Taa Moko

Taa Moko is sacred and special to Māori. It's a taonga past down from a long line of chiefs. In my research I have decided to investigate how Taa Moko has evolved from the past to the present and how people feel about the change.

What is Taa Moko?

There are a lot of opinions around what Taa moko is. After researching a range of resources from the Internet, I discovered that there is no one true meaning to what Taa Moko is. Through resources like Wikipedia, Māori Tattoo, Taahua Index and the website Kupapaing I learnt that Taa Moko is a symbol of identification, rank, genealogy, and tribal history. We are presented with a contrast of definitions, some with superficial views like 'Taa Moko is the permanent body and face marking by Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand' to definitions like Taa Moko is 'the mark of beauty or ferocity.' Mere Henare, an indigenous person of New Zealand, said that 'My Moko is a mark of remembrance of my family whom I love. Also it's to encourage me to be strong and to do my best in whatever I participate in: This idea is supported by Kupapaing another website used for the purpose of this assignment, defines Taa Moko as 'If there's no meaning to the moko you cannot call it a moko.' So what is Taa Moko? I think Taa Moko is a spiritual tradition that enhances one's identity, it is a taonga that teaches us about our history, our genealogy and what it is to be uniquely Māori. Taa Moko is used so that we never lose our stories, legends and our whakapapa. Taa Moko is more than a picture, it is a symbol of our cultural, our language and our traditions and we cannot begin to define it as we will lose the very essence of what it means to Māori.

How has Taa Moko evolved from the past to today? Taa Moko has changed dramatically from the time of my ancestors to today. According to some resources Taa Moko was used as a symbol of a true leader, rangatira, or 'high ranking persons'. Only they could wear a moko and those without were known as people of 'lower social status.' This type of Moko is shown in a visual of King Tawhiao. [Source not identified here but presumably source?] You can see the old chisel design entrenched into the skin with traditional ink. He was a Rangatira of great mana and his Taa Moko represented this. At that time only tangata tapu, sacred people were allowed to get a Taa Moko done. At the time of King Tawhiao the ink used was made traditionally with ingredients like caterpillar, burned wood, abaltrous bone and fungus. (The caterpillar is infected by a kind of fungus that starts growing out if its head, killing the caterpillar.) The darker black tattoo ink used for the face was made of burned wood. Today, the ink used is easily assessed by going to the shop to purchase it. In comparison Taurewa Victor Biddle from the book 'Mau Moko' proudly displays his hoko, a more contemporary style. His hoko is very detailed showing fine patterns, some that couldn't possibly be done with a chisel. It is obvious that the Kaitihi (artist) had used a needle. Throughout the book we see that status and mana have nothing to do with who is allowed to wear a Taa Moko. These days anyone can get a Taa Moko. Mr Rahui Papa a Māori historian, talks about the importance of Karakia and rituals in the days of our old people. He mentions how Karakia was done throughout the procedure to add Mana to the final product, to make sure everything is done with the blessings of those who are watching over us. The old people were the law and if they believed you did not deserve a Taa Moko it never happened. These days, people can get a Taa Moko easily. Money seems to be commonly used as payment, not Mana. As you can see Taa Moko has evolved from the past and continues to evolve into the future. It is important that we don't lose respect for its meanings. How do people feel about the evolution of Taa Moko?

A survey I conducted with year 11 students showed that 54% of 13 students were happy to share Taa Moko with other cultures. Mere Henare a traditionalist agreed with this result as she voiced, 'It's great to see, to know that Non-Māori are wanting to experience the emotions we have during a Taa Moko procedure: She continues to say, 'It's also magnificent that they're embracing our tikanga and wanting to respect our art.' In another interview conducted with a student currently attending Te Wharekura o Rakaumanga said, 'I simply don't mind Non-Māori having a Taa Moko on themselves because it's good for other cultures to learn our way of life as a Māori.'

I think that Non-Māori have a right to wear this taonga but with conditions. Even traditionalists like Mere think this. They must be taught our history and tikanga before getting a Taa Moko. They need to fully understand what Taa Moko is.

Conclusion

Taa Moko is a sacred taonga given down from our tuupuna. After researching about Taa Moko I have learnt that Taa Moko is a symbol of integrity, Māori identity, a reflection of whakapapa and respect. Taa Moko is a way of understanding Māori culture and beliefs through the eyes of Māori. It represents all different aspects of life, being strong, having pride, family, mana, spiritual unity and love. Taa Moko is alive and evolving but it has a history that people must know. We should aim to wear our Taa Moko on the outside as well as on the inside.