

# Chapter 11

## The *Hui Tau*: Cultural Heart of the New Zealand Mission

*Rangi Parker and Emily W. Jensen*

**H**aere Mai! Haere Mai! Haere Mai ki te *Hui Tau*! Or in other words, “Welcome, welcome, welcome to Hui Tau!” For more than a half century, from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s, these warm and enthusiastic words greeted hundreds of New Zealand Latter-day Saints gathering for the annual mission conference known as the Hui Tau. The Hui Tau, however, was no ordinary mission conference. It evolved into a multiday event that combined worship and instruction with cultural display and recreation. Cultural performance was a prominent part of the Hui Tau because the overwhelming majority of Church members in New Zealand in the early twentieth century were Maori, the native *tangata whenua* (people of the land). Twice in the twentieth century a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was on hand to experience this signature event of the New Zealand Mission. Both Apostles were awed by the Hui Tau and left detailed accounts of their experience. In this chapter their verbal depictions, as well as those of legendary New Zealand Mission

President Matthew Cowley, are combined with a generous selection of photographs to provide a lively portrayal of what David O. McKay called one of “the significant gatherings of the world”—the Hui Tau.<sup>1</sup>

Maori culture, according to one scholar, embodies the traits of “generosity, sociability, and co-operativeness.”<sup>2</sup> Maori enjoy being together, and they take pride in their food, language, arts and crafts, history, and genealogy. Ceremonially, the Maori pay strict attention to providing correct details for every ritual.<sup>3</sup> For Maori Saints, who already valued the holding of *Hui* as a cultural practice, the Hui Tau was a unique gathering that gave them cause to celebrate their membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Maori way. So dear to the heart of the New Zealand Saints was the Hui Tau that Matthew Cowley remarked that many measured their “calendar year from ‘Hui Tau to Hui Tau.’”<sup>4</sup> Usually the Hui Tau changed locations from year to year. The then Elder McKay explained that it was an honor to host the Hui Tau:



**Fig. 1.** New Zealand Saints pose for a photograph at a late nineteenth-century Hui Tau.  
*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*

"Members and non-members co-operate in [the] preparation; for it is a recognized fact that the district in which the 'Hui Tau' is held must bear most of the expense. Suitable grounds must be supplied; outbuildings erected; accommodations for a thousand visitors or more provided. . . . Judging from the eagerness shown by residents of different cities to secure the favored decision, these conditions are met without much difficulty."<sup>5</sup> Planners of the Hui Tau included not only the mission presidency but an entire Hui Tau general board, as well as a separate Hui Tau committee.<sup>6</sup>

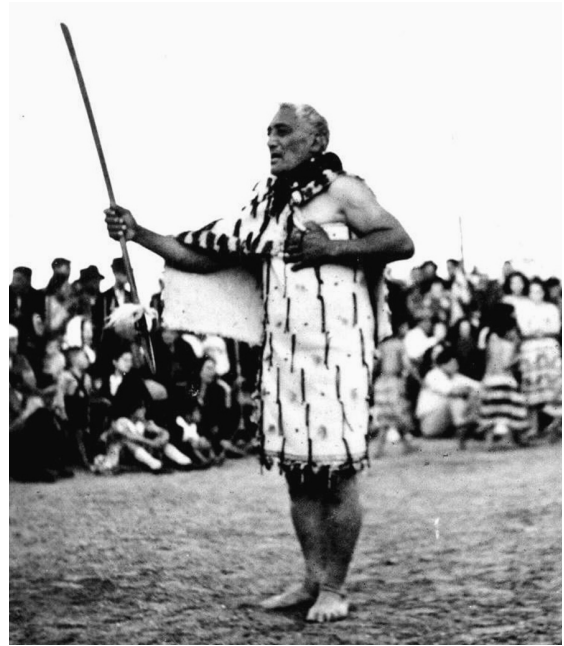
The early Hui Tau were formal affairs and "consisted of sermons only, and [because they] were in session for many hours, the listeners often fell asleep. It was the duty of the Deacons

to prod the sleepers with long sticks to keep them awake."<sup>7</sup> According to Latter-day Saint Maori leader Stuart Meha, traveling to the early Hui Tau could take "as many as two and three weeks," with the journey itself an adventure as the travelers purposely planned nightly stops in various Maori villages en route.<sup>8</sup> Meha explained that after a night's stay, the "following morning many people in the village would join them and together they would continue the trip. By the time these parties would reach their destination, there would be many scores of people"—all excited to take part in the Hui Tau.<sup>9</sup>

