

YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION 2000-2100: A NGATI HAUITI PERSPECTIVE

*Tama Potaka**

This paper was written for the Third Asia-Pacific Young Leaders Conference held at The Grand Hotel, Taipei, Taiwan between 26 April and 1 May 1998. The paper was orally presented by the author. It does not specifically address legal issues. However, it does suggest policy considerations for governments in the Asia-Pacific region as informed by a Ngati Hauiti perspective.

Tihei mauriora!

Ko Ruahine te maunga

Ko Rangitikei te awa

Ko Takitimu te waka

Ko Ngati Hauiti te iwi

Ko Ngati Tamatereka te hapu.

This *pepeha* (proverb) defines my background. The *pepeha* explicitly links me with my Maori ancestors and the environment which surrounded and nourished them and I, reinforcing the holistic underpinnings of my community. My background is inextricably sourced in where my ancestors are from, and where they lived. It is impossible for me to detach myself from them, or from the generations that follow me. It emphasises that the lenses through which I consider development of our region are uniquely mine, prejudices included. Ruahine is my mountain, Rangitikei is my river, Takitimu is my canoe and Ngati Hauiti and Ngati Tamatereka are my bones/people. My responsibilities are sourced in this genealogy. So are my roles, so is my character.

I was raised in a middle class Aotearoa-New Zealand family, in provincial backwaters away from the bright neon lights of any city. Although I would like to think Rata (where

* A descendant of the Ngati Hauiti, Ngati Whitikaupeka, Whanganui, Ngaruahinerangi, Ngati Toarangatira and Ngati Raukawa tribes. He is presently completing his final year of a BA/LLB(Hons) programme at Victoria University of Wellington.

my family has lived and where I will return to) was a 'thriving metropolis' it was, and still is, a little fish in a big sea. No shop, no school, no neon lights.

However, despite the hustle and bustle of cutting trees for firewood, working in a hay paddock, and weeding in my mother's garden, I was instilled with an identity which defines who I am. This notion of identity, I believe, is an important facet of leadership. Security in the knowledge that whether you are from a Chinese family in the Republic of China, a Malay family in Malaysia, or a Ngati Hauiti family in Aotearoa-New Zealand, one can understand and recognise prejudices within oneself. It is with these prejudices that I approach this essay.

I INTRODUCTION

A Overview

By the end of the twentieth century, rapid technological advances, mass education, and a move from authoritarian political systems, have empowered youth leaders to meet regularly in person or via telecommunications to advance and develop ideas and ideologies in order to influence decision makers. But what of the character and roles of youth leaders in the next century?

B Purpose

This paper briefly addresses what are possible characters and roles of a youth leader in the Asia-Pacific 2000-2100. The paper is divided into 5 sections. Part I introduces the theoretical framework through which I approach the issues confronting us. I define my background to expose the different lenses through which I consider development of the Asia-Pacific. This enables the reader to recognise prejudices that I may not appreciate and to peer inside what my peoples consider are the qualities of a leader. Part II questions what is the importance of youth leadership for our local communities as well as the Asia-Pacific. Part III analyses possible roles and responsibilities of youth leaders. This analysis concentrates on the environmental pressures facing our communities and the need for early blueprinting of our common futures. Special emphasis is placed on identity and a holistic appreciation of our region. Part IV suggests what the character of youth leaders could be. Finally, Part V concludes with the basic message for conference participants that we should think carefully about what communities we want in our region. The character and roles we are predicting for youth leaders are what we will encounter as older leaders next century.

II IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP

My people use many terms and concepts to illustrate why leadership is important. However, it is best encapsulated in the general Maori word for leader - *rangatira*. *Rangatira* comprises two distinct words - *ranga* is a derivative of the word *raranga* which means 'to

weave' - *tira* simply means a group of people. Hence, literally translated, a rangatira/leader is a person who is able to weave a group of people together in the pursuit of common objectives. I believe this is where the importance of youth leadership lies - the meshing together of groups of people voluntarily pursuing their goals.

