

# **Mātauranga Māori Paradigms and Politics**

Te Ahukaramū  
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## **1. Introduction**

Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

My purpose in speaking to you today is to describe something of the field of Māori knowledge, or mātauranga Māori, and to advocate for a management model whose goal is to ease the fraught political environment mātauranga Māori finds itself in today.

Mātauranga Māori is a knowledge tradition that grew out of ancient Polynesia. It was transported here to Aotearoa, by ancestors of present day Māori, where it flourished for some 1000 years (give or take a bit) until the arrival of Pākehā in 1769. Mātauranga Māori continued to be the most influential knowledge tradition in 19th century Aotearoa/New Zealand but this status changed considerably under the weight of colonisation. Its political influence was superceded, in that same century, by what might be called Western knowledge. In the 20th century, mātauranga Māori has been seriously undermined by a range of factors, not least of which has been the diminishment in the number of speakers of the Māori language and the dearth of institutions devoted to it.

Today, mātauranga Māori finds itself in a difficult state. A new range of institutions have appeared which serve to explore and express mātauranga Māori, to varying degrees, but the situation remains of great concern. Perhaps the most urgent issue facing mātauranga Māori is the rediscovery of the world view or the paradigm out of which it was created in precontact times, a paradigm which can be reapplied in contemporary circumstances in order to create new mātauranga Māori. It is this task which preoccupies me at Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa in my capacity as convenor of the Masters programme in that subject.

Contemporary questions about mātauranga Māori arise. What is the place of mātauranga Māori in contemporary New Zealand? Are there institutions in existence devoted to mātauranga Māori? What is the future of mātauranga Māori? What is the role of Government in the maintenance of mātauranga Māori? Who should benefit from it? Of what relevance and use is it anyway? These questions arise out of the socio-political reality of mātauranga Māori.

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Deeper questions arise concerning the nature of mātauranga Māori itself. How is it created? Was there/are there mātauranga Māori methodologies? How is mātauranga Māori distinct from other knowledge traditions? By what process is it created?

I do not propose to answer all these questions in this short paper, however, I would like to address or provide some direction, at least, on two issues of great importance (to my mind) in relation to the contemporary state of mātauranga Māori: the paradigm(s) out of which it is created and the need for discrete institutions devoted to mātauranga Māori research and education.

## 2. Defining Mātauranga Māori

Perhaps the best place to start is with a definition of mātauranga Māori which is handily provided by Professor Whatarangi Winiata and goes as follows:

*the explanation of human behaviour that is based upon traditional concepts handed down through the generations.*<sup>2</sup>

I discussed this definition with Whatarangi who explains that in his view knowledge (Māori knowledge at least) is created by humans. For Western scientists, this may not exactly be a revelation but in some quarters of Māori society, such a statement amounts to heresy. In the face of Whatarangi's statement, some Māori will quickly grab their copy of 'The Lore of the Whare Wananga'<sup>3</sup> and quote 'word for word' that Tānenui-a-rangi ascended to the 12th heaven and obtained the baskets of knowledge. The suggestion that such a story is a metaphor of the inward experience of knowledge and understanding is somehow denuding of the 'taha wairua' (spiritual realm) which is of such importance to Māori. And yet Whatarangi's view does not downplay the importance of the spiritual realm. Instead, the view that humans create knowledge causes us to focus upon the discrete *reality* of the phenomena, our *experience* of the phenomena and then our *response* to the experience of the phenomena which gives rise to mātauranga or knowledge. This is elementary epistemology which is nevertheless new to many people.

Following Whatarangi's thinking, I have constructed the following sentence that might capture the ideas a little better:

*Mātauranga Māori, or Māori knowledge, is created by Māori humans according to a set of key of ideas and by the employment of certain methodologies to explain the Māori experience of the world.*

This might be illustrated in the following way:

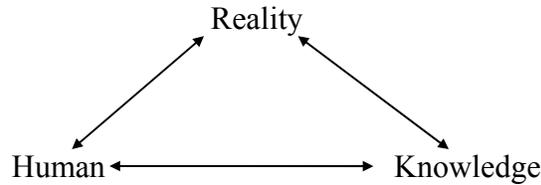
Human ←→ Knowledge ←→ Reality

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<sup>2</sup> Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa *Maramataka* 1997, p. 246.