In 1921, the year Elder McKay visited New Zealand as part of his world tour, the Hui Tau cost between \$2,500 and \$3,000 to produce.<sup>10</sup> Using both donations and proceeds from goods

sold at previous Hui Tau, the Hui Tau committee purchased all the needed supplies, including tents, stoves, electrical appliances, and food, to accommodate the visitors.<sup>11</sup> And thousands came. The early Hui Tau may only have had “scores” who attended,<sup>12</sup> but by 1921 there were approximately 1,000 visitors.<sup>13</sup> In 1938 and 1939 there were about 2,500,<sup>14</sup> and by 1955 there were around 4,000.<sup>15</sup>

As the parties arrived they would be greeted in customary fashion. The guests assembled outside the gate of the *marae* (central meeting place) and waited until women called in a high-pitched and stylized voice the chant of “*Haere Mai!*”<sup>16</sup> Then the hosts formed rank in front of “the meeting-house and begin the action song of welcome,” which also included women beckoning with green branches.<sup>17</sup> Leaders and other important guests were ceremoniously challenged (*wero*, or *taki*) by a male who danced forward and threw down a challenge stick. The ranking visitor, on behalf of the entire group, was then to pick up the stick and come forward in a gesture of peace. At this, the challenger proceeded to lead the guests up to the *marae* where both hosts and guests exchanged welcome speeches, which were often ceremonial in nature and in-



**Fig. 2.** Hemi Puriri participates in a Hui Tau welcoming ceremony dressed in a *korowai* (feather cape) and holding a *taiaha* (spear).

*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*

cluded genealogical recitations. This was followed by the *hongi*, or pressing of noses (see figure 4 in chapter 13).<sup>18</sup>



**Fig. 3.** A tent at the 1921 Hui Tau

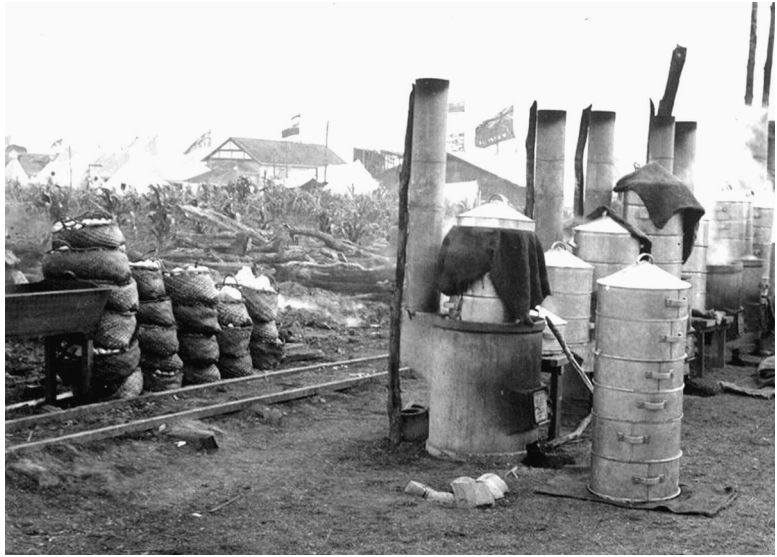
*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*

In his own experience of this *powhiri* (welcoming ceremony), Elder McKay recorded, "As our party began to walk slowly toward the assembled multitude, our ears were greeted by a shrill cry from a score of women's voices: 'Haere Mail! Haere Mail!' and other terms of welcome, accompanied by such wild gesticulations, jumping, dancing and grimacing that, had it not been for the assurances of Brother Christy, I should have thought we were about to be attacked instead of welcomed."<sup>19</sup> Following the appropriate speeches the hongi commenced. "Beginning with the woman on our left, we clasped hands and pressed noses with the entire assembly!" As other groups arrived, more ceremony, dancing, and speechmaking followed, and "[t]hus the home people welcomed the visitors all through the day."<sup>20</sup>

