

Maori Sovereignty

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Sunday, 22 July 2007

MAORI SOVEREIGNTY - A Chinese Perspective

Most Chinese in NZ would subscribe to the view that as legal immigrants or descendants of legal immigrants, they have a legitimate place in New Zealand society. This is especially so if they were born here or become naturalised and in time start to take a full part in the affairs of the community. They would like to think that NZ is on its way to becoming a modern multi-cultural society, more enlightened than most and with a good economic future following the reforms of recent years. They would fondly like to believe that NZ's recent orientation towards Asia gives them a larger role to play mediating between the (business) cultures of east and west. In this view perhaps, the Treaty of Waitangi is a historical relic to be consigned like so many other unequal treaties to the dust bins of history. Alas, in NZ this not so.

The confrontation at Motua Gardens in Wanganui, the occupation of Tamaki Girls' College and the decision by the Government to relocate the national day celebrations from Waitangi to the safety of Wellington are manifestations of the conflict inherent in a resurgence of interest in the Treaty of Waitangi, Maori land claims and Maori sovereignty.

The Treaty of Waitangi, set to become the constitutional underpinning of NZ law and society in the immediate future, makes no mention of third parties like the Chinese. While the Crown and the Maoris try and sort themselves out, we the Chinese, could be like the uninvited guests in the house during a family argument. One of the first decisions in this situation could be: "Let's get rid of the guests so we can have a good fight and settle things without complications!" We cannot let this happen. We need to contribute to the constitutional debate, individually and collectively, and assert our legitimate position, so that in the end we have a place to stand in our adopted country.

Two companion books in this field have recently been published. They are Maori Sovereignty - the Pakeha perspective by Carol Archie and Maori Sovereignty - the Maori perspective by Hineani Melbourne (both published by Hodder Moa Beckett in October 1995).

The books consist of a total of 35 chapters summarising the views of a cross-section of informed New Zealand society on this subject.

Among the 17 Maori giving their views are: Ranganui Walker, Kara Puketapu, Peter Tapsell, Wira Gardiner, Mike Smith, Sandra Lee, Robert Mahuta, Sir Tipene O'Regan and Donna Awatere-Huata. Among the 18 non-Maori contributing their views are: Hugh Fletcher, Bishop John Paterson, Ken Douglas, Professor Peter Munz, Dr Jane Kelsey, Doug Graham, Maryan Street and George Chambers.

Among the lesser lights not usually mentioned with the above, but included in the book anyway, was your own humble correspondent.

Somewhere in the 35 chapters, nearly every current viewpoint on the subject of "Maori Sovereignty" is represented. Not surprisingly, nearly every contributor based their views on their background, past experiences, work situation and their access to power.

Most Maori contributors considered tribes and tribalism to be important (but failed to explain why) and many struggled to reconcile this with a practical means of representation and advancing in a modern democratic society. Some expressed the view that they were not prepared to be the underdogs forever, whilst others asserted that in the near future NZ would have to adjust to greater tribalism, ready or not; with a minority warning of conflagration. One or two would be accused of Uncle Tom-ism.

The non-Maori views ranged from outright the red-neck to lip-service tokenism to hard-nose business to genuine

empathy to grovelling political correctness. Most non-Maori contributors acknowledged that there had been serious injustices perpetrated against the Maoris in the past. Many rejected the possibility that Maori sovereignty would extend to include a parallel Parliament.

This kind of summary fails to reflect the complexity of the reasons given by each contributor.

In my view, one of thirty five, equally compelling in their own way:

Racism is a means for one group to deny resources to another. Race and physical characteristics and religion are a convenient way to distinguish other groups from ones own, and to deny them access to resources, on the basis that they are different and do not share common goals and ideals. The fight against racism is a fight against this discrimination. But it must be recognised that the fight is really for economic rights and access to resources.

The concept of equal rights is in conflict with the fight for control and use of the world's resources, and economics is inextricably bound up with politics and power..

In a democracy, the allocation of resources is roughly proportional to the ratio of contending groups. If one group is deprived of resources too much, they will start to rebel and create social unrest.

Therefore the only solution is to move quickly towards a position of equilibrium instead of wasting time on artifices such as tribal rights, Maori sovereignty and indeed to contrived readings of the Treaty of Waitangi. The sooner the Maori people have equal rights to access New Zealand's resources the better, because it is a waste of time and energy to delay the inevitable at the cost of great social disruption.

However Maori must immediately learn to take a realistic view of the world as a whole as a large functioning, ongoing economic and political system which will not stop for 3.5 million people, let alone 350,000 people.

A vague document like the Treaty can say whatever one wishes to make of it. What matters is the weight of numbers and who has access to the organs of power. No doubt if Maori comprised 90% of the population, the Treaty could be interpreted in a way which was very favourable to the Maori. It is a valid means of Maori to adjust the social balance of power, but it should be recognised as a framework and not holy writ with immutable meaning.

Tribalism is an idea as an idea whose time has passed. It is no longer required in the modern world. At best tribalism has been a useful device - a constituency for a cause - where there are historic wrongs to be redressed. There have been large scale tribal Governments in our time: Somalia, Nigeria/Biafra, Rwanda and Bosnia not all successful.

At one level I support the preservation of Maori toanga and culture because they are unique and indigenous to NZ. At another level I am bound to say that these treasures are meagre compared with the cultural treasures of the rest of the world and its civilisations. I count among these the written languages and literature, science and technology, and the concepts of democracy, human rights and law.

I find it ironic that Maori activists are flying to hui, communicating by cell phones and faxes and taking out High Court injunctions against the sale of radio frequencies and signing contracts for fishing quotas. Yes, they must use every means to press they claims, but do they reflect on the great treasures of the rest of the world they have acquired and use as a matter of course.

Under Maori sovereignty, Maori would presumably have a greater say in immigration, and it would not be in the best interests of Maori to have more immigrants, even if it was in the best interests of the country.

If NZ wants more foreign investment, it will need to accept some degree of immigration. If it asserts that is part of the Asia Pacific region, then it will get Asian and Pacific Islanders.

It seems so difficult for some Maori to see their place in the world as opposed to their place in NZ. Both are important. But if you are the richest man in the poorest country, you will still be poor.

Chinese immigrants bring a new perspective on achievement, work and enterprise. They also show that things can be done another way, with fewer resources, lean organisations and family connection. It must shake the Maori to see the academic achievements of the immigrants. It would be stupid to pooh pooh this and downgrade this as the result of rote learning. It is not. Education is an internationally recognised asset. To say that Maori can only achieve on their own terms is self-inflicted genocide.

Maori protested at the Asian Development Bank conference. It is important that Maori see their economic interests as similar to the rest of NZ. There is no such thing as Maori economics, just as there is no such thing as Maori science. The world is interconnected, inextricably linked. International banking is a part of this.

An insidious creeping agenda towards Maori sovereignty will sap the energies of this country and just waste time. To encourage barristers at \$1000 per hour to argue in front of the Privy Council in London about Maori sovereignty is ludicrous.

If Maori sovereignty is a device to reallocate resources more equitably, then it is a blunt instrument with a lot of waste and unpredictable results. It's the long way round to achieve the obvious. What we are talking about is fair sharing and access to resources to be determined by votes. Let's accept it and get on with it.

And please let's not conspire to lead another couple of generations of Maori up a blind alley in history.