "living in harmony with the land and humanity". "It is also a legacy of nonviolent resistance and a belief in the peaceful and respectful co-existence of Maori and Pakeha." (Jenny Bornholdt, Aug. 2008).

Although Maori people have very strong physique and fierce haka (Maori war dance), Maoris in parihaka do not use the violent way to defend Europeans. This is quiet a smart way. On one hand, Pakeha have more powerful weapon at that time, especially guns. Pakeha can kill Maori without close fight. Thus warfare can only ruin everything of Maori people without a little advantage. Te Whiti said: "those who are bent by the wind shall rise again when the wind softened." Keeping strength of Maori is the most important mission for them. Otherwise, the

tradition and culture may spare none which means the extinction of the race. On the other hand, the two leaders believed that New Zealand would become a bicultural society. This shows Maori culture is tolerant and Maori people love peace. However, they have never forgotten their own ancestors and identities. This contributed significantly to the renaissance of Maori culture.

Interaction Between the Two Cultures (After 1940s)

The large nations like the United States usually have many small ethnics which is called "fourth world". The culture of fourth world "are forced by circumstances to seek to assert their identity while submerged within some wider culture, usually industrialized, technological, resource-hungry and increasingly trans-national in its economic activity." (James Ritchie, 1992:7). According to James, "minority people in fourth world situations develop three intertwined political objectives:

To capture or repossess resources upon which to base some measure of economic self-determination.

To penetrate the bastions of power and become political audible and visible.

To secure the means of continuing cultural distinctiveness or identity" (1992:7).

Maoris as the fourth world in New Zealand also pursue these objectives, especially after signing the Treaty of Waitangi. Unfortunately, in the 100 years from 1840 to 1940, their efforts had little effect on their situation. From the 1950s, their status quo began to change. "The focus has shifted from the tackling urban integration in the 1950s to an emphasis on new leadership in the mid-1960s, to the political activism and cultural revival which came to the forefront in the decade 1975-1985", to the hard work of tribal revival and economic reconstruction in 1990s (James Ritchie, 1992:7) and demand democracy and justice in the bicultural environment (Dominic O'Sullivan, 2007:1).

Even though the Treaty of Waitangi on the whole brought many negative effects to the Maori people, it also plays an important role in keeping Maori culture to a certain extent. In New Zealand, Maori is a unique ethnic who owned the guarantee from British Crown. So their social status of Maori is quite considered quite special. The Crown has responsibility to guard Maori culture and respect Maori traditions.

THE INFLUENCE OF MAORI CULTURE TODAY

As a result of Maoris' efforts to maintain their own culture and traditions, influence from Maori culture can be felt in many aspects of New Zealand society.

The Influence in language and literature

Maori or te reo Maori as the official language of New Zealand is the only language which has the equal status to English in New Zealand. The Maori language act which passed in 1987 declared the status of Maori. Today most organizations, agencies and institutions in New Zealand have bilingual names.

The history of the encounter of te reo Maori and English is very anfractuous. In the period of early contact, Maori language is predominant in Aotearoa (New Zealand). That is why the Treaty of Waitangi must have the version in Maori language. But, in the 1860s, due to the loss of sovereignty, Maori language was marginalized and replaced by English. Even from 1880s, the colonial government forbade the use of Maori in schools and an increasingly large number of Maori people learned English instead of te reo Maori. By the 1980s, fewer than 20% Maoris can speak te reo Maori very well. As a result, generations of non-Maori-speaking Maori emerged, which means many Maori children failed to learn their ancestral language. The Maori

leaders realized that Maori language will become extinct if they allow the language continuously to slide. So they take the initiative to recover Maori language, including the Kōhanga Reo movement, which from 1982 immersed pre-school children in Maori and the founding of the Kura Kaupapa Māori, a primary-school programmed in Maori in the later 1980s.

