International Indigenous Business and Trade and the Role of Culture: A Comparison between Aotearoa Māori and Alaska Native Enterprises

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous enterprises are increasingly engaging in international business and trade, mainly in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and tourism, to grow Indigenous economies. The experiences of the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand (the Māori) and of Alaska provide a context and case through which to explore cross-cultural exchanges in business. In this conceptual paper, we review literature on the role of culture in international business and trade, focusing on indigeneity in international Indigenous business. We find that when commonality and mutual respect are established in cross-cultural exchanges in business, there is said to be cultural congruity. When material cultural differences inhibit cross-cultural business, there is cultural discordance. Specific examples are used to show how Indigenous firms in Aotearoa New Zealand and in Alaska compare. This paper provides scope for other Indigenous peoples to explore how their cultures influence firm-level performance and international trade.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous business and trade is occurring within an international business environment beset by uncertainty (World Trade Organisation, 2019). Yet, cross-border trade remains an important means of sustaining domestic economies, including Indigenous economies, with the value of world merchandise trade at US$19 trillion and US$5 trillion trade in commercial services in 2018 (World Trade Organisation, 2019). With the 10 leading trading nations accounting for half the value of world trade, the distribution of wealth from trade is uneven. Global value chains with integrated production systems and technological advances in products, services and trading platforms present opportunities and challenges for trading nations, agencies and firms — small and large (International Chamber of Commerce, 2013). Resistance to globalisation because of concerns over wealth imbalances, environmental degradation, weak labour standards, and incursions in state sovereignty is shifting attention from a rules-based multilateral trading system to bilateral and regional trade (Klemm Verbos, Henry, & Peredo, 2017). A progressive trade agenda in Aotearoa New Zealand, entitled 'trade for all,' is precipitating citizen-centred thinking on the role of trade (D. Parker, 2018, 2019). Meanwhile, the United States is advancing a trade agenda of its own, which is challenging unfair trade practices, renegotiating agreements in which the United States has endured trade deficits, and pressuring trading partners to improve labour and environmental standards (Lighthizer, 2019).

Increasing consideration is given to Indigenous perspectives on trade. For its part, the Ardern government in Aotearoa New Zealand has consulted Māori on trade policy as treaty partners and because Indigenous rights are one of the principles of 'trade for all' (D. Parker, 2018). The results indicate strong support among Māori for the role of trade in the Māori economy through reducing trade barriers, capacity building and Māori participation in trade policy (Public Voice, 2018). Explicit protection of treaty settlements and intellectual property was raised, as was the potential for inter-Indigenous trade (Public Voice, 2018). A similarly wide consultation in the United States with Alaska Native communities on trade is not evident. Some provision for Indigenous interests is, however, apparent in trade agreements such as the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2019), though not the separate Indigenous chapter that the Canadian government was promoting (Barrera, 2018). Despite the limited provision for Indigenous rights and interests in trade policy, Alaska Native and Aotearoa Māori enterprises are continuing to engage in trade as a way to enhance the wellbeing of their respective peoples. A confluence of cultural and commercial imperatives within Indigenous economies appears to be driving this growth, and alongside this, the potential for inter-Indigenous trade is emerging (Mika, Fahey, & Bensemann, 2019).

In this paper, we explore Indigenous participation in trade and compare Māori enterprises of Aotearoa New Zealand and Alaska Native enterprises of the United States. Our analysis focuses on addressing this research question: what is the role of culture in international Indigenous business and trade? It is a conceptual paper, which reviews existing literature on how culture influences Indigenous business and trade. We hope it prompts empirical enquiry into Indigenous trade. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. First, we discuss Māori involvement in international business and trade and the role of Māori culture in this. Second, we canvas Alaska Native culture and how this features in their trade activity. Third, we review literature on the influence of culture on international trade. Finally, we discuss elements of indigeneity — Indigenous culture and values — in terms of how this affects business and trade among Aotearoa Māori and Alaska Native enterprises.