Elder McKay was also impressed with the *kai* (meals). He remembered that "boiled meat, potatoes, spinach, bread, butter, jam, and cheese,

made the principal eatables; but cake, watermelons, and other fruit and delicacies were also served. Some of the meat and potatoes were prepared in the 'Hangi,' that is cooked in a pit in the good old Maori fashion, except that chains were heated instead of rocks. And we must admit that meat thus cooked is far more tender and delicious than that boiled in the more modern manner."<sup>21</sup>

Providing food for more than a thousand people each day was a vast undertaking, but this was only part of what made up the Hui Tau. Interspersed throughout the day (except on Sunday) were different competitions including singing, Maori action songs, short story, dance, oratory, and sports events; older Maori or missionaries would serve as the judges.<sup>22</sup> One Maori leader explained that "our M. I. A. young men and young women have the opportunity of demonstrating before the thousands attending this great conference the work which they



**Fig. 4.** Steam-cooking potatoes and fish at a Hui Tau  
*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*



**Fig. 5.** Inside view of a Hui Tau dining tent (1921)  
*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*



**Fig. 6.** Maori sisters pose for a photo at the 1950 Hui Tau.  
*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*

have been doing during the past year, in song, speech, in our unique and beautiful *poi* dances, in our *haka* [war dances], tennis, and then by the new dances which the Mutual Boards have sponsored.”<sup>23</sup> Elder McKay especially enjoyed a *poi* dance where fifteen young Maori girls, “dressed in native costume,” combined “rhythm, beauty, grace and skill” to produce one of “the

most beautiful dances in the world. I have never seen any that excel it.”<sup>24</sup> Choral music also abounded at the Hui Tau, and choirs from all districts came together to perform or compete. Eleven pages of the 1938 program were devoted to Hui Tau hymns including “True to the Faith,” “O My Father,” and “Koutou Katoa Ra” (“Come to the Saviour”).<sup>25</sup>



**Fig. 7.** A women’s log-sawing contest  
*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*

The Hui Tau also included exhibits of craftsmanship. Different booths would be set up, and one mission president's wife noted, "I am especially pleased with the display of handwork by the Relief Society sisters. Articles made from old materials were very fine. Aprons crocheted and knitted articles, embroidered pillow shams, and table covers. Woven kits added a touch of Maori Art and the beads, hula skirts and the quilt from Rarotonga represented many hours of work and loving service, showing that Relief Society women are industrious women."<sup>26</sup> Many of these crafts

would be offered for sale to help offset the costs of future Hui Tau. The Sunday School booth at the 1955 Hui Tau was centered on a visual aid demonstration called the "Teach-O-Vision," which was a combination of tape-recorded narration put to projected pictures.<sup>27</sup> A typical evening at Hui Tau might end with a dance, or with a special program honoring contest winners. One night during the 1938 Hui Tau attended by then Elder George Albert Smith, a fund-raising carni-



**Fig. 8.** The Porirua Choir at the 1949 Hui Tau in Korongata. The conductor is James Elkington.

*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*

val was put on by the MIA, which included the "crowning of MIA Queen at Carnival."<sup>28</sup>

The primary purposes of the Hui Tau, however, were spiritual. In describing the 1921 Hui Tau, Elder McKay remarked that "twice a day . . . everybody excepting the women folk preparing breakfast, assembled in the large tent and participated in devotional service, consisting of (1) singing, (2) prayer, (3) repeating in concert passages of scripture; and



**Fig. 9.** Nuhaka Primary presentation at Hui Tau (circa 1947)

*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*





**Fig. 10.** Crowning the queen at a Hui Tau Gold and Green Ball  
*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*

(4) questions and discussion. The quotations were selected from the *Ready References*, and chanted in unison. . . . It was plainly evident that the Maoris had assembled to learn more of the gospel of Christ, and not merely to be entertained.”<sup>29</sup>