Some individuals, especially some Pakeha, in New Zealand still have prejudice against Maori language. They thought that learning te reo Maori is useless and stupid. Although Maori people is recognized to have a high-criminal rate and a low educated level and they are held in a relatively low position of New Zealand society, no one has the right to deprive their rights of development. Moreover, people cannot deny the contribution Maori culture has made to the national characteristics of the New Zealand culture. It is Maori culture to a large extent that distinguishes New Zealand from any other country in Europe. It is hard to imagine a New Zealand society without Maori people. If there is no Maori culture, New Zealand will not be New Zealand, New Zealand will just become another Britain. If the whole world had one culture only, life would be rather dull and boring. It is the various cultures that make the world a colorful place to live in. Therefore, Maori culture and other ethnic cultures should be respected and preserved.

Speaking of the Maori literature, I have to say literature in Maori is really a small part because “it develops with colonization and as spoken Maori diminished. Much of it comes with English translation.” (Jane McRae 2004:133). The most common form of literature in Maori is the poetic songs which were shown in the Powhiri. Powhiri is the formal process which two sets of people meet and greet each other in a traditional Maori way. These songs are deeply rooted in Maori values.

Influence in Performing Arts and Other forms of Arts

The performance arts of Maori are an essential part of Maori life. There are several kinds of Maori performance, especially the songs and dances.

Waiata tangi are the song heard at the funeral or some sad things. Waiata aroha and waiata whaiaipo are the songs for lovers. In addition, they also have the songs as message-bearing, as lullabies. (Nathan & Karyn 2004:105). It is easy to find that every kind of songs has their own unique function for Maoris. They are performed on different occasions and in various ceremonies. Nowadays when the tourists go to marae for a visit, they can still appreciate the special songs.

Speaking of visiting marae, the dances of Maori haka must give an impression to everyone. Actually, there are three types of haka which have different social functions: “used in the rituals of encounter; as a psychological weapon on the battlefield; to transmit social and political messages” (Awatere 1975:513).

For Maoris haka is not only a kind of performance but way to express a kind of spirit which includes bravery, persistence and unity. So All Black, New Zealand Rugby National Team, which is one of the most famous rugby teams in the world, do haka before every game they join to encourage themselves.

The most representative arts of Maori culture are Whakairo and raranga.

Whakairo is the carving art of Maoris. Traditionally, the carving materials were usually woods, pounamu (native jade of New Zealand) and bones. Every piece of carvings has their ideas. In

the past, they are used to record the events, but now, most of them are used to decorate houses or being the ornaments.

Raranga is the art of Maori weaving which passed down from the ancients of Maoris. The materials of raranga are all from the nature. The rarest raranga should be weaved by the kiwi feathers which were linked by the natural fibre. Raranga has experienced changes because of the influenced by Europeans. Before Europeans came to New Zealand, raranga is a respectable skill. But from 1800s to 1900s, with the development of New Zealand, the clothes and fashions was dominated by westerners. Maori weaving became less important. Only maori people who held on the old values still learned and passed on the skills. By the 1950s, raranga as the heritage of Maori culture would be lost. Fortunately, the status of Maori people had greatly improved. The Maori Women's League as an important voice of New Zealand society devoted a great deal of attention to this art and reserves it.

CONCLUSION

In light of what has been discussed, one can realize that the study about the interactions between Mainstream culture and Maori culture in New Zealand is conducted from a macroscopic perspective. It casts some light on process of the interaction, with a focus on the efforts made by the Maori to preserve their own culture. After Europeans came to New Zealand, Maori culture began to live in the shadow of European culture. However, the Maori, originally the native people, later an ethnic one, did not yield easily to the European culture and managed to reserve most part of their culture. It is worthy to review the track of Maori culture's development and learn from Maoris' experience, especially for the minority groups in different part of the world.

Judging by the Maori experiences, we can safely draw the conclusion that in a bicultural or multicultural society it is of great significant for people to equally treat and respect different cultures. Only in this way can people with different cultures live in harmony with each other, thus making the world a better place to live in.

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