MĀORI INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND TRADE

Interest in the Māori International Economy Grows

Māori are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, with a population of 734,200 in 2017, comprising around 15 per cent of total population of 4.79 million (Stats NZ, 2017). While there are at least 116 iwi (tribes) and many more hapū (subtribes) (Statistics New Zealand, 2013a, 2013b), all speak the same language — te reo Māori (the Māori language) — and share similar cultural values and origins (Buck, 1958; Higgins, Rewi, & Olsen-Reeder, 2014; Houkamau & Sibley, 2019).

Much has been written about the Māori economy from a domestic standpoint (see for example, Davies, 2011; MEDP, 2012b; Mika & Tahi, 2012; Nana, Stokes, & Molano, 2011a, 2011b; NZIER, 2003; Sanderson, Stokes, & Slack, 2009). Less, however, has been published about the Māori economy's international dimensions (Nana, 2013; Schulze & Stokes, 2013). Attempts to address this imbalance are confronted by an absence of data on Māori international trade and investment (Allen, 2011). Economists have had to be somewhat creative with what data exists, relying on a range of sources and assumptions to estimate the nature and scope of the Māori economy (Butterworth, 1967; Nana et al., 2011a; NZIER, 2003; Rose, 1997). The Māori international economy, comprising Māori trade (exports and imports) and investment (inward and outward), therefore remains an understudied phenomenon, partly because of gaps in data and attendant preoccupation with the domestic Māori economy in public policy (MEDP, 2012b; MET, 2010; Mika, 2010). Moreover, not all Māori are universally enamoured with trade. International trade polarises Māori opinion into two camps: first are Māori who fervently support international trade because of the benefits it affords the Māori economy and Māori people (R.N. Love, 1998; Mika, 2012); and second are Māori who vehemently oppose international trade because it has hitherto obviated Indigenous rights, worker rights and human rights (Bargh, 2007; Melbourne, 1995). At this juncture, the debate about the merits of trade from an Indigenous perspective in Aotearoa relies on values-based arguments without the benefit of empirics (Allen, 2011).

A Precolonial History of Māori International Trade

Māori were engaged in international trade before Aotearoa New Zealand was annexed by the British Monarchy in 1840 (Orange, 1987; Petrie, 2002, 2006). This included supplying Australian and Pacific Island markets with surplus goods using Māori owned ships, flourmills and tribal productive capacities (Petrie, 2002, 2006). In particular, between 1769 and 1850 tribal economic development accelerated through the entrepreneurial zeal of tribal chiefs who recognised the value of and seized upon European technologies and foods to sustain their peoples (Davis, 2006; M. Love & Waa, 1997; Mika & O'Sullivan, 2012; Petrie, 2006; Schaniel, 1985). Māori economic activity and international trade imploded, however, between 1850 and 1900 (Hawkins, 1999; Petrie, 2006). This is attributed to the effects of large scale land-loss during the New Zealand land wars, forcing Māori into the wage economy, now the main source of Māori incomes (Belich, 1998; Hawkins, 1999; NZIER, 2003; Walker, 1990). More recently, Māori international business and trade seems to be regaining momentum on the strength of Māori commodities and cultural tourism, the value of which, while growing, is comparatively modest (Henare, 1998; NZIER, 2003).

Estimating the Value of Māori Exports Is Problematic

In 2008, New Zealand's exports generated around NZ$26.9 billion in foreign exchange, representing about 30% of New Zealand's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which was 10% below the Government's target of exports at 40% of GDP (Allen, 2011). How much of this was generated by Māori is unknown, as official statistics delineating Māori exports are not available for this period (Allen, 2011; B. Parker, 2000). Some attempts have, however, been made to estimate the value of Māori exports. For instance, Māori export revenues outside of agriculture, fishing, and forestry were estimated in 1998/1999 to be worth NZ$225 million (B. Parker, 2000), while Māori exports from agriculture, fisheries, and tourism were estimated in 1999/2000 to be NZ$650 million (NZIER, 2003). A conservative estimate, therefore, suggests Māori exports in 1999/2000 were in the vicinity of NZ$875 million. This would represent about 3% of New Zealand's exports by value in 2008. Subsequent estimates of the value of Māori exports put the figure at $2.9 billion in the year to March 2010 (about 5.5 per cent of New Zealand's total exports) (Nana, 2013). Yet this estimate is plagued by the same lack of statistics on Māori business as earlier efforts. Consequently, estimates of Māori exports are underpinned by assumptions not considered statistically robust but necessary in the absence of adequate data. Māori have much ground to make up if they are to achieve parity with non-Māori exporters in industries and sectors in which Māori are predominant and to capture a share of knowledge-based exports (Nana et al., 2011b).