The 1938 *Hui Tau Programme* “Daily Schedule” lists nine meetings throughout the six-day event: a mission MIA board meeting on the first day (Wednesday); a special meeting for all priesthood presidencies, a genealogical society meeting, an MIA meeting, and a temple meeting all on the Friday; an elders priesthood meeting on Saturday; and a Relief Society meeting, a Sunday School meeting, and an MIA meeting on Sunday. This was in addition to five general sessions of conference throughout the Hui Tau as well as daily *karakia* (prayer devotionals).<sup>30</sup> Elder Smith wrote of the meetings he at-

tended in 1938: “I spoke at all general conference meetings and enjoyed good liberty. We held a meeting with the missionaries that lasted eleven hours in the carved house on Saturday. On Sunday the meetings were largely attended



**Fig. 11.** Presenting the Gold and Green Ball royalty was a high point of the Hui Tau social activities.

*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*



**Fig. 12.** Matthew Cowley speaking at the 1949 Hui Tau in Korongata  
*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*

and many were compelled to stand. Over one thousand were crowded in at one time.”<sup>31</sup>

As New Zealand did not have a temple at the time, it is interesting that the program lists a “temple meeting.” Elder Smith also devoted one of his addresses to genealogy and temple work. He described how Maori princess Te Puea Herangi had showed him the *wharenui* (large meeting house) and its carvings that embodied the Maori genealogy practices. He encouraged the Maori Saints to take advantage of the opportunity “to do the Temple work for your people independent of the white race” in the Hawai‘i Temple.<sup>32</sup>

An unusual feature in the early years of the Hui Tau was the “Gospel Chanting.”<sup>33</sup> One of the first books translated into Maori was the missionary scripture guide *Ready References*. *Ready References* reproduced entire scripture passages on designated doctrinal topics. Many Maori committed these passages to memory and would chant them in unison at Hui Tau devotionals.<sup>34</sup> However, by 1938 Stuart Meha lamented that “the practice of ‘Gospel Chanting’” was ending. “In former days it was customary for the members to

recite in sing-song rhythm verses from the Bible and Book of Mormon. In this way we learned by heart many of the Scriptures which pertain to the fundamental principles of our faith and Gospel.”<sup>35</sup>

Church business, if deemed important by the mission presidency, was also discussed in the meetings. As an example, in an 1888 Hui Tau priesthood meeting with the missionaries and “main [M]aories” in attendance, they considered the “best plan by which to print the book of Mormon and how many copies to have printed—by which they agreed upon 2,000 copies; but whom to fix for the production of the money . . . they could not agree upon.”<sup>36</sup> In 1955, at one

of the final Hui Tau, an official announcement was made via phone call to Elder George Biesinger, supervisor of church construction in New Zealand. Elder Biesinger relayed the exciting message: the First Presidency desired a temple in New Zealand, and it needed to be built entirely of volunteer mission labor. All four thousand members present raised their hands to sustain the proposal, and many of them helped in the building. The New Zealand Temple was dedicated on April 20, 1958.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1922 Hui Tau, mission president George S. Taylor preached against Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana, a Maori faith-healer who claimed he had the “Book of Life” and was rising in popularity among Maori. President Taylor admonished the Saints not to worry if they were not in Ratana’s “Book of Life,” for “all men, not only Maori, were to be judged out of the real Book of Life, and according to their works, not according to their signature.”<sup>38</sup> President Taylor did not decry all of Ratana’s practices but explained how “his works and teachings differed from the scriptures.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, the Hui Tau could also be a venue to discuss current issues.