For our local communities youth leadership is important in being a check on the exercise of power. In a time where youths are increasingly influenced by the media and peers, youth leadership articulates the voice of people ordinarily treated as political nobodies, challenging the status quo. This challenge can take the form of political demonstrations against the abuse of power by the state and privileged, to meeting with international delegates to analyse how we can advance "Hand in Hand Towards Mutual Development". It constitutes a vehicle to alert the older leadership as to what societal blueprint is demanded by forthcoming generations. Its importance is to advance social well-being, to uphold democracy and to pursue identity through nationalism and regionalism.

III ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A YOUTH LEADER

A Internationalisation - Social Wellbeing

The internationalisation of Asia-Pacific markets forces many people to re-evaluate our prejudices towards other communities and cultures. Whether this internationalisation is viewed through an economic lens (for example increased imports) or a cultural lens (for example increased ethnic diversity in population statistics), we are witnessing the development of a cultural marketplace where we can easily exchange values and experiences. This part of the paper suggests responsibilities for youth leaders as a result of increased contact with other cultures.

Ekore e ngaro he kakano i ruia mai i Rangiatea.

The seed that is sown from Rangiatea shall never be lost.

In Maori culture this proverb can illustrate the importance of cultural identity. It literally means that if you know who you are, and where you are from, then despite the changing world, you will never lose your soul or spirit. A youth leader is compared to a seedling that is planted in an environment steeped in Maori language, history, customs and etiquette. If you immerse yourself in your heritage, then you have the ability to define your reason(s) for living.

Youth leaders among Maori communities have mutual responsibility to ancestors and coming generations to uphold our cultural identity. Failure to retain our identity means that prophecies of our ancestors are left wanting, our responsibilities to our children and descendants are unfulfilled, and we succumb to the pressures of Western colonisation and assimilation that have continually attempted to destroy our cultural values in the past 150

years. To lead our people we must understand and be conversant with our history, and our language. To do otherwise would be to cut our *pito* (umbilical cord) to the past and future, and be tantamount to cultural suicide.

I believe youth leaders in the Asia-Pacific region next century must ensure cultural identity is reinforced. As our region increasingly attracts Western investors and tourists, our communities become more susceptible to cultural assimilation. By retaining cultural identity our communities are more strongly positioned to encourage social well-being, and more ready to identify with cultures in our region that have similar objectives.

*Ko te kai a te rangatira, he korero.
Talk is the food of chiefs.*

Youth leaders must be able to explore and analyse cultural discussion in order to advance a community's social well-being. We are expected to see beyond our own prejudices to appreciate the cultural values of other peoples, not because of economic advantage or because the law requires it, but because it is right to do so. Youth leaders should not be so indoctrinated with our own identity that we cannot consider the advantages of other cultures, and then incorporate them into our own cultures. Former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew once stated that no single ethnic group has a monopoly of wisdom or genius.¹ He was correct. Cultures have much to learn from each other in the cultural marketplace.

Youth leaders are the primary mechanism for facilitating these learning experiences. Why? I immediately think of two reasons. First, modern communication systems enables youth leaders from different communities to co-operate, either through e-mail/internet or in person, and to exchange experiences and advantages/disadvantages of our cultures. Youth leaders in the twenty-first century will be born into generations where international telecommunications are the norm, comparable to electricity in the latter half of this century. Second, we are living in increasingly heterogeneous communities and cities. In my University for example, over five percent of total enrolments are of Asian heritage, over five percent are of Pacific heritage and nearly nine percent are of Maori heritage. In such culturally diverse environments we are more likely to be willing to consider different cultural beliefs and traditions.

B Human Rights - Democracy

Synonymous with increased globalisation has been the emergence of human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These international antecedents to many domestic

¹ See R Vasil *Governing Singapore* (Times Books International, Singapore, 1984) 110.

Bills of Rights and Constitutions have been used as tools to benchmark the failings of countries to meet 'minimal' standards, often conveniently ignoring the discrimination and human rights violations in our own countries. This part of the paper suggests possible roles for youth leaders in light of increased awareness of human rights instruments.

