



SEALASKA
HERITAGE

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SHI President

Introduction

My self-introduction will highlight the cultural significance underlying our relationship to our land and environment:

Yeidiklas'akw ka Kaa.háni yóo xat duwasáakw

Cháak' naa áyá xát

Shungukeidí naax xat sitee

Kaawdliyaayí Hítdáx áyá xát

Jilkáat kwáan áyá xát

Lukaax.ádi dachxán áyá xát

My Tlingit name is Yeidiklas'akw. It is an ancient name whose meaning has been lost in antiquity. My ceremonial name is Kaa.háni, which means "Woman Who Stands in the Place of a Man." This name recalls an historical event involving intertribal trade, and it speaks to the status of women in our society. I am an Eagle of the Thunderbird Clan and the House Lowered from the Sun from Klukwan in the Chilkat region. I am a Child of the Sockeye Clan.



Introduction

I identify myself as a member of a group rather than as an individual. Our clan membership and names further create bonds between our ancestors and our future generations—assuring me of an immortality or life through those who will carry my name.

Our clan homeland of Jilkáat Kwáan and our clan house in Klukwan provide an enduring link to our homeland and to our universe.



Introduction

Our clan crests and spirits—the Eagles, Thunderbird, Sun, Killer Whale, Shark, White Bear and the Sockeye Salmon—further solidify our physical and spiritual relationship to the land and our environment.

In addition, our clan claims ownership rights to the U.S. Naval military uniform and to the name “Lt. Frederick Schwatka” because Lt. Schwatka failed to pay a debt to my great, great grandfather for taking him over the Chilkoot Pass.



Group orientation

You can also see from my identity that our society, as well as those of all other Alaska Native cultures, have a group orientation rather than an individualistic orientation that is evident in most Western societies.

This group orientation underlies our core cultural values. The utilization of our environment and resources requires us to share our subsistence resources among our kin.

In Tlingit culture two interrelated values are identified as *Haa Aaní* and *Wooch Yáx*.



Group orientation: *Wooch Yáx*

Wooch Yáx requires maintaining social and spiritual balance. It calls for reciprocity or the exchange of resources between kin-related groups. If the balance or reciprocity is not maintained, ill will may go wandering and cause harm.

The resource sharing is most evident in the distribution of whales that are butchered and divided within the community according to prescribed rules. The division of the whale looks very similar to a graphic of a cow divided according to the different cuts of the meat.

Some parts of a harvested animal are reserved for Elders and special shares are also reserved for households without an active hunter.

You may have heard about Senator Albert Kookesh of Angoon who was charged for exceeding a permit allocation. Actually, he and other subsistence fishermen were combining their permits to catch salmon for the Angoon Senior Center residents.

Group orientation: *Haa Aanii*

The core cultural value of *Haa Aanii* speaks to utilizing the environment in such a way to care for future generations or what we would today call “sustainability.”

Delores Churchill, a renowned Haida basket weaver, tells the story of harvesting spruce roots. She says when pulling roots, “Oh, how much our ancestors cared for us. They didn’t take all of the roots, but left enough roots for the tree to survive for future generations of basket weavers.”



Subsistence economies

Most all rural communities in Alaska are characterized by dual economies or by a subsistence and cash economy.

Subsistence involves social, spiritual and economic dimensions.

- Social in terms of the kin-based harvest and distribution.
- Cultural in terms of the spiritual relationships between humans and flora and fauna. Native people believe that all animals, fish and birds have spirits and that we maintain spiritual relationships with them. We have established practices to ensure that the animals, fish and birds return.
- Subsistence as an economic system is the harvest, utilization and distribution of natural resources. Cash, however, is required to purchase equipment, supplies, rifles, ammo, etc.



Subsistence economies

Most all rural communities are economically depressed with few opportunities to earn a cash income, and more than likely they will remain this way for decades. Most rural communities lack the basic infrastructure to support economic development. The cost of energy is astronomically high.

Thus, subsistence remains critical for food security. The by-products of subsistence resources, including skin, furs, bones and shells, can be used for the production of arts and craft that can supplement one's income stream.

We have a large outmigration of rural residents to urban areas. Anchorage is now identified as the largest Native village. However, despite the depressed economies of rural regions, the villages have persisted.



Tribal corporations

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was enacted in 1971 to resolve the aboriginal land claims of Alaska Natives.

The settlement differed from previous aboriginal land claim settlements in the country in that corporations were used as the vehicle to implement the land claims.

Congress saw corporations as a means to assimilate Alaska Natives into the larger society with corporations, individual shares and a cash settlement of near \$1 billion.

Natives, on the other hand, saw corporations as a means to economic self determination and to have full control over their land rather than be subject to the Bureau of Indian Affairs that would serve as trustee over Native lands.



Tribal corporations

A unique provision of ANCSA is Section 7 (i) that requires regional corporations to share 70% of their profits from subsurface and timber development. For example, Sealaska has shared \$300 million with other regions.

ANCSA contained a provision that would lift the restrictions on the sale of stock in 1991.

In the mid-1980s, Alaska Natives became very concerned that they could lose their land with the sale of Alaska Native corporation stock and that provisions of ANCSA conflicted with their cultural values.



Tribal corporations

They went to Congress and sought amendments to ANCSA that I have called the retribalization of Native corporations:

- They were successful in continuing the restrictions unless the shareholders voted to lift the restriction;
- They allowed for the enrollment of new Natives or those Natives who were born after 1971, which the original ANCSA did not allow;
- They provided land bank protections for undeveloped land; and,
- They provided for special benefits for Elders and the establishment of settlement trusts.



Tribal corporations

Four regional corporations, including ASRC, NANA, Doyon and Sealaska, and ten village corporations have voted to enroll eligible Natives born after 1971 into their corporations. Traditionally, Natives owned land because they were *members of tribes* and not because they had inherited stock. The vote was a clear statistical indicator that Native cultural values survived.

Many of the ANCs are attempting to address the conflicts between development and traditional lifestyles. Some regions, including Bristol Bay, have rejected economic development such as the Pebble Mine that could provide significant employment and income opportunities.



Tribes

ANCSA did not extinguish tribes.

After decades of struggle, it has been firmly established that Alaska Natives maintain the special and unique relationship with the federal government and that a sovereign-to-sovereign relationship exists.

Over 200 village tribes exist along with two regional tribes in Southeast Alaska and the North Slope. They are tribes, however, without a land base.

These tribes receive federal funding to provide governmental services to their tribal members.



Gunalchéesh, Háw'aa, T'oyaxsn