The Hui Tau were open to both member and nonmember alike, and most of the time everyone worked for and enjoyed the Hui Tau together. However, in 1921, an RLDS (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and now Community of Christ) member interrupted Elder McKay's address. He was quieted by those around him but marched up to Elder McKay at the close of the session. Elder McKay smiled at him and "as their hands clasped the [RLDS member] . . . was unable to speak."<sup>40</sup> Elder McKay told him to "go his way, building up his own house and not tearing other people's down."<sup>41</sup> Whenever people attending the Hui Tau started "causing a ruckus," the Hui Tau police would be on hand to escort them off the premises.<sup>42</sup>

A prominent nonmember who hosted and participated in the 1938 Hui Tau was the Maori princess Te Puea Herangi, whom one elder de-

scribed as "stately of bearing and dignified of speech, she fittingly carries the responsibilities of her position."<sup>43</sup> Elder George Albert Smith was able to serve the princess in a priesthood capacity. He recorded, "On Sunday afternoon Princess Te Puea sent for me and asked for a blessing. Brother Rahiri Harris accompanied me and joined by laying his hands on her head. She appeared to be very weak and I fear has been doing too much to make the meeting successful[. S]he is very humble and I hope the Lord will heal her as I feel sure she is needed by the Maori people. As I was leaving she called her secretary. . . . He brought a beautiful native rug or robe. . . . She handed this to me and asked me to accept it as a gift from the Maori People. I told her I would if she would permit me to send her a Navajo Rug and she said she would be pleased to have it. I felt that she was most generous to me and thanked her for her kindness to our people."<sup>44</sup>



**Fig. 13.** David O. McKay and Hugh J. Cannon posing with children at the 1921 Hui Tau  
*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*

This interchange between the Apostle and the princess is indicative of how the Hui Tau brought together the two cultures—with pleasant results.

Enthusiasm for Hui Tau was pronounced. “Others may copy, but . . . none can duplicate our *Hui Tau*,” reported the New Zealand Mission newsletter, “for it is part and parcel of the Mormon people throughout the land of New Zealand and there is none other like it.”<sup>45</sup> Mission president Sidney J. Ottley said of the same Hui Tau, “I feel that [it] was a successful *Hui*, and that the people . . . are feeling better toward the World and the Church and each other.”<sup>46</sup> President Cowley described how the Hui Tau combined both the spiritual and the cultural aspects of the Maori when he remarked that the 1939 Hui Tau would be a “concerted exemplification of God’s revelation that ‘the body and spirit are the soul of man’ (see D&C 88:15).”<sup>47</sup> And Elder George Albert Smith remarked in the April 1947 general conference that one of the “best experiences of my life was attending a Hui Tau in New Zealand.”<sup>48</sup>

In 1921 Elder McKay wished “success and long life to the Hui Tau! . . . May its influence extend until it becomes a power . . . to cement the love, and increase the faith of Church members.”<sup>49</sup> This hope only extended thirty-seven more years because in 1958 the Auckland Mission was divided and no longer held Hui Tau. The newly formed South Mission continued holding Hui Tau for a few years until the First Presidency directed them to stop and instead have quarterly district conferences.<sup>50</sup>

The Hui Tau was a successful hybrid of a Maori cultural gathering and a standard Latter-day Saint conference. Those who participated in the New Zealand Hui Tau shared a spirit of happiness and togetherness whether it was preparing for the event, working in the kitchens, or enjoying the spirit of the meetings and other activities. Elder McKay perhaps best described the Hui Tau when he said, “The glory of the ‘Hui Tau’ is seen and felt in the twelve or fourteen worshipping assemblies. . . . The earnestness, faith and

devotion of the audience; the manifestation of the inspiration of the Lord upon the speakers . . . the excellent music, and the confidence, sympathy, and brotherly love that flowed from soul to soul, all combined to make every service a supreme joy.”<sup>51</sup>

*Rangi Parker is a New Zealand Maori, a historical researcher and archivist, a television documentary producer, a former professional recording artist and composer, and a mother of six children and twenty-five grandchildren. She currently resides in the Temple View New Zealand Stake.*

*Emily Warburton Jensen, a former Deseret News web editor, loves writing and editing and is currently raising three darling daughters.*

