

# みんなくりポジトリ

国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

## The Gwich'in Gathering : The Subsistence Tradition in Their Modern Life and the Gathering against Oil Development by the Gwich'in Athabascan

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 井上, 敏昭 メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.15021/00002695">https://doi.org/10.15021/00002695</a>

**The Gwich'in Gathering:  
The Subsistence Tradition in Their Modern Life and the Gathering  
against Oil Development by the Gwich'in Athabascan**

**Toshiaki INOUE**  
*Josai International University*  
*Togane, Japan*

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper focuses on “the Gwich'in Gathering,” a gathering against oil development by one of the Northern Athabascan<sup>1</sup> peoples, and the cultural/social importance of hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering activities in their modern society. In the subarctic area of North America, there are several groups of indigenous hunter-gatherers known as Northern Athabascan. Similar to other Native American societies, they participate in Western industrial nation-states as minority groups.

Since 1994, I have had several opportunities to stay with members of one of the Northern Athabascan hunter-gatherer groups, the Gwich'in,<sup>2</sup> in their rural communities in interior Alaska.<sup>3</sup> Although their daily lives are much involved with the monetary system and are affected by the industrial culture, I observed that the Gwich'in living in rural communities are still conducting their traditional subsistence activities such as hunting, trapping, fishing or gathering. Their diet relies on food, which has been obtained by these activities. They still maintain their tradition of sharing food of this kind with their relatives or neighbors.

In 1988, an oil-related development had been planned within the calving grounds of the Porcupine River Caribou herd. Because this herd has been an important source of game, the Gwich'in claimed that this development could damage the herd and change its migratory route and, as a result, put an end to the Gwich'in cultural tradition of living with caribou. They took political action to stop this development. The Gwich'in have argued that they have traditionally relied on caribou not only for subsistence but also for cultural survival. They refer to themselves as “the caribou people.” Since then, they have held a “Gwich'in Gathering” biennially to confer on the matter of this oil-related development.

In this paper, I would like to consider the meaning of the Gwich'in's modern way of life within the context of hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering. I will do so by reporting on “the 6th Gwich'in Gathering,” which I attended. All of the Gwich'in's utterances, statements and remarks, which have been quoted in this paper, as far as be noticed, were directly heard by the author while visiting Gwich'in communities. For quotations from statements and utterances of attendants of 6th Gwich'in Gathering, I also referred to newspaper articles which report the Gathering (Kadel 1998a; 1998b; 1998c). All of the cases, which are referred to in this chapter were directly observed by the author. The author is responsible for all quoting, and the wording used in all of these quotes.

## **THE GWICH'IN**

### **The Gwich'in and Their Territory**

The Gwich'in is one of the Northern Athabascan hunter-gatherer groups who speak dialects of the Gwich'in language, a member of the Northern Athabascan language family. They live on and around the flats of the Yukon and Mackenzie River systems of the Alaskan interior (U.S.A.) and northern Canada. Thus, they live on both sides of the border between the U.S.A. and Canada, although their political status and social-cultural situations are different in Alaska and Canada.

Formerly nomadic, the Gwich'in now comprise several settlements, including Fort Yukon, Circle, Venetie, Arctic Village, Chalkyitsik, Birch Creek, Beaver, Stevens Village and Eagle Village in Alaska, U.S.A., Old Crow in Yukon Territory, Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic Aklavik and Inuvik in Northwest Territory of Canada. They live in these settlements throughout the year, occasionally doing their traditional subsistence activities. It is very difficult to know how many people actually live in these settlements of northeastern Alaska and northwestern Canada (Fast 1995: 3–16). According to the statements by the Gwich'in Steering Committee, the population numbers over 7,000 (The Gwich'in Steering Committee 2003).

The climate of their territory is interior subarctic and the land is, for the most part, covered by boreal forest (Slobodin 1981: 514). This is the habitat of both large and small mammals such as moose, caribou, muskrat, beaver, wolverine, porcupine, snowshoe hare, mink, marten, and lynx that are targets for Gwich'in hunting and trapping activities. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) is located in the north of Gwich'in territory and is a habitat for the Porcupine River Caribou Herd. This herd regularly migrates through Gwich'in territory. Rivers of the Yukon and Mackenzie River systems that pass through Gwich'in territory also provide fish for the Gwich'in diet, such as chum salmon, silver salmon, chinook salmon, white fish, inconnu, grayling and northern pike. Within their territory, Gwich'in can also gather edible plants including a wide variety of berries.

