

# Elevating Heirlooms

## Selected Sources

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## The Cultural Significance of Hei Tiki

Extract taken from: ['Concepts to understand'](#), New Zealand Intellectual Property Office:

### Familiar

The hei tiki is one of New Zealand's most popular and recognisable Māori symbols.

### Culturally significant

Hei tiki represents the unborn child and is associated with Hineteiwaiwa, the Māori goddess of childbirth.

### Special consideration and respect

Hei tiki is culturally significant and deserves special consideration and respect.

Using hei tiki for particular products or services may be offensive to Māori. This can be raised as an objection against your New Zealand trademark or design application, and may impact market sales.

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Extract from ['Hei tiki and issues of representation within contemporary Māori arts'](#), Pania Waaka:

According to Williams (2003), a hei tiki is defined as:

1. A personification of primeval man. Te aitanga a Tiki, aristocracy. Te manu pirau a Tiki, a corpse.
2. A post to mark a place which was tapu.
3. A rough representation of a human figure on the gable of a house.
4. A flat grotesque figure of greenstone worn on a string around the neck. Kia hei taku ate i te tau o tana tiki.

Hei tiki is a personal adornment belonging to the Māori people. Neich and Pereira (2004), Barrow (1968) and Davidson (1996) state, these ornaments were worn by men and women. Best (1974, p 185) however believed only women wore hei tiki except in rare circumstances.

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Extract from '[Cultural analysis of Emotiki app and why it could be offensive](#)',  
Karaitiana Taiuru:

Hei Tiki, the correct term for the pendant that is used as a necklace and often called Tiki is the personification of the deity Tiki that is known by numerous names as seen below. Tiki is a recognised deity across most of Polynesia.

Depending on the tribal area, Tiki is either the creator of man (Christian equivalent of God, noting that some Iwi have a belief in a more superior god called Io or other realms) or the first man on earth (Christian equivalent of Adam).

The tiki is a personification of Tiki the fertility deity and has many incantations associated with him to assist people to become fertile, hence why people traditionally wore a Tiki. The first Tiki was made for Hineteiwaiwa - the atua of childbirth and te whare pora (weaving and female arts). The shape of the Tiki represents the human embryo. This story has variations in various tribal areas, but there is unanimous agreement that Tiki is a deity or a personification of fertility.

Tiki were made from pounamu/jade (assuming this is why emotiki are green) and sometimes human skulls and whale bone which aged and became brownish (*one can only assume the white and brown emotiki are to represent human skull and whale bone*). Tiki were rare and highly prized heirlooms that were often handed down from generation to generation. They were crafted by tohunga and had incantations chanted in its creation and when handed from generation to generation.

Historians speculate that the English and other immigrants to New Zealand increased the production of Tiki as they were in such high demand by immigrants and thus profitable to Māori. This combined with the introduction of steel axes which made the traditional pounamu adzes redundant, re-purposed the adzes into Tiki, and at a much quicker rate than was traditionally possible. Subsequently, this made Hei Tiki less valuable due to the mass production.

Extract from [‘Hei Tiki: He Whakamārama Hōu’](#) (Master’s thesis), Dougal Rex Austin:

[A]ccording to traditional systems of belief the original source of mana of hei tiki can be credited to the atua ‘Māori deities’, Ngahue and Hine-teiwaiwa. The creation narratives are set in Hawaiki, the original tropical Polynesian homelands of Māori.

