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Hawaiian Culture  
Hawaiian Protocol on Mauna Kea

By Moses K. Crabbe

Moses K. Crabbe is a member of the Mauna Kea Management Board's Hawaiian Culture Committee. In collaboration with Kahu Kū Mauna, this group is working to develop educational materials on the cultural significance of Mauna Kea, including protocol. Crabbe, a Hawaiian cultural practitioner and educator, shares his personal views on protocol on Mauna Kea in this article.

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Native Hawaiians have always had a close association to the 'āina upon which we live. As do other indigenous peoples of the world, Hawaiians view ourselves as kahu, caretakers of the land. And, as kahu, we have a personal responsibility to maintain the very essence and life of the land on which we live.

Mauna Kea, the highest mountain in the Hawaiian archipelago and Pu'u Kūkahau'ula (now generally identified as Pu'u Wēkiu), its highest peak, are directly connected to our feeling for the 'āina. Ascending the summit of Mauna Kea takes one closer to the spiritual and the supernatural realm.

In Hawaiian thinking, a visit to Mauna Kea has personal meaning because in the eyes of some Hawaiians Mauna Kea is kupuna to them it was here long before us, and therefore it is our "elder."

Equally important for Hawaiians is the fact that Mauna Kea also serves as the final resting place of the iwi, or bones, of kupuna. So, with respect and reverence for the spirits of those ancestors and kupuna who reside there, appropriate behavior is asked of anyone visiting Mauna Kea.

Protocol - a code of correct conduct, particularly within ceremonies - is a strong word.

The purpose and function of Hawaiian protocol are deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual belief of mana — supernatural or divine power. Belief in akua, 'aumakua and kupuna helped our ancestors to maintain a vital relationship with the natural and supernatural world. Hawaiians drew strength from their cultural protocol practices. This spiritual relationship has transcended time and continues to be taught, perpetuated and appreciated by a growing number of native Hawaiians today who want to learn, rediscover and identify with the cultural heritage of their ancestors.

Two general principles help to guide the practice of Hawaiian protocol. First, a clear purpose must be established and the purpose of each part of the ceremony understood. Anyone who practices Hawaiian ceremonial protocol should know why he or she is involved in a particular ceremony and what they are expected to do.

Second, there is an order or sequence in how one proceeds. For example, one suggestion for the protocol elements of presenting ho'okupu, or offering, could include the sounding of the pū

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Hawaiian Culture  
Committee  
[Hawaiian Culture  
Links](#) [Hawaiian  
Protocol on Mauna  
Kea](#) [Our Sacred  
Mountain](#)

kani, the conch shell, which would be followed by an oli wehe, or opening chant. A procession would follow, which could be accompanied by additional oli, followed by the bearers of the ho'okupu to a pre-designated site in order of their rank or status. These steps are consistent in any Hawaiian protocol.

Selection of oli is determined by the type of ceremony to be conducted at Mauna Kea. Today, it is common practice to select oli that are appropriate for the occasion. Different oli apply to different purposes, so a chanter should be familiar with the text of the chant and its function. To request permission to enter a sacred place such as Mauna Kea is consistent with Hawaiian thinking. Some oli kāhea, chants of request to enter, have been taught and learned for generations in the hālau hula. Oli could also be pule akua, prayer chants, mele mo'okū'auhau, genealogy chants, or mele wahipana, place name chants.

The rank or status of a person and the nature of their visit to Mauna Kea determines how formal or informal a ho'okipa, or welcoming ceremony, should be. A mea ha'i'ōlelo, or speaker, from the visiting group should state the purpose of the group's visit. An official greeter should welcome and receive the visitor.

Understanding and practicing proper protocol ensures that a ceremony is pono, or done correctly. If a ceremony is conducted with good intentions at all levels of the process, all parts of the ceremony will flow together. Confirmation may occur at a personal or a broad level. Hö'ailona, or signs, will reveal themselves either through natural phenomena, a person's behavior, or a spoken word either prior to, during, or even after a ceremony has been conducted.

As a final note: anyone planning to visit Mauna Kea should also be mindful of the health and safety hazards of traveling to high altitudes. The Office of Mauna Kea Management and the Visitor Information Station are good sources to obtain a personal safety checklist.

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