<sup>3</sup> S. Percy Smith, *The Lore of the Whare Wananga* Polynesian Society 1913. This book contains extensive *whare wānanga* traditions including a Māori account of the origin of knowledge.

or this way, given the interconnection between the three:



For Whatarangi, knowledge represents a doorway through which humans apprehend their reality and make sense of it. The next concern is the *process* by which knowledge is created. We have identified the players in the trio and have noted that one (knowledge) is created by another (humans): the question is posed as to what tools, ideas and methodologies are then employed by human(s) to create knowledge.

What are the key ideas and methodologies traditionally employed by Māori to create mātauranga Māori? I was assisted by three concepts: paradigm, cosmological picture and world view. Thomas Kuhn writing in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,

*argues that scientists work within and against the background of an unquestioned theory or set of beliefs, something he characterizes as a ‘paradigm’...*<sup>4</sup>

James Irwin, in his book on Māori religion, discusses the notion of the ‘cosmological picture’:

*Various analogies have been used to form a cosmological picture of “the way things are”. The cosmology of a people presents an orientation to life and a way of interpreting existence. A people’s image of the world is a power, an organising force, which provides the pattern for defining the kind of meaning available in future experience.*<sup>5</sup>

These ideas give rise to the well-known notion that inquiry into the nature of the world, whoever the inquirer may be, is conducted within a framework of ideas, beliefs and perceptions. It is upon these ideas that methodology is employed. Hence, in order to discover the process or methodology (ies) by which mātauranga Māori was traditionally created, one needs to discover the essential ideas of Māori culture or the world view of Māori culture.

A definition of ‘world view’ is provided Rev. Māori Marsden:

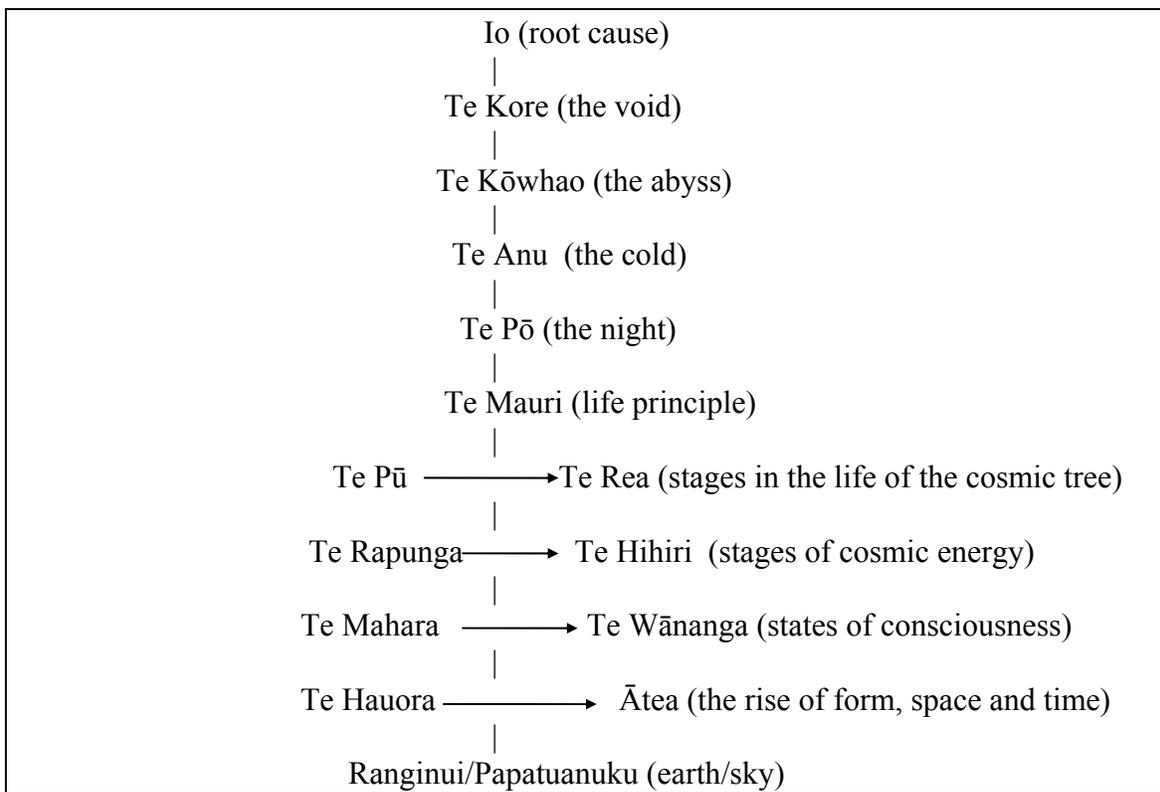
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<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* edited by Ted Honderich, OUP 1995, p. 451.