## Notes

1. David O. McKay, “Hui Tau,” *Improvement Era*, June 1921, 769.
2. Joan Metge, *The Maoris of New Zealand* (New York: Humanities Press, 1967), 60.
3. Metge, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, 59–60.
4. Matthew Cowley, *Matthew Cowley Speaks* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 293.
5. McKay, “Hui Tau,” 769.
6. See *Hui Tau Programme 1938* (Ngaruawahia, New Zealand: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1938), 4.
7. Stuart Meha, “Hui Tau in Review,” in *Hui Tau Programme 1938*, 6.
8. Meha, “Hui Tau in Review,” 7.
9. Meha, “Hui Tau in Review,” 7.
10. McKay, “Hui Tau,” 775.
11. McKay, “Hui Tau,” 775.
12. Meha, “Hui Tau in Review,” 7.
13. McKay, “Hui Tau,” 769.
14. Meha, “Hui Tau in Review,” 6; Cowley, *Matthew Cowley Speaks*, 293.
15. Allie Howe, “A Temple in the South Pacific,” *Improvement Era*, November 1955, 828.
16. Metge, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, 192.
17. Metge, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, 192.
18. Metge, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, 192.
19. McKay, “Hui Tau,” 769–70.

20. McKay, "Hui Tau," 771–72. See Lydia Liddle, "Oh We're Going to the *Hui Tau*!" (unpublished paper, Brigham Young University–Hawai'i, 2004), 3. President McKay also remembered the *tangi*, or *tangihanga* part of the welcome, where the Maori people moaned and cried in an expression of sympathy for those who had died since the previous Hui Tau (see McKay, "Hui Tau," 772; and Liddle, "Oh We're Going to the *Hui Tau*!" 5).
21. McKay, "Hui Tau," 773. *Hangi* is also spelled as *haangi* (see Liddle, "Oh We're Going to the *Hui Tau*!" 2).
22. Liddle, "Oh We're Going to the *Hui Tau*!" 8.
23. Adelaide Thompson Poananga, "How It's Done in New Zealand," *Improvement Era*, March 1938, 156.
24. McKay, "Hui Tau," 774.
25. "Hui Tau Hymns," in *Hui Tau Programme 1938*, 18–28.
26. This is a statement by Alice W. Ottley found in the New Zealand Mission newsletter, *Te Karere*, June 1953 (Auckland: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 193.
27. "Highlights of 1955 Hui Tau," *Te Karere*, May 1955, 137.
28. "Daily Schedule," in *Hui Tau Programme 1938*, 14–17. See also Adelaide Thompson Poananga, "How It's Done in New Zealand," 156.
29. McKay, "Hui Tau," 772.
30. "Daily Schedule," in *Hui Tau Programme 1938*, 14–17.
31. George Albert Smith Journal, April 14, 1938, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 115; hereafter cited as Church Archives.
32. "Conference Address of Apostle George Albert Smith," *Te Karere*, May 1938, 139.
33. Meha, "Hui Tau in Review," 7.
34. McKay, "Hui Tau," 772.
35. Meha, "Hui Tau in Review," 7.
36. John Ephraim Magleby Journal, April 7, 1888, transcript in possession of Grant Underwood, Provo, Utah.
37. Allie Howe, "A Temple in the South Pacific," 828.
38. Cited in Brian W. Hunt, *Zion in New Zealand: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New Zealand 1854–1977* (Temple View, New Zealand: Church College of New Zealand, 1977), 55.
39. Cited in Hunt, *Zion in New Zealand*, 55.
40. Manuscript History of the New Zealand Mission, April 22, 1921, as cited in Hunt, *Zion in New Zealand*, 55.
41. Manuscript History of the New Zealand Mission, April 22, 1921, as cited in Hunt, *Zion in New Zealand*, 55.
42. Hunt, *Zion in New Zealand*, 55.
43. Don Cotterell, "Ngaruawahia—Yesterday and To-day," in *Hui Tau Programme 1938*, 5.
44. George Albert Smith Journal, April 14, 1938, Church Archives, 115.
45. Glen Ellis in *Te Karere*, June 1953, 192.
46. Sidney J. Ottley in *Te Karere*, June 1953, 192.
47. Cowley, *Matthew Cowley Speaks*, 294.
48. George Albert Smith, in Conference Report, April 1947, 139.
49. McKay, "Hui Tau," 776–77.
50. R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 331–32.
51. McKay, "Hui Tau," 775–76.