Māori Economy Is Export-Dependent

The Māori economy has a preponderance in commodities (about 60.1% compared with 31.4% for the New Zealand economy as a whole) (MEDC, 1999). As a consequence, the Māori economy is export-dependent and is disproportionately affected by trade barriers and adverse international market conditions (McCabe, 1999; NZIER, 2003). To alleviate this circumstance, the Māori Economic Development Commission (MEDC) recommended three strategies: (i) stronger advocacy by Māori for trade liberalisation; (ii) changing to less discriminatory markets and products, or less price sensitive consumers; and (iii) broadening the Māori asset base beyond commodities (MEDC, 1999). Evidence suggests New Zealand's Māori development, business, and trade agencies are actively supporting Māori enterprises to diversify their products, services, and markets, including producing higher value goods and services (MEDP, 2012a; NZTE, 2012; Te Puni Kkōiri, 2007).

Strengthening Māori International Trade

Māori enterprises are encouraged to participate in international trade, and it appears they are increasingly willing to do so (Allen, 2011; Henare, 1998; R.N. Love, 1998; Mika, 2012). Trade missions led by a former Minister of Māori Affairs to China and Malaysia lent Māori entrepreneurs political support (Office of the Minister of Māori Affairs, 2012a, 2012b; Xinhua, 2014). The success of these delegations is attributed to the cultural affinity between Māori and Asian counterparts and the use of *waiata*, *haka* (traditional song and dance) and *kai* (food) as a cultural prelude to formal talks (MET, 2011a). The warm reception of Māori traditions during trade missions to China is linked to cultural similarities between Māori and Chinese peoples (MET, 2011b). These include the importance of values and relationships in business, an intergenerational view of investment, and common ancestry, albeit distant (MET, 2011a; NZTE & MFAT, 2012). Māori cultural elements, such as *kaitiakitanga* (stewardship), *kotahitanga* (unity), and *whanaungatanga* (relationships), differentiate Māori goods and services and Māori ways of doing business, adding value to New Zealand's brand internationally (Comer, cited in Harmsworth & Tahi, 2008a; NZTE & MFAT, 2012).

Earlier efforts by Te Puni Kōkiri and Trade New Zealand (now part of New Zealand Trade and Enterprise) were directed at facilitating inter-Indigenous trade between Māori and Canada's First Nations and American Indian tribes on the basis of their indigeneity, cultural empathy, and mutual development goals (Stephens, 1997). Indigenous cultural affinities did not, however, translate into enduring commercial success. Further research is required to understand inter-Indigenous trade efforts and the more recent focus by Māori and non-Māori enterprises on China, Japan, and Malaysia (Ihi Research, 2019).

ALASKA NATIVE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND TRADE

Alaska Native Culture and Business

There is little literature on the role of Alaskan values in Alaska business. Alaska is a young state, yet its culture goes back thousands of years and has a proud history. Alaska Natives pride themselves on not having been subjugated by the Russian or U.S. government. There are eleven distinct cultures, speaking eleven languages and twenty-two dialects (Alaska Native Heritage Center, 2019). The main cultural groups are Aleut, Alutiiq, Athabaskan, Eyak, Haida, Inupiat, Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Yup'ik (Krauss, 1980). There are 229 officially recognised Alaska Native tribes (Office of the Federal Register, 2018). Traditional customs are influenced by ethnicity, origin, language, religious and spiritual beliefs, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, ancestry, history, gender identity, geography, and so forth (G.H. Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Sumner, 1959). A variety of traditions, traditional spiritual practices, and mainstream beliefs, assumptions, and faiths can blend and coexist. Many American Indian (AI) and Alaska Native (AN) spiritual beliefs and practices are considered sacred and are not to be shared publicly or with outsiders. Until passage of the *American Indian Religious Freedom Act* in 1978, many traditional AI/AN practices were illegal and kept secret (U.S. Indian Health Service, 2015; Powell & Jensen, 1976; Zotigh, 2018).