<sup>5</sup> Irwin, James: *An Introduction to Maori Religion* Special Studies in Religions, Number 4 Australian Association for the Study of Religions, South Australia 1984, p. 5.

*Cultures pattern perceptions of reality into conceptualisations of what they perceive reality to be: of what is to be regarded as actual, probable, possible or impossible. These conceptualisations form what is termed the “world view” of a culture. The World View is the central systemisation of conceptions of reality to which members of its culture assent and from which stems their value system. The world view lies at the very heart of the culture, touching, interacting with and strongly influencing every aspect of the culture...<sup>6</sup>*

My goal therefore is to describe the paradigm and/or world view out of which mātauranga, traditionally, was created.<sup>7</sup> I do not have the space, in this short paper, to include an extensive argument as to the Māori world view or the paradigm of Māori culture. What I will say is that I have just finished my doctoral dissertation, a third of which is devoted to this very question. There I argue that the Māori world view, the paradigm out of which all Māori culture was created is entitled ‘Te Ao Mārama’. This ‘Te Ao Mārama’ world view arises out of cosmological whakapapa or genealogies which are metaphorical of the creation of the world and of the psyche of the human being. The following is a précis of a cosmology drawn from the whare wānanga of Ngā Puhī:



<sup>6</sup> From Rev. Māori Marsden and Te Aroha Henare: *Kaitiakitanga: A Definitive Introduction to the Holistic World View of the Maori*, Unpublished essay, 1992

<sup>7</sup> I accept that the concepts of paradigm and world view may not equate with each other and that my use of paradigm may not follow Kuhn’s intention, however, I have used them in this way to highlight the need to identify the key principles of a framework of mātauranga Māori.

According to this world view, this whakapapa refers to the elements necessary for the creation of this world. For example, time and space is necessary for this world to exist, hence, in the Ngā Puhī view space is the child of time and the earth and sky are the children of space. This kind of cosmological picture was a hotly debated topic in traditional whare wānanga for it not only held an explanation for the creation of the world but it generated a philosophical orientation to the phenomena of this world. The paradigm of Māori knowledge is, at first, generated from cosmology of this kind.

Following the eons of time referred to in this kind of whakapapa, Ranginui (the sky) and Papatuanuku (the earth) are separated and this world, which is known as Te Ao Mārama, was brought into being. Hence, I argue that the Māori world view can be more appropriately referred to as the ‘Te Ao Mārama’ world view which represents, among other things, the philosophical framework within which Māori history, both in the mythological Hawaiki period and in the Aotearoa period, was then played out. As the Hawaiki period proceeded, so the world view developed and evolved but within the constant presence of Ranginui (the sky) and Papatuanuku (the earth). These figures represent the foundations of mātauranga Māori.

There are many different kinds of cosmological whakapapa found throughout iwi of Aotearoa and Te Wai Pounamu. As already stated, these whakapapa were hotly debated and subtle inflections and changes can influence the methodologies by which mātauranga Māori was subsequently created. Tentative interpretations of this whakapapa are as follows:

- a. The whakapapa symbolises the passage from ignorance (Te Pō) to knowledge (Te Ao Mārama)
- b. Knowledge is relative to ignorance
- c. Knowledge is the descendant of ignorance
- d. The whakapapa prescribes and describes a distinct pathway which one must follow in order to receive knowledge and particularly to understand (mārama)
- e. The final stage before knowledge and understanding is distinguished by a dramatic (traumatic) event. This is symbolised by the separation of Ranginui and Papatuanuku.
- f. To apprehend knowledge, one must employ symbols.
- g. One set of symbols refer to several realities. For example, this whakapapa represents not only the creation of the world, but also childbirth, the growth of trees, the building of a house, the passage toward understanding and so on.
- h. Humans require symbols to apprehend knowledge
- i. Knowledge therefore is a reality unattainable by humans except through or by some intermediary such as symbols.
- j. Ultimately knowledge is not created by humans but from some other source (Io)

If Te Ao Mārama represents the paradigm or world view out of which mātauranga Māori is created, then our definition of mātauranga Māori might be modified further still:

*Mātauranga Māori is created by Māori humans according to a world view entitled 'Te Ao Marama' and by the employment of methodologies derived from this world view to explain the Māori experience of the world.*

Much research remains to be done in relation to the 'Te Ao Mārama' world view. It needs to become a staple research discipline in whare wānanga and other institutions devoted to mātauranga Māori. It is the kind of topic where no end can ultimately be determined but rather it undergoes constant debate and evolution.

