

Maoritanga invented — expert

Washington (NZPA). — An American anthropologist has published a new analysis of Maoritanga in New Zealand, arguing the movement has been "invented" in order to enhance the power of Maori.

Prof Allan Hanson says the image of Maori culture now being presented is made up largely of traditions selected because they contrast with pakeha culture.

In addition, he argues that many of those traditions were actually shaped by European colonists who wrote anthropological studies about the Maori last century.

Prof Hanson, of the University of Kansas, has published his analysis in the *American Anthropologist* journal after a long research association with New Zealand.

The article says Maoritanga reflects a desire for New Zealand to be a bicultural society "in which Maoris are on a par with pakehas politically and economically.

Because of that political agenda, it adds, the movement promotes Maori culture traditions which are most distinct from pakeha culture, "particularly those (aspects) which are least attractive."

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Prof Hanson says this culture has been "invented" by scholars and activists of both races today to be an ideal counterbalance to the failings of a materialistic pakeha culture.

"The present image has been invented for the purpose of enhancing the power of Maori in New Zealand society and is largely composed of those Maori qualities that can be attractively contrasted with the least desirable aspects of pakeha culture."

Prof Hanson said in a recent interview that while his work might be controversial in New Zealand, he did not seek to denigrate Maori culture in any way.

Reference to it being "invented" could be applied to any culture

from his viewpoint that all cultures are subject to change and on-going re-interpretation.

Maoritanga could be seen as largely old traditions "reworked, re-interpreted and put into a new package" for today's purposes but it remained authentic because they were accepted as such by Maori people, he said.

"I really don't think that anyone's got down and schemed it that way," Prof Hanson said.

"It's more that people who are supporters of a better position for Maori people in New Zealand and hear things that sound good to them, but I don't know that they intentionally do it for the purpose of creating a contrast with pakeha culture."

In the article, he says the Te Maori exhibition, which toured the United States and New Zealand, was important for Maoritanga, partly by promoting the image of a spiritual quality in Maori culture and bringing to the fore ideas of

tribal ownership of art pieces. It also "advanced the agenda of Maoritanga" by making more significant to Maori people their tribal membership and increasing pakeha respect for the culture, Prof Hanson says.

That agenda differs sharply from that in colonial times when European writers "invented" cultural traditions showing the Maori as a "noble race" with a sophisticated philosophy, he says. While the political purpose then to enhance assimilation of Maori with the white settlers has now been rejected, he adds, key elements of that culture have been retained.

The Maori migration to New Zealand, said to have occurred around 1350, seems discredited by factual research and there is scepticism about whether pre-European Maori did develop beliefs about a supreme god known as "Io-matua-kore". But both are widely accepted as part of the tradition promoted by Maoritanga.