Alaska Native Corporations, Land Claims, and Engagement in Business

In the early 1970s, the Alaska Natives filed a land-claim lawsuit against the United States Government, and legislation passed on December 18, 1971, formed the state into 13 regional corporations, 12 in state with land rights, and the 13th for non-resident Alaska Natives living outside Alaska. The *Settlement Act* recognised Alaska Natives' sovereignty, granting not only land titles but also economic compensation. It created around 200 village corporations (Cheney, 2014) known as Alaska Native corporations (ANCs). The *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* (ANCSA) provided opportunities for Indigenous groups of Alaska to have preferential treatment in government contracting and much more. The sheer

TABLE 1
Alaska Export Destinations (2012 and 2017)

Alaska's Total World Exports 2012		Alaska's Total World Exports 2017	
China	29.00%	China	26.80%
Japan	17.00%	Japan	16.40%
South Korea	15.00%	Canada	14.30%
Canada	10.00%	South Korea	13.70%
Germany	6.00%	Germany	3.70%
Spain	3.00%	Netherlands	3.70%
Singapore	3.00%	Spain	3.30%
Netherlands	3.00%	Australia	3.20%
Australia	3.00%	Malaysia	1.80%
Belgium	1.00%	France	1.40%
Other	10.00%	Other	11.70%

size of Alaska and its location in the far north make for unique problems and situations when conducting business. The ANCSA administrative structure reflects "a tension between the goal of assimilating Alaska Natives and the goal of safeguarding the ancestral lands and culture of Alaska Natives' (London, 1989, p. 201). According to Simpson (2007), "ANCs are unique business institutions that present an interesting array of opportunities for U.S. and international transactions" (para. 1). ANCs have distinctive characteristics that open many opportunities for doing business with them.

According to Greg Wolf, executive director of the World Trade Center Alaska,

> ... what's needed is greater diversification of our economy, in terms of business activity, and also diversification of our revenue base, in terms of additional tax payers beyond a handful of oil producers. Exports, and other international business, can play a role in fostering such diversification. Already a $5 billion annual contributor to the Alaska economy, there is room for [considerably] more growth leading to a more balanced economy. (Alaska Business, 2017, p. 7)

Alaska's Expanding Trade Economy

Indeed, the remarkable expansion of Alaskan exports to China has been the dominant story for the state's international trade economy. As a result, China has become Alaska's number one trading partner. In 2012 Alaska's exports totalled $4.6 billion;, and within five years, exports increased by another $0.4 billion. Table 1 shows the top recipients of Alaskan exports (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

These numbers are only growing as China responds to climate change pressure by investing in LNG (liquefied natural gas), a more sustainable resource that is richly found in Alaska. An example is the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation (AGDC), signed as a joint agreement with Chinese public enterprises, Sinopec, the China Investment Corporation, and the Bank of China. The project is committed to creating 12,000 jobs and bringing an investment of $34 billion (Feng & Saha, 2018).

Alaska Native Corporations Delivering Benefits for Indigenous Communities

ANCSA is primarily made up of small businesses, meaning that virtually all shareholders are Indigenous peoples. Examples of ANCSA for-profit corporations are Sealaska, with 15,819 shareholders, the largest in terms of number of shareholders, and Doyon Ltd., which holds 12.5 million acres of land and is the largest landholder among the group (Anders & Anders, 1986). ANCSA corporations have been successfully partnering with national and international companies. Its companies represent a merging of economic and socio-cultural interests. Because there is social commitment involved in these enterprises, their services and products have cultural value, thus tending to attract loyal customers, for they offer not only a diversity of supplies with asset allocation in different sectors but also employ a diversity of workers drawing on the richness of the region's distinct cultures (Simpson, 2007).