One further point remains to be clarified. Is mātauranga Māori referred to as such because it is by Māori humans that it is created or that it is generated and created out of the 'Te Ao Mārama' world view? My answer to this is to say that the most important criteria for mātauranga Māori research is that it is created out of the Te Ao Mārama paradigm. It is this that is most important for one can be Māori yet conduct research according to another paradigm. Hence, our definition might be refined further still.

*Mātauranga Māori is created by humans according to a world view entitled 'Te Ao Mārama' and by the employment of methodologies derived from this world view to explain the human experience of the world.<sup>8</sup>*

I have, very quickly, covered the world view of Māori culture. The next step is to consider the actual process by which mātauranga Māori was/is created according to this world view. There are a number of mātauranga Māori methodologies, some are older than others. Perhaps the most important analytical tool of mātauranga Māori is whakapapa.

### **3. Whakapapa as Methodology**

Whakapapa is an analytical tool employed by Māori to understand the following (not an exhaustive list):

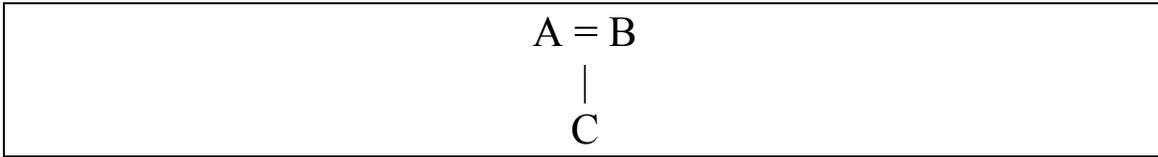
- the nature of phenomena
- its origin
- connections and relationships to other phenomena
- describing trends in phenomena
- locating phenomena
- extrapolating and predicting future phenomena

I will very briefly describe some of the features of a whakapapa analysis.

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<sup>8</sup> Having said this, I must note that one of the most impressive features of the Māori knowledge system was to the ability to cite a genealogical relationship between the human inquirer and all phenomena of this world. Pre-contact Māori were at pains to do this so that a fundamental value found in the Te Ao Mārama paradigm is that inquiry should take place in a kinship context. Humans are a part of the fabric of life, not separate from it. If one came from a culture that did not place emphasis upon this, the outcome of the employment of the Te Ao Mārama analytical system might be different.

1. The central idea of whakapapa is that two things, two phenomena come together to give birth to a third phenomena. This might be represented in the following way:



*Principle 1*

*All phenomena arise from at least two antecedent, parental phenomena.*

2. The next conclusion to make, is that when we are faced with a single phenomena, the whakapapa methodology tells us to look behind the first phenomena to find two antecedent, parental phenomena which have given rise to the first.
3. When we have considered the two parent phenomena, we can reapply the tool again to find their parent phenomena.

*Principle 2*

*The tool can be reapplied every time a single phenomena is apprehended. This might be rendered this way:*



4. Hence, the system urges us to consider RELATIONSHIPS. As a single phenomena is the child of two parent phenomena, by understanding the relationship between the two parent phenomena and that of the child, we can form an understanding of the phenomena itself.

*Principle 3*

*To understand phenomena, we must understand relationships.*

5. Future phenomena is dependent upon 2 or more things coming together to create new phenomena.

*Principle 4*

*Future phenomena is dependent upon 2 or more things coming together to create new phenomena.*

6. In time, whakapapa builds up to create a picture of the phenomenal world. This 'picture' of the phenomenal world is called 'Te Ao Mārama.

## 7. Whakapapa *locates* phenomena.

In these passages, I have attempted a definition of mātauranga Māori<sup>9</sup> by which a view of the ‘field’ of mātauranga Māori might be constructed. Much work needs to be done in analysis of the ‘Te Ao Mārama’ world view, in the analysis of traditional methodologies and new methodologies that might arise according to this view.

I have chosen to consider the paradigm of Māori knowledge and perhaps its most important methodology (application of whakapapa) as I believe it is by understanding this that the evolution of mātauranga Māori will re-commence. I have been a referee for applications to the Public Good Science Fund on a number of occasions and have noted that most, if not all, applications focus upon examples of mātauranga Māori and very little work has been done on paradigms and methodologies. Most of the projects have been devoted to study on examples of mātauranga Māori and very little work has been done on the paradigm out of which this knowledge is created. For this reason, much research into mātauranga Māori is conducted through the employment of non-Māori knowledge paradigms.

