

The Sacred, the Profane and “Host Cultures”

Williamson Chang, Professor of Law, University of Hawaii at Manoa, the William S. Richardson School of Law-- From a Presentation given at Meijo University, Nagoya Japan, June 6, 2015 [Submitted to Civil Beat’s “Connections” June 11, 2015 [Kamehameha Day and my birthday]

The most important two words of Governor Ige’s speech of May 27, 2015 were the words “host culture:”

“I believe our core values need to be: The importance of respecting our host culture.” I think that tells it all. How does one respect a “host culture?”

Well, what is a “host?” A “host” is the family or group that gives a party, or the bride and groom who “host” a reception, or any organization, reunion class, gang of workers that “hosts” a “celebration.” The host usually provides the place, food and drink, entertainment and an atmosphere of friendship and good times.

But, the guests too have responsibilities. Sometimes they bring gifts, such as at wedding,. Often they contribute food and drink: but always, they bring the appropriate attitude—an attitude of respect, gratitude, friendship. Guest don’t make up their own rules—they abide by the general outline provided by the host. If there is to be no diving in the pool—such a rule a rule is respected.

By “host culture,” Governor Ige was clearly referring to Native Hawaiians, their values, their culture and their ways of life, as the “host culture.” He said it must be respected. So, how do you respect a “host culture?”

As guests, you do not gather and plot to proclaim the host’s residence to be your house. Second, you don’t call in the police to enforce your claim to title to the premises. Third, you don’t conspire with outsiders to write your own deed to the property. Fourth, as guests, you do, at some point in time, leave. You do not stay forever. It is not your house.

That is just the basics. Governor Ige should know. He is of Okinawan ancestry. Okinawa was its own Kingdom separate and apart from Japan. It was invaded by Satsuma forces in 1607 and finally annexed by Japan in the middle of the nineteenth century. Today, the United States military continues to occupy Okinawa and threatens over massive Okinawan protest to block the United States takeover of Oura Bay, a sacred site to Okinawans. He met with the Mayor of Okinawa last week. The Mayor was on his way to Washington to plead for relief from American occupation of Oura Bay. Did they not discuss both Mauna Kea and Oura Bay? Did David Ige not see the similarities?

So, David Ige should certainly understand. He should understand that when one is a guest in an Okinawa house, and has brought flowers for the host, if there is no vase for the flowers, one doesn't turn to the urn containing Uncle Masaki's ashes and say to the host—"let's borrow the urn for the flowers, just for now, we can replace the ashes later." That would horrify the host. Could he or she explain why Uncle Masaki's ashes are sacred? Possibly, but probably not. Desecration is a case of "I know it when I see it."

That which is most sacred is often beyond articulation. It just "is". The sacred is where explanation stops centuries of common values that bond a community become the guiding rule. Christians do not use the real name of God in their services. One would never build on the western wall in Jerusalem. One would not build on the Arizona memorial or put a condo on Punchbowl cemetery. Why not? Because it cannot be explained. Respect of elders is universal. It needs no explanation. Mauna Kea is an elder.

The East and the West have different conceptions of nature. To the East, the earth, or here in Hawaii, the "aina" is sacred—it is not made sacred by a bold sacrifice of human life. In the West, "the earthly realm" is "dirt" [See Carlton Ching"] that is "profane," until it is made sacred by human deed---like bold and noble sacrifice. In Japan Fuji San, [not "Mount Fuji" it is "Mr. Fuji"] is sacred as is. Indeed, mountains themselves are sort of sacred—Japan has a "mountain creed."

To Native Hawaiians, Mauna Kea is a central part of the Kumulipo, the Creation Chant of Native Hawaiians. America has its Creation Chant. It is called the "Constitution." It defines our values and behaviour. The

Constitution is heavily guarded at the National Archives. But I also have one in my office. As Justice Hugo Black stated:

"The United States is a born of and only of the Constitution."

America's creation was its Constitution. America is thus very young –not three centuries old. There are many basic values that cannot be articulated in the American creed, hence the judicial notion of "I know it when I see it," and "Due process is the process that is due." The Native Hawaiian creation chant is thousands of years old. Mauna Kea is central to that creation chant. One does not disprove its spiritual importance by showing Hawaiians do not regularly visit the mountain, or that there are sporadic shrines on the mountain.

One never laughs when a fundamental value cannot be explained. One does not laugh when a Supreme Court Justice says "Due Process is the Process that is Due." No explanation need be given for taking one's hat off in church. These are the culmination of community values over generations---they are in-articulate because language cannot go where our fundamental core values reside.

It is thus more than "rude" to demand Native Hawaiians to explain their religion. The "aina" and Mauna Kea are sacred to Hawaiians. Action and attitude show it is sacred. Nobody has to prove I Arlington, Ground Zero, or Calvary are sacred to the West—these are the hushed places of enormous sacrifice. In the West places where the brave have given their lives are sacred. No more needs to be said: Arizona monument.

In this controversy over Mauna Kea we are not acknowledging two things. First, we fail to take note, as the Governor pointed out, that Native Hawaiians are the host culture. Second, guests must respect the rules of the host. This has been forgotten. Thus, we have defined this controversy as one where the values of the host is less than the values of the guest

There is one man who could step in and resolve this. His name is Barrack Obama. He grew up in the "host" culture. He says the values of Hawaii and Hawaiians formed his early personality. He could, with his pen declare Mauna Kea protected as did George Bush for Papahānaumokuākea under the Antiquities Act of 1906. But, President Obama would not make the mistakes

made at Papahānaumokuākea—like “excluding the host culture.” The question begs itself: Mauna Loa and Kilauea were made National Parks in 1916 why leave out Mauna Kea? Shouldn't Mauna Kea be a UNESCO world heritage site like Papahānaumokuākea and Fuji-San.

Why was Mauna Kea left out? Is it not as sacred, as important, and as essential to the Kumulipo as Mauna Loa? Mauna Kea should be on the UNESCO world heritage sites-- like Fuji San. Fuji San is not subject to attack under the minimal protection of the rules of a state conservation district. Conservation districts do not protect; they are the refuge of exceptions, exceptions arranged by political pull to allow development of agricultural lands and the mansions of “Gentlemen Farmers.”

Why is the standard for the protection of Mauna Kea set so low---a standard written by the guests—when Mauna Kea is so sacred to the host culture? Barack Obama can do one thing for Hawai [and it is not Federal Recognition or changing the Hawaiian Home Rules] --it would be to acknowledge that Mauna Kea is the most sacred site of the Hawaiian “village” that raised and taught him the most important values in life.