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), Alaska Natives enrich their business dealings with their sense of cultural pride. ANCSA corporations can deliver a diversity of benefits to their shareholders as well as to other Alaska Natives. These can be classed as monetary and nonmonetary benefits. The first includes "shareholder dividends, elder benefits, scholarships, memorial benefits, shareholders' equity, and charitable donations" (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2012, p. 1). The latter, generally accessible through partnerships with tribal organisations, village corporations, and regional nonprofit organisations, "include employment opportunities, cultural preservation, land management, economic development, and advocacy on behalf of Alaska Natives and their communities" (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2012, p. 1).

Despite incredible diversity with each Indigenous nation having their own set of values, cultural commonalities across different tribes or communities can be found. This paper's next section looks at the role culture plays in international business and trade.

PRINCIPLES OF CULTURE IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND TRADE

The Role of Culture in International Business

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) define culture as "a set of shared experiences, understandings, and meanings among members of a group, an organization, a community, or a nation" (cited in Ozorhon, Arditi, Dikmen, & Birgonul, 2008, p. 361). These shared understandings are represented in human knowledge, outlooks, attitudes, customs, and behaviours of a given society (Low & Leong, 2000). Organisational culture is the commonly understood meanings that separate members of one organisation from another (G.H. Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). While culture seems impervious to a singular definition, this has not dampened scholarly enthusiasm for examining the impact of culture on international business (Gan, 2008; Ozorhon et al., 2008; Sirmon & Lane, 2004).

International trade and investment manifests in the relations and agreements reached by entrepreneurs and enterprises operating outside their country of origin. Enterprises enter international markets in different ways. While the sequencing has been challenged, the 'stages' theory of internationalisation suggests this includes exporting via agents, establishing an overseas subsidiary and overseas production (Geringer, 1988; Warriner, 2009).

Although economic reasons primarily drive international business, culture also plays some part (Ozorhon et al., 2008). Culture has the potential to influence international business and trade in three main ways: first, as a determinant where a causal relationship is assumed between entrepreneurial culture, entrepreneurial activity, and enterprise performance; second, as a catalyst where culture exerts a moderating influence on international business; and third, as an intangible effect, enhancing satisfaction and confidence between the parties (Urban, 2010).

Culture and Firm-Level and Alliance Performance

A sample of research on the role of culture in international business and trade from multiple countries and sectors is provided in Table 2. The studies have different research objectives and methodologies, with most producing empirical data on how firms behave and perform in international settings. The research indicates that culture influences product design, branding, and provenance (origin stories) in international business in obvious sectors such as tourism, but also less apparent sectors like construction and investment. Cultural adaptation is important for improving interpersonal relations and organisational effectiveness, but evidence on culture and its link to firm and alliance performance requires further study.

Despite their popularity, international joint ventures are frequently affected by instability (Gan, 2008; Parkhe, 1991, cited in Ozorhon et al., 2008). Some argue that culture, and in particular the absence of cultural compatibility, is a leading cause of such instability (Kabiraj, Lee, & Marjit, 2005; Sirmon & Lane, 2004). Ozorhon et al. (2008) adapt Hofstede's (1980, 1991) classifications of culture to assess cultural similarity between international joint venture partners in construction projects and culture's effect on enterprise performance. Ozorhon and colleagues use a mix of subjective measures (e.g., partner satisfaction) and objective measures (e.g., project performance) to quantify the impact of culture on international joint ventures (Ozorhon et al., 2008). They find that organisational level cultural similarities correlate with international joint venture performance, whereas national culture and host country culture have no discernible influence (Ozorhon et al., 2008). The conclusion drawn from this literature is that culture matters in international joint ventures involving business partners with distinct national and organisational cultures. The question is, to what extent and how?

