

BOOK REVIEWS

REWI, Poia. *Whaikōrero: The World of Māori Oratory*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010. 232 p. ISBN 978-1-86940-463-5.

The author of the book *Whaikōrero: The World of Māori Oratory* is Poia Rewi, associate professor in Te Tumu, the School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies at the University of Otago.

This book is an investigation into not only the art of oratory itself, but also related cultural aspects. It delves into the underlying philosophies inherent in *whaikōrero* that have an impact on, and are influenced by, the culture, etiquette and belief system of the Māori world. One of the purpose of this book is to examine the multifaceted nature of *whaikōrero* as ritual, as history, as *tikanga*.¹ Poia Rewi tried to find the origin of *whaikōrero*. He deals with the structure of *whaikōrero*, the way of performing this theatrical speech.

The author is surprised by lack of data on *whaikōrero* recorded by ethnographers such as Elsdon Best, John White and others. He inclined to presume that it is because in the nineteenth century *whaikōrero* was a thriving practice with a relatively large number of practitioners. Because it did not face the possibility of extinction, ethnographers felt less compulsion to write about it. Therefore, Poia Rewi decided to write the book about this important part of Māori culture. Facing the paucity of material in the written record, he decided that oral interviews were the most effective means of eliciting quality information. He conducted 31 interviews over the period 1995 – 2003. The tribal affiliations of the informants include Ngāti Tūhoe, Ngāti Kahungunu, Te Arawa, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Awa, Waikato-Maniapoto, Te Whakatōhea, Ngāti Pūhi a Ngāti Whare and Tūhoe.

The book is divided into ten chapters. The introduction is followed by a chapter that tries to explain what *whaikōrero* is. Understanding the origin of *whaikōrero* poses some difficulty. He would like to find its origin. A number of scholars think that “*whaikōrero* just is”. According to one of his informants its origin is at the time of creation of the world when Rangi-nui (the Sky Father) and Papa-tū-ā-nuku (the Earth Mother) were separated and speech between them and their children were the first *whaikōrero*. Another tradition says that *whaikōrero* resulted from the Māori creation of humanity whereby Tane fashioned the first woman, breathing life into her and naming

¹ *Tikanga* can be described as general behaviour guidelines for daily life and interaction in Māori culture. *Tikanga* is commonly based on experience and learning that has been handed down through generations. It is based on logic and common sense associated with the Māori world view.

her Hine-ahu-one. They cohabited and begat Hine-titama, whose incestuous relationship with her father resulted in the birth of the first humans, and with humanity came speech, which also led to *whaikōrero*.

The third chapter is about ways to learn *whaikōrero*. The handing down of knowledge by old people is a very difficult thing now. They look at their own children, perhaps their eldest son. If he is mature enough or interested enough in his Māori, he might become the repository. But a lot of people say no. They would sooner take the knowledge of their own traditions with them than pass it on to the present generation. They believe that if it goes out to another person outside the family, in a short time it will have dissolved, absorbed by all the other people who have access to it. There is also a fear that by giving things out they could be commercialized. If this happens, they lose their sacredness, their fertility. They just become common. And knowledge that is profane has lost its life, lost its *tapu*.

The original ways for learning *whaikōrero* and other sacred knowledges was in special “schools” *whananga*. In the 1900s, there was a rapid decline in the number of Maori speakers and the Maori language itself faced extinction. *Whaikōrero* was indirectly affected by the suppression of the Maori language.

The fourth chapter is about *whaikōrero* in rituals of encounter. Māori customs of encounter are central to cultural practice, etiquette and realization, and in fact the interrelatedness between *whaikōrero* and encounters between host and visitor is seminal within Māori culture. The three main characteristics of the delivery of *whaikōrero* are, firstly, that a discourse is exchanged between visitor and host, secondly, that this meeting takes place in an assigned space, usually a *marae*, and thirdly, that the occasion is formal.

In the next chapter, the author explains that *whaikōrero* can be performed only by a few men from the tribe. The three main qualifications for ceremonial speech-making are maleness, maturity and status. In general, it is the elders who decide who may speak on the *marae*. There are identifiable characteristics that mark good oratory from bad oratory, that include aesthetic, stylistic, linguistic and cultural factors.

The next chapter discusses a powerful part of Māori world – *mana*. Its generally refers to the authority, value and worth, status, importance, respect and acknowledgement of things animate and inanimate. The very interesting conclusion of this chapter, according to his informants, is that the language of *whaikōrero*, whether it seems mere rhetoric or is akin to common speech, has the power to encapsulate, reaffirm and transmit *mana* that have an important role in Māori culture. In the eighth chapter, the author deals with protocols of place. He got several different answers from his informants, but the most common place is *marae* but it depended on the occasion. The author attached to this chapter several photographs of the men performing *whaikōrero* at special occasions.

The ninth chapter deals in detail with the structure of *whaikōrero* and the final chapter discusses the future of *whaikōrero*. The author concludes this chapter with the expression “Unfortunately, I do not know anyone who has the prophetic powers to say what course *whaikōrero* and Māori customary practices will take. I am convinced, however, that *whaikōrero* will not cease to exist, unless the Māori people themselves

cease to exist or identify as Māori. I take this position because whaikōrero is more than a mere speech.”²

With this book, the author makes up the lack of scientific publications on whaikōrero. It is written in a very convenient way, which makes it accessible not only to researchers but also to the public. Its great value lies especially in interviews with the old indigenous Maori people experienced in traditional culture. As the author points out, many of them died during the period of research and much of their knowledge has been irretrievably lost. This book provides an exhaustive review of whaikōrero in Maori culture.

Apart from analysing the individual whaikōrero the author provides lots of examples thoroughly explaining this unique aspect of Maori culture even to non-expert readers. Last but not least this publication may serve as a textbook, inspiring everybody devoted to learning this special Maori art – as it reflects its complexity and long tradition. Though until today whaikōrero remains a central element of pōwhiri (formal welcome ceremonies), there is a strong absence of research literature dealing with the depth, cultural and social context of this Maori art.

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SHAN CHOU, Eva. *Memory, Violence, Queues. Lu Xun Interprets China*. Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA: Association for Asian Studies, 2012. 346 p. ISBN 978-0-924304-68-2.

Lu Xun (Zhou Shuren) is one of the most famous Chinese writers of the 20th century. From his first work, “Diary of Madman”, he started to present a completely new view of Chinese society as well as new tendencies in Chinese literature. Although plenty of studies have been written about him, there has been little movement in reflections on his life and works, the way in which historical events were reflected in Lu Xun’s writings, or in how Lu Xun has been interpreted by critics even more than seven decades after his death. In this new study, the author discusses how an interpretation of Lu Xun’s works depends on political events in China and whether a positive evaluation from the government had a positive or negative influence on the author’s image in China; the author also tries to locate Lu Xun’s position in the context of world literature.

The study consists of five chapters. While the first four chapters focus on the specific periods in Lu Xun’s life and how they influenced his literary works, the fifth chapter concerns the illustrations in his works.

In the first chapter of the book, “Renewing a Seminal Literary Figure”, the author gives the readers some basic and well-known information about Lu Xun, his life and works, and the cultural atmosphere in the period of his life in China. The purpose of this presentation is to offer non-specialists an approach to the topic so that they better understand some facts and connections which are covered later on. The author focuses on key years in Lu Xun’s life in order to discuss how his literature was influenced by his own life experiences. She describes Lu Xun’s childhood and his studies in Japan,

² REWI, Poia. *The World of Māori Oratory*, p. 181.