*Ko te amorangi ki mua, ko te hapai-o ki muri.
The leaders go ahead, the food-bearers support behind.*

This proverb suggests that leaders must take responsibility for the group to move forward. Sometimes leaders will be required to take risks in order for the group to advance. However, the process is two-way. Leaders must continually refer back to those food-bearers who are their followers and supporters. Without each other the two roles would be worthless.

Youth leaders in our region have the responsibility to analyse and challenge violations of human rights from the right to life to negative discrimination - by governments, corporations or private persons. History has proved that a prosperous society is made nearly more likely by communities which are dedicated to freedom. This often requires the taking of risks that are not appreciated in my country. For example, many youth leaders in some Asia-Pacific countries have been killed for attempting to uphold democracy. Youth leaders must press ahead and take responsibility for challenging these violations. This may include challenging the defence of cultural relativism for some violent cultural practices. If youth leaders do not challenge the abuses of human rights, it is hardly likely that older leaders will be prepared to change the status quo.

*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari taku toa he toa takitini.
Mine is not for myself, but for the many.*

In my culture this proverb suggests that people should not be selfish in pursuing their aims. We should be prepared to pursue our aims in light of regional objectives. By next century youth leaders will have greater contact with youth leaders in other countries. Through sharing of experiences a youth leader in my community will be educated as to what are the concerns of youth leaders in other countries. Improved understanding and technology makes it easier for youth leaders to lobby our own governments, then lobby internationally for improved responsiveness to human rights concerns. If democracy in Asia-Pacific countries is to advance then youth leaders need to pressure other communities into upholding human rights by speaking out against abuses of them. Youth leaders in Western countries especially need to educate ourselves of the rights concerns of our region, and be prepared to act on the advice of youth leaders from other countries. We should not be limited to reacting to pleas for assistance, but should act before the call goes out.

He wahine, he whenua e ngaro ai te tangata.

People will perish for women and for land.

Finally, youth leaders must recognise the failings of our communities to protect *Papatuanuku* (Mother Earth). In my culture land is given the same name as the placenta that nourishes a child in a mother's womb - *whenua*. When a child is born it is customary to bury the placenta in the land to reinforce our relationship with *Papatuanuku*. To disrespect the land is to forget where you are from, and equates to saying that an unborn child can survive without a placenta.

In a time where most communities are motivated by the pursuit of money rather than protection of our natural and cultural environments, youth leaders have a responsibility to challenge intensive industrial development in our regions. Increasing our GDP does not necessarily make the world a better place, or ensure that *Papatuanuku* is cared for. It does not recognise the pollution that we dump into our seas, lakes and rivers, or the consequences of pouring money into creating military power and weapons of mass destruction. In my country, youth leaders will be expected to be professional lobbyists, able to convince governments and corporations to change their attitudes towards environmental protection, and return to the resource management principles that once guided my people.

C Self Determination - Nationalism

Increased indigenous assertions of *rangatiratanga* (identity - ability to define who you are) in recent years have met different results in different communities. Our region has a history of colonisation of indigenous peoples resulting in social dysfunction and ill-health. However, indigenes are increasingly demanding sovereignty and management over our own resources and affairs. A major challenge for our region in the next century is to implement diverse models of sovereignty management to enable indigenous and minority concerns to be addressed.

I believe the roles of youth leaders will include educating ourselves and others of indigenous and minority concerns. This requires youth leaders to research the histories of those peoples and be more empathetic as to what are the basic causes of grievances. Youth leaders will need to suggest diverse models of sovereignty management to effect greater self-determination amongst indigenous and minority peoples. This movement in sovereignty is slowly occurring in the United Kingdom under Prime Minister Blair. It is not difficult to predict that more legitimate demands for independence and/or devolution of power, will occur in our region.

In Aotearoa New Zealand the government has been totally against any devolution of power to Maori and are only willing to negotiate 'settlements' to extinguish legitimate indigenous claims arising out of historical grievances. This paternalistic policy fails to acknowledge that Maori may desire more than money and an apology from the

government for policies that have sought to destroy our cultural identity. Maori youth leaders of the next century will question the value of the settlement process and whether it is appropriate to be mainstreaming Maori society. They will be expected to take Maori society out of grievance mode and into development mode. This will require highly skilled managers and philosophers. It will also need youth leaders willing to demand sovereignty devolution in a more privatised environment.