It is our view (Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa) that there needs to be discrete and independent institutions devoted to ‘Te Ao Mārama’. This leads me to the political reality of mātauranga Māori.

## 4. The Political Reality

In a recent discussion document released by the Ministry for Education concerning the future of tertiary education, an option was discussed with respect to whare wānanga. This option suggested the downgrading of whare wānanga to the status of Private Training Establishment (PTE). To us this was a blatant expression of the government’s real agenda for mātauranga Māori. We suspect that there is no real desire on the part of government to understand whare wānanga and mātauranga Māori and that this discussed option belies the view that whare wānanga are simply an unwanted drain on Government resources. If I can put it this way, the comparable suggestion in the western knowledge tradition is to downgrade universities to the status of Private Training Establishments, an outrageous suggestion, you will no doubt agree. And yet there is not the same level of indignation in the wider populace at the suggestion that whare wānanga should suffer that very fate.

One may counteract our perception by reminding us that this was merely an option to be discussed and was not policy. Yet the Māori experience of government, and its various arms, demonstrates beyond the need for further evidence that the aspirations of mātauranga Māori will not be met within a Crown/Government context. It is for this reason that we of the whare wānanga do not accept the ongoing viability of Māori Studies departments in the mainstream universities. There are two reasons for this view and they are interconnected: firstly, the fundamental agenda of all the mainstream universities is the expression and exploration of the Western knowledge tradition and so this should be. However, because this is so, mātauranga Māori or what we might call the

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<sup>9</sup> One will see that this definition is akin to basic ideas in western epistemology.

Te Ao Mārama tradition, continues to be marginalised. This is why the ‘Māori’ area of the university system is entitled ‘Māori Studies’ and not, say, ‘Whakapapa Studies’. ‘Māori Studies’ reflects the political reality of attempting to give voice to the Te Ao Mārama world view within the paradigm of Western knowledge. Māori studies as a field does not arise out of the methodological demands of a knowledge tradition (like say physics or language). It is not a true knowledge discipline. Rather it was born out of political prompting to create an area within universities in which ‘Māori subjects’ could be considered but with little thought to what the knowledge bases themselves might have to say about their institutional expression.

The Ministry for Research, Science and Technology has initiated a ‘Foresight Project’ which seeks to understand future knowledge trends. This is so New Zealand society can be adequately positioned to both influence those trends and to gain some advantage from them (among other things) The project has a clear international focus and such is MORST’s belief in the international nature of the project that it wrote ‘New Zealanders have a choice: we can keep up with this rate of change, or we can stagnate and risk slipping into Third World status.’<sup>10</sup> The rest of this MORST newsletter reminds us of global ‘megatrends’ and includes statements like ‘NZ Economy and Society Must Adapt (to these global megatrends)’ and ‘We must develop the best possible assumption base about the shape of the future, so as to create a national view on required competencies and a national strategy for setting priorities.’

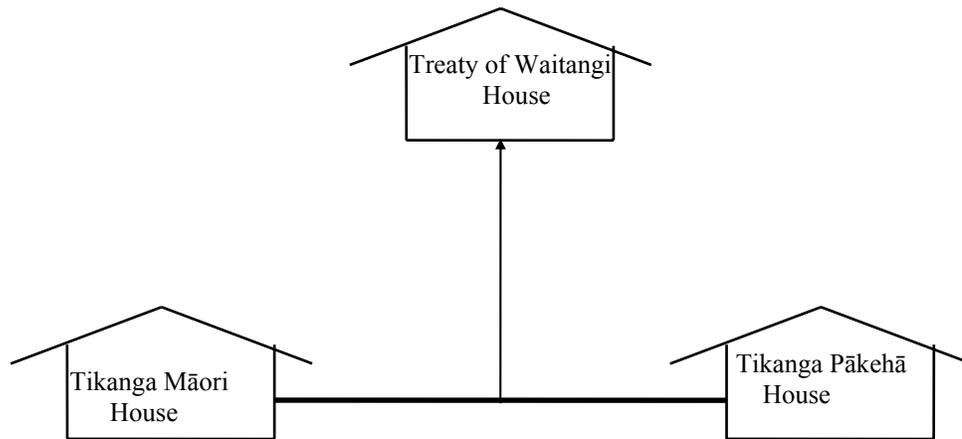
Such comments do not warm the heart of a mātauranga Māori researcher. Where do I fit in this scenario? Will I be treated with the same respect as knowledge traditions from other cultures and societies are? Will mātauranga Māori be allowed to perform a role in this process?