### **The History of the Gwich'in and Oil Development around Their Territory**

At the time of their first contact with Europeans, the Gwich'in were nomadic hunter-gatherer who lived by hunting large mammals such as caribou, moose, or Dall sheep with bows and arrows or spears, and also caught caribou using caribou fences. They also hunted a variety of wildfowl with bows and arrows, trapped small mammals with snares and deadfalls, fished for fresh-water fish with spears and fish-traps, and gathered edible plants (Osgood 1936; Mckennan 1965; Slobodin 1962; 1981).

The earliest recorded encounter between the Gwich'in and Europeans occurred in 1789 when Alexander Mackenzie and his party met some 'Quarrelers' (Gwich'in) on the Mackenzie River (Osgood 1936: 17; Slobodin 1981: 528). From the 19th century, several European trading companies began to establish trading posts for the fur trade in and around Gwich'in territory (Yerbury 1986). From the middle of the 19th century to the early 20th century, after the Hudson's Bay Company established trading posts there, Gwich'in living in the drainage basin of the Yukon River began to have continuous contact with Europeans

traders through trading animal furs for industrial products (Slobodin 1962: 16–30; 1981: 529). The Gwich'in, using their skills, knowledge and technologies for living in the bush, came to have access to industrial tools for bush life such as guns and steel knives, as well as luxury goods such as beads, tobacco and tea. This trading changed the Gwich'in lifestyle. Instead of being nomadic, they took up temporary residence around the trading posts where there was easy access to European traders, (Nelson 1986: 276–277; VanStone 1974: 96–104).

Following the inclusion of Alaska in the amended Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1936, Alaskan Gwich'in communities established village councils to govern their lands in the early 1940s. The U.S. Department of the Interior created several reservations for Native Alaskans, such as the Chandalar Native Reserve, which included Arctic Village and Venetie (Arnold 1978: 86–87). Around this period, most Gwich'in began to settle permanently, mainly because as children became established in schools their families found it impractical to stay away from permanent settlements (Nelson 1986: 279–280; Shimpo 1993: 13–59).

In 1968, oil was discovered in Prudhoe Bay. To develop this oil deposit, several oil companies requested permission to build a pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to the Gulf of Alaska. However, the permit for this plan depended on the result of long pending land claims by Alaska Natives (Davidson 1993: 26). In 1971, the U.S. Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act or ANCSA (Public Law 92–203) to bring Alaska Native land claims to an end. This act was designed to transform Alaska Native villages into economic entities, based on village corporations and each Alaska Native became a shareholder in one of these corporations. Unlike most other Alaska Natives, the Gwich'in of the Chandalar Native Reserve used a special clause in ANCSA and elected to take possession of their former lands, and established “The Venetie Indian Reserve.” Two settlements located within the boundary of this reserve, Venetie and Arctic Village, have not established village corporations. “The Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government,” representing both villages, maintains their authority over their lands. Gwitchyaa Zhee Corporation, the village corporation of Fort Yukon, also transferred their land to the Gwitchyaa Gwich'in Tribal Government (Native Village of Fort Yukon) in 1993.

In 1988, the State of Alaska and several oil companies started lobbying to develop oil and gas in the coastal plain within the boundaries of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). ANWR is located in the north of Gwich'in territory and is a habitat for the Porcupine River Caribou herd. A caribou herd is defined as a group of caribou that traditionally calves in an area distinct from other groups. Each spring they migrate from their winter range in the boreal forests of the Chandalar, Porcupine and Peel Rivers,<sup>4</sup> north to their spring calving and nursery grounds on the Arctic coastal plain of northeastern Alaska and Yukon through the Gwich'in traditional territory.

This oil-related development had been planned within this coastal plain where the calving/post-calving ground of the caribou herd is located. The Gwich'in strongly argued that this could damage the herd and change its migratory route through Gwich'in territory and, as a result, put an end to the Gwich'in cultural tradition of living with caribou. So, the Gwich'in took legal and political action to stop this development, although some other Alaska Natives supported it.

The Gwich'in activists have argued that they have traditionally relied on caribou not

only for subsistence but also for cultural survival. According to them, caribou is not just food but a very important aspect of their cultural and spiritual world for all of the Gwich'in people. So, this development brings not just a problem of supplying food to a remote settlement, which could be fulfilled through compensation, but a crisis of cultural survival for the Gwich'in.

## **CULTURAL TRADITION AND SOCIAL