Youth leaders in our region will face the increased importance of international political bodies such as the UN and ASEAN. To be effective as leaders, youth leaders will need to understand the workings of these organisations and lobby them for greater assistance in the advancement of national fervour. This may include using international human rights instruments to demand the right of self-determination. Youth leaders will also need to suggest what roles these organisations have in our region, and the role of our region in global markets.

IV CHARACTER

The character of youth leaders will be comparable to the character we ordinarily expect (but don't always get) of older leaders. This part of the paper suggests several characteristics which I consider appropriate for all leaders.

Whare tu ki te pae, he kai ma te ahi. Whare tuwatawata, koira te tohu o te rangatira.
A house that stands by itself is food for the fire. The house that stands pallisaded, is a mark of a chief.

A true leader has dependable support systems around you. A leader surrounds yourself with people who are trustworthy and reliable. Unlike a house that stands by itself a leader must be able to attract support, and knowing where that support stands. Youth leaders need to be inspirational. You need to be able to create a desire amongst people to achieve something. This leads to supporters being attracted to the objectives you are pursuing. A leader who fails to maintain support, loses credibility and the leadership role.

Ekore te kumara e kii mai he mangaro au.
The kumara does not talk of how sweet it is.

I consider humility a virtue. Youth leaders in our region need to possess humility in order to be appreciated by people from different communities. A lack of humility will result in youth leaders being unable to converse with other cultures which place value on respect for your colleagues. This will prevent youth leaders from working internationally and having wider vision as to the international role of our region.

Kotahi te kupu o te rangatira, kua mana.
A rangatira says something once, and then it is respected.

I believe a true leader maintains honesty. Although a leader may have few words, once those words are spoken they are respected and upheld by the leader. A leader will set objectives, and strive to achieve them. I consider that our region needs more leaders who are willing to explicitly outline where they want our region to go.

V CONCLUSION

The character and roles of youth leaders in our region are inevitably influenced by the lenses through which we view the region. Youth leaders in our communities need to think globally and work locally. In that regard I believe that youth leaders must be committed to advancing social justice, upholding democracy and supporting both nationalism and regionalism.

Kotahi te kohao o te ngira e kuhuna ai te miro pango, te miro whero, te miro ma.

There is but one eye of the needle through which must pass the black thread, the red thread, and the white thread.

Our region has a diverse range of cultures and peoples. Its communities have diverse histories and different political systems. Pessimists would say that we do not have common ground between us all. I disagree. This Third Conference of Asia Pacific Young Leaders evidences that even young people in our region such as ourselves are interested and willing to come together to discuss common futures. I suggest that instead of using our differences as a means to distance ourselves from each other, we should celebrate those differences and identify what we have in common. This starts with two facts - we all have separate cultural identities, and we are willing to work together to make a better place for generations that follow us.

Tuturu whiti, whakamaua kia tina!

Tina! Hui e! Taiki e!

PERSPECTIVE NGATI HAUITI

L'article reprend le contenu de l'allocation faite par l'auteur lors de la troisième conférence des jeunes élites de la zone Asie Pacifique (Third Asia Pacific Young Leaders Conference) qui s'est tenue à Taiwan entre le 26 avril et le 1 Mai 1998. L'auteur, illustrant son propos de proverbes maoris, se invite les jeunes élites de cette région du monde à veiller à faire avancer non seulement la justice sociale mais aussi le nationalisme et le régionalisme. Bien qu'elles ne concernent pas à proprement parler le droit positif, les thèses présentées par l'auteur sont le reflet de la pensée de la jeune génération dans cette partie du monde et à terme, elles ne manqueront pas d'influencer les orientations que devront retenir les gouvernements de la région du Pacifique. Les récents événements en Indonésie illustrent si besoin est, la justesse de son analyse.