It is vitally important for any nation state to ‘get a grip’ on the knowledge traditions available to it and to set forth the conditions by which these traditions can be nurtured and usefully aligned and applied in relation to particular societal goals. However, entire knowledge traditions can ‘wilt on the vine’ under hostile societal conditions and this is exactly what has happened to mātauranga Māori.

It is our view that mātauranga Māori requires its own discrete institutions whose central *kaupapa* is the exploration and research of the Te Ao Mārama knowledge paradigm. We do not believe that Crown owned institutions can meet this goal. It is for this reason that when the MORST team came to Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa last year, much of our discussion was devoted to the Raukawa Trustees model of Partnership-Two Peoples Development based upon the Treaty of Waitangi. I would like to revisit this model here.

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<sup>10</sup> Vision: The Foresight Project Newsletter, Volume 1, Number 1, October 1997.



This model was first presented at a major hui on the Treaty of Waitangi, convened in 1984, at Tūrangawaewae Marae, Ngāruawāhia and has since been adopted by the Anglican Church in New Zealand. It advocates for the creation of discrete spaces in which the cultures, one represented as Māori, and the other represented by the Crown, can naturally evolve in their own way. The model also sets forth the conditions and principles in which these two discrete ‘houses’ can interact with one another to give rise to the ‘Treaty of Waitangi House’.<sup>11</sup>

The model can be applied to any area of New Zealand society. With respect to the knowledge industry ( if it can be referred in this way), the ‘Tikanga Pākehā House’ represents those range of institutions devoted to the perpetuation of the knowledge traditions and knowledge agendas of the Crown. These would include universities, mainstream schools, the Ministry and Foundation for Research, Science and Technology and many more. Those institutions which fulfill the ‘Tikanga Māori House’ are kōhanga reo, kura kaupapa Māori, whare wānanga and others. The range of ‘Tikanga Māori Houses’ is growing.

It is our view that the Tikanga Māori House of the knowledge industry has been seriously under-resourced and there now needs to be a discrete and independent Māori institution which can coordinate and facilitate the perpetuation of mātauranga Māori. Such an institution would be a companion to the Ministry for Research, Science and Technology and would facilitate and fund mātauranga Māori research and the setting of priorities. It would act as a quality control mechanism and would responsibly manage resources for the betterment of New Zealand society as a whole. It is our view that Māori, under the Treaty of Waitangi, are entitled to a certain percentage of the MORST and FORST budget by which to create this Māori institution.

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<sup>11</sup> For a full description of the model, please see *The Treaty of Waitangi: Māori Political Representation* by Whatarangi Winiata.

Ultimately, however, the model arises from the Treaty of Waitangi and the assertion that one can not design systems and management for one culture, within the paradigm of another. The New Zealand Government has been doing this for such a long time that the belief that the Government has a 'global' concern and can accommodate all interests is deeply felt. Instead, only a model that allows space within which individual traditions can grow in their own way and, secondly, sets forth the principles and conditions upon which they can interact, is likely to succeed in fostering all. The Raukawa Trustees model, is evolutionary for it seeks to give voice to all knowledge traditions in New Zealand.<sup>12</sup>

The Minister, Hon. Maurice Williamson, is familiar with this model (it has been applied in broadcasting, language, the Crown Forestry Rentals Trust) and has considerable experience with resisting it. To date, the 'Foresight Project', you would agree, has proceeded with little or no knowledge of such a model or the aspirations upon which it is based. The Foresight Project would do well to understand the growth in the range of institutions which fulfill the 'Tikanga Māori House' and assist in its development by advocating for the mātauranga Māori research institution described above.

## **6. Conclusion**

Mātauranga Māori is a knowledge tradition which has resided in Aotearoa/New Zealand for 1000 years or so. I have argued that it is created by humans according to a world view or paradigm entitled Te Ao Mārama. There are a small number of institutions in Aotearoa/New Zealand devoted to the reconstruction and development of mātauranga Māori.

Mātauranga Māori is implicitly recognised in the Treaty of Waitangi. Contemporary demands and circumstances require the application of model for the management of the relationship of the two partners in the Treaty and I have, following an earlier meeting at Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa, advocated for the Raukawa Trustees model for Partnership/Two Peoples Development. There is a clear need to establish an independent and discrete institution devoted to the facilitation and funding of research within the Te Ao Mārama paradigm.

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<sup>12</sup> If further knowledge traditions are to be accommodated and are in need of a 'house' then the model can accommodate these easily.