Cultural Congruity an Enabler in International Business and Trade

We propose that cultural congruity — defined here as peoples of different national origin sharing material cultural similarities — facilitates cross-cultural business relations and alliance performance. An alliance means any business arrangement in which two or more parties from different countries are members (e.g., joint venture, agent, supplier). We suggest the opposite of cultural congruity is cultural discordance, where material cultural differences inhibit international business and trade. Cultural congruity is different from ethnocentrism, in which judgements about another's culture are made solely by reference to one's own cultural markers (e.g., language, dialect, physical features, and religion) and which connotes in-group favouritism (Hammond & Axelrod, 2006; Sumner, 1959). Neither is cultural discordance the same thing as xenophobia, which is hostility to other groups with different cultural

TABLE 2
The Influence of Culture on International Business

Author	Title	Finding	Country/(evidence)
G. Hofstede (1994)	International business is culture	Managers in international firms must be familiar with aspects of cross-border organisational life so that management practice is culturally relative.	Multiple countries (empirical)
Barnett (2001)	Manaakitanga: Māori hospitality	Māori culture provides an important means of attracting overseas visitors, reflected in national tourism marketing.	New Zealand (empirical)
Lin (2004)	Determinations of cultural adaptation	Cultural differences can lead to misunderstanding. Improved cultural adaptation may improve financial performance and interpersonal relationships.	China (empirical)
Ozorhon et al. (2008)	Implications of culture	Although economic reasons primarily drive international business, culture also plays some part.	USA and Tukey (empirical)
Harmsworth and Tahi (2008b)	Indigenous branding	Māori culture influences outward trade by Māori enterprises in several cases (p. 11).	New Zealand (empirical)
Gan (2008b)	Professional culture compatibility	Cultural adaptation in China extends beyond adapting business practice to understanding others from a cultural perspective.	China (empirical)
Urban (2010)	Frontiers in entrepreneurship	Culture has the potential to influence international business and trade as a determinant or a catalyst, or indirectly	South Africa (conceptual and empirical)
Kalhor, Shahi, and Horri (2014)	Effect of culture on international trade	Culture is recognised as one of the main factors of successful marketing and promotes local production.	Iran (empirical)
Apetrei, Kureshi, and Horodnic (2015)	When culture shapes international business	National culture influences international management in large firms, but this is hard to identify in small firms.	Europe (empirical)

features from one's own (Hammond & Axelrod, 2006). Cultural congruity is premised on a commitment to overcome cultural difference in pursuit of shared business goals. Cultural congruity is concerned with alignment of business interests through cross-cultural exchanges; cultural congruity being an enabler, cultural discordance being a constraint. The goal is cultural fit or cultural compatibility despite cultural differences, where, paradoxically, commonality is to be found within diversity (Gan, 2008a).

CASE STUDIES OF AOTEAROA MĀORI AND ALASKA NATIVE ENTERPRISES

Indigenous Values Influence Enterprise and Product Authenticity

Most literature on the role of Māori values in Māori business is internally oriented (i.e., how values affect what firms do and how firms behave) rather than externally oriented (i.e., how one firm relates to another) (Best & Love, 2011; Harmsworth, 2005; M. Kawharu, Tapsell, & Woods, 2012; Tinirau & Gillies, 2010). The question, is what is the role of Māori culture in Māori international business and trade? Several authors explore this question in relation to Māori branding, exporting, tourism, and investment (Cairns, 2013; Harmsworth & Tahi, 2008b; Jones, Gilbert, & Morrison-Briars, 2004, 2005; Warriner, 1999). For example, Jones et al. (2004) find that being Māori does not provide Māori tourism enterprises with a competitive advantage. Instead, Māori culture adds value in terms of product and service authenticity; less certain are they about the impact of Māori values on enterprise performance. Barnett (2001) is more emphatic that Māori culture provides an important means of attracting overseas visitors, which is endorsed by the marketing efforts of New Zealand's tourism promotion agency (Tourism New Zealand, 2013).

Commitment to Community Distinguishes Indigenous Enterprises

Bunten (2010) completed a comparative study between Alaska Natives and Māori in terms of their successful engagement with the tourism industry. She argues that both cases are examples of "ethically sound businesses" capable of being "responsive to local value systems" (p. 287). This means that these enterprises are, at the same time, Indigenous owned and commercially oriented, following cultural protocols as they attend to tourist expectations, and finding congruity between commercial enterprise and cultural integrity. Thus, the main difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous-owned tourism are their principles and commitment to community. As such, a successful enterprise is not only limited to profit, but also empowers the community, particularly through the rise in long-term employment. Indigenous tourism in these two countries also has in common "collective leadership, stewardship of land and natural resources, cultural perpetuation", and a purpose of bringing environmental and cultural consciousness through education (Bunten, 2010, p. 301).

Indigenous Values Influence Branding and Business Practice

In the specific case of Aotearoa New Zealand, Harmsworth and Tahi (2008b) find that Māori and non-Māori enterprises are using elements of Māori culture in the branding of their products and services in local and overseas markets. The risks of misuse and misappropriation of *tohu* Māori (symbols of Māori culture) by non-Māori enterprises locally and internationally are increasing, yet protection mechanisms have not kept pace (Harmsworth & Tahi, 2008b; Mead, 1994). Harmsworth and Tahi (2008b) identify a number of Māori enterprises that incorporate Māori values into their products, services, and business operations.

One in particular is *kono*, which means food basket in Māori (Ngata, 1993). Kono is a diversified food-based subsidiary of Wakatū Incorporation based in Nelson at the top of the South Island (Kono NZ, 2014). Kono was established in 2011 from the consolidation of different enterprises into three divisions: Kono Horticulture; Kono Seafood; and Kono Beverages (Kono NZ, 2012). Kono collectively employs 250 staff and farms around 500 hectares of land and sea (Kono NZ, 2014). Kono infuses Māori values into its branding — the way it does business and how it relates to its principal export customers, particularly China (Kono NZ, 2012). Kono identifies with four main values: (i) *kaitiakitanga* (custodians of land and sea); (ii) *whanaungatanga* (respectful relationships); (iii) *manaakitanga* (hosting and caring for others); and (iv) *rangatiratanga* (self-determination) (Palmer, cited in Kono NZ, 2012). These values, they argue, are fundamental to building a sustainable business, with intergenerational impact, and enduring international relationships (Kono NZ, 2012). Precisely how these values play out in international business relations and deal-making for Kono and other similar Māori enterprises is not widely known and warrants further research.

Indigenous Values Influence Domestic Social Ties

Warriner (2009) finds that Māori culture is not a strong factor in the branding of Māori exports in the creative sector. Instead, Māori exporters are motivated by demand for their products and services rather than the prospect of an intercultural exchange. Māori exporters rate in-country compliance costs and finding suitable agents and distributors as challenges ahead of cultural differences in overseas markets (Warriner, 2009). While *tikanga* (Māori values and customs) is important for some Māori exporters in terms of business strategy and organisational processes, this needs to be balanced against Western principles of business. Warriner (2009) gives little comment on the role of Māori culture in relationships with overseas business partners (e.g., agents, distributors, investors) and deal-making. Rather, Māori culture is discussed as a catalyst to cementing domestic ties between entrepreneurs and their support network of family, friends, and associates.

Indigenous Values Influence Intercultural Firm-Level Commitment

Harmsworth and Tahi (2008b) give examples of Māori culture influencing outward trade by Māori enterprises in other countries. The same principles, it is argued, apply with equal facility to inward trade and investment by overseas business partners in Māori enterprises within Aotearoa New Zealand. Two examples illustrate this: first, Te Arawa Group Holdings Limited (TAGH) of Rotorua; and second, Whitau Limited and the Red8 Group in the nearby Mataatua tribal district (Mika, 2014). TAGH was established in March 2007 as an investment company of Te Pūmautanga o Te Arawa, a trust comprising eleven affiliated Te Arawa *iwi* (tribes) and *hapū* (subtribes). TAGH's primary purpose is to grow its treaty settlement cash assets of NZ$34 million on behalf of affiliated tribes (Mika, 2011). When engaging with overseas business partners, TAGH focuses on establishing enduring business relationships based on *tikanga* Māori (Mika, 2015). As a sign of good faith, TAGH and its business partners, including multinational corporations from China and Japan, entered into a *kawenata* (agreement). This is a formal, yet non-binding, pact that signifies mutual understanding and respect. The acculturation process implicit within the kawenata and associated customs has been favourably received by TAGH's overseas partners (Mika, 2014).

In the Mataatua district a consortium of Māori enterprises were formulating plans with Chinese business partners to invest in agribusiness projects. The Māori consortium instituted the Whitau Sovereign Agreement as a mechanism to facilitate cross-cultural understanding with overseas business partners (Mika, 2016). *Whitau* means flax fibre and is a metaphor for quality (Moorfield, 2011). The sovereignty component represents Māori as self-determining Indigenous peoples with customary rights affirmed in the Treaty of Waitangi (I.H. Kawharu, 1989; Orange, 1987). In practical terms the Whitau Sovereign Agreement first involves a number of cross-cultural exchanges overseen and directed by *kaumātua* (esteemed elders), in which Chinese business partners engage in Māori culture with Māori people, then Māori commerce proceeds (Mika, 2016).

Indigenous Culture Can Strengthen Cross-Cultural Business and Trade

In the case of Native Alaskans, Cheney (2014) builds on the ideas of Anders and Anders (1986), which hold that Indigenous traditional values typically conflict with corporate goals. Cheney (2014) looks at Sealaska Corporation's ongoing efforts to promote Native culture and language as well as community development and political empowerment. He argues that rather than being an obstacle, culture can strengthen native businesses by assisting them, for example, in maintaining effective leadership and operating in cross-cultural environments. Dealing effectively with international partners has been a key skill for Native Alaskan entrepreneurs, as it has with Māori. Official figures show the important role played by exports in Alaska's economy, with the state having exported $4.9 billion in made-in-America goods in 2017, which translates to around US$6,700 for every resident, given Alaska's population of 739,795 people (Workman, 2018). The largest trading partner was China, which expends $1.3 billion in goods imports from Alaska (Workman, 2018). Other partners were Japan ($812 million), Canada ($707 million), South Korea ($675 million), and Germany ($182 million). International trade also played a fundamental role in creating jobs, inasmuch as it sustained approximately 37,000 jobs that same year (Workman, 2018).

CONCLUSION

There are several reasons why culture and cultural congruity in international business should matter to Indigenous entrepreneurs, researchers, and policy makers. First, cross-cultural dynamics of managing enterprises in multiple host nations is a long-term prospect — mastery of this is essential for managerial and enterprise success. Second, cultural congruity may reduce the risks and transaction costs of international business. Third, as the Māori and Native Alaskan economies are export-dependent, Indigenous enterprises are increasingly looking overseas for consumers, business partners, investors, and suppliers. In this scenario, cultural congruity may serve as one criterion when assessing internationalisation options. There is some acknowledgement, however, of the need for balance between commercial and cultural imperatives. This implies caution against over-playing the role of culture at the expense of fundamental principles of commerce (that is, enterprise profitability and survival). Fourth, by incorporating their culture in respectful ways, Indigenous enterprises are legitimising an alternative approach to doing business internationally, which honours the cultural origins and practices of the parties.

Aotearoa New Zealand and Alaska both have astonishing natural environments and strong Indigenous cultures, as well as similar histories of collective land management systems that respect harvesting cycles and the rights to fish and hunt of traditional groups. With Māori and Alaska Native people firmly set on expanding trade with China and other Asian countries, Indigenous culture offers a point of difference not only in product and service quality and authenticity, but also in the authenticity of relationships with international business partners. There is more to learn about the value and nature of this point of difference, presenting interesting lines of enquiry for Indigenous and non-Indigenous management scholars alike.

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