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Papa Mape: A tribute

Teurumereariki Hinano Teavai-Murphy

Yves Teihotaata, known as Papa Mape, was born on 19 May 1932 in Papetō`ai, Mo`orea. He married Anita Johnston Christine, born on 15 May 1929, in Orofara-Mahina, Tahiti. Together they raised two children, Heiata Teihotaata, born on 22 March 1970, and Heimata Wilfred, born on 7 April 1973.

Papa Mape was a quiet and humble man, but passionate about his culture. His formal education in the French school system was limited; however, he acquired a remarkable education from his elders and further developed a profound expertise from his endless curiosity about the natural world. He often noted that his school was the ocean. In traditional times, Papa Mape would have been recognised as an a tahu`a tautai (expert in the marine world) and tahu`a ra`au (expert in traditional medicine).

Papa Mape witnessed the rapid and often disconcerting change of the mid- and late-twentieth-century world. Populations on Mo`orea and across French Polynesia rose, tourism and urban centres developed, traditions were lost and fisheries diminished. He said that when he was young, he could start an uru (breadfruit) cooking on the fire, then go out and get a fish to eat with it and be back before the uru was cooked. In later years, he lamented, the uru would be charcoal before he was able to find a fish. Because of these changes, he realised that he, too, had to embrace change and he experienced an unexpected but, perhaps, always latent calling to become a teacher. This meant going against traditions in which knowledge was passed down through the family in one-to-one interactions. But for Papa Mape, this concession was necessary given the urgency of the situation: traditional knowledge and the Mā`ohi (Indigenous Tahitian) philosophical frameworks of perception and conception in which that knowledge was and is embedded needed to be taught before they were lost. So, he taught. He taught about the ocean and

about fish. He taught about plants and agriculture and medicine. He taught groups of Mā`ohi students, French schoolteachers, Western scientists and anyone who took the time to sit with him. His patience and humour served him well in this, and his words carried the weight of his deep knowledge of the natural world.

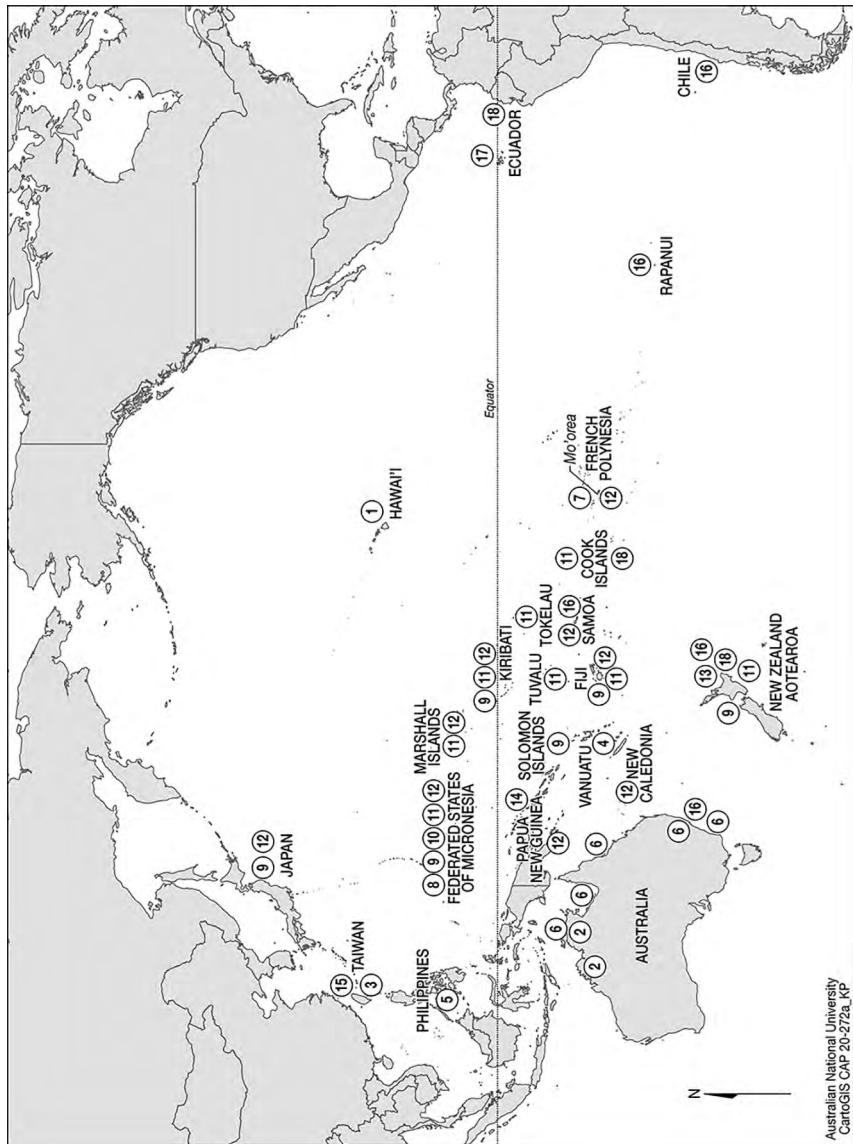
Often sought out in his later years to address the ecological and environmental media, Papa Mape embraced an integrated vision of island worlds and our relationships to them. As one journalist recorded him saying: 'Whatever you do on the land, the ocean suffers. Whatever you do in the ocean, the land suffers' (Eichenseher 2011). He was, with another knowledge steward from his village, the primary cultural expert to help restore and revitalise our lunar calendar, reporting on sustainable fishing and farming practices. He was the co-founder and president of honour of Te Pu `Atiti`a, a community-based organisation on Mo`orea dedicated to documenting, promoting and preserving biocultural heritage, marine and terrestrial biodiversity and traditional ecological knowledge, and which collaborates with the University of California at Berkeley's Gump Research Center to run the Atitia Center, 'which aims to inspire, teach, and reconnect Polynesian youth with their biocultural heritage'.

Yves Teihotaata passed away on 30 October 2013 in his beloved village of Papetō`ai. As the honorific he was known by, Papa Mape, suggests, he was a founding figure and a father to the Mo`orea community's efforts to navigate a path from ancestral wisdom and traditional ecological expertise towards a future of island sustainability. He remains for each of us the guardian of the ocean and a guiding star for all our island projects.



Plate 1: Papa Mape.

Source: Photo by Poema Duprel.



Map 1: The Asia-Pacific region, showing chapter locations.

Source: CartoGIS CAP 20-272a_KP, The Australian National University.

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