#### **Ngahue and the first hei tiki**

Ngahue and the first hei tiki A pakiwaitara ‘traditional story’ tells of how the ancestor-like god Ngahue fled from Hawaiki with his coveted pounamu fish Poutini. They were chased from their homeland by Hinetua-hoanga and her abrasive cutting-stone Whaiapu. After a long journey Ngahue and Poutini made landfall at Tuhua ‘Mayor Island’ in the Bay of Plenty, but they soon sensed the arrival of their foe and continued onwards, arriving at length at the remote Arahura River on the South Island’s West Coast. Here Ngahue deposited Poutini making this an eternal resting place for his precious stone. He then returned to Hawaiki with a portion of pounamu taken from the side of his fish. Back in Hawaiki Ngahue told the people of the richness of the large land he had discovered. He worked upon the pounamu to fashion the first hei tiki adornments, making also kuru-pounamu ‘ear pendants’ and famous toki ‘adzes’. The adzes were used to construct ocean voyaging canoes and voyages of settlement commenced resulting in the arrival of the people and their pounamu treasures in Aotearoa. This story was originally published in Te Reo Māori by Sir George Grey in 1854 (68–69) and again the following year in English (1855b:82–84). While the English translation refers to ‘images for neck pendants’ the original 1854 version is more specific with regards to the hei tiki made by Ngahue in Hawaiki: ‘i te hei-tiki etahi’ (1854:68). The narrative has been attributed primarily to Te Rangikaheke, a principal chief of Ngāti Rangiwewehi, Te Arawa (Simmons 1966a:179).

#### **Hine-te-iwaiwa and the first hei tiki**

Another hei tiki creation narrative involves Hine-te-iwaiwa and is also set in tropical Polynesia. Hine-te-iwaiwa was a goddess of exceptional beauty who acquired the first hei tiki as a gift from her father (Best 1914:131, Grey 1855a:50). The god Tāne is usually – although not always – acknowledged as the father of Hine-te-iwaiwa (Orbell 1995:64). Another name by which Hine-te-iwaiwa is known is Hinauri. Hinauri was married to Irawaru, however, a dispute arose in which Irawaru was transformed into a dog by Hinauri’s brother, Māui (Grey 1855a:50–52). One account says Hinauri threw herself into the sea in grief for her husband and she came ashore eventually at the island home of Tinirau (Grey 1855a:54,81). Other versions say that Hinauri had heard of Tinirau, who was highly regarded as the most handsome man of his time, and she made her way to his island by either swimming or by sailing

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upon a shellfish (Reed 2004: 148–49). After arriving on the island Hine-te-iwaiwa/Hinauri and Tinirau slept together and this angered Tinirau's other two wives, Makai-atua-uriuri and Makai-atua-haehae. A fight took place in which Hine-te-iwaiwa killed these two co-wives. One account says that Hine-te-iwaiwa killed the women by intoning a powerful karakia 'incantation' and by throwing stones at them. The stones burst open as they struck the women letting forth a mass of greenstone, and it was by this means that pounamu had its origins (Reed 2004:150).

The Hawaiki origin attributions for hei tiki and for the coveted pounamu stone from which they are made fit with this analysis and are to be expected of such highly regarded cultural treasures. These stories can be interpreted as supporting the fact that in hei tiki a material of unparalleled value was used to fashion an adornment of unparalleled cultural value. Jahnke (2006:96) refers to the two-world system in which the Māori spiritual world inter-penetrates the material world. According to this understanding the supernatural origins of hei tiki would not have been something regarded traditionally as distant and remote in time, for the spiritual world was regarded as constant and immanently present within the physical world of Te Ao Mārama. This view is supported by that of Hakiwai (1996:53) who refers to the Māori perception of the past as lying before the people, forming an 'ever-present now'.

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Extract from [Te Hei Tiki: An Enduring Treasure in a Cultural Continuum](#) (sample pages), Dougal Austin:

The meaning of the name 'hei tiki' can be explained by breaking it down into its separate parts. The word 'hei' denotes something worn around the neck. ('Hei' and 'āhei' are names for the collarbones; the hei delineate that part of the upper body upon which hei tiki and other neck adornments naturally rest.)

'Tiki' is a generic word used by Māori and other Polynesian cultures for human images, large or small, whether carved in wood, stone, bone, or some other material. A hei tiki is therefore an image carved in human form that is worn suspended around the neck.

It is sometimes explained that Tiki was the first man created by the atua (deity) Tāne. According to some traditions, Tiki and Hine-ahu-one were the first human pair. Others consider Tiki, or Tiki-āhua, to be an atua himself, and the progenitor of humankind. Man, god, or demi-god, there seems to be consensus that humankind descends from Tiki's lineage. 'Te aitanga a Tiki' is an early expression for humanity and was used as an accolade to designate persons of high birth. That these pendants take their name from the human form in a general sense, rather than represent Tiki himself, is indicated by the fact that when the sex of early hei tiki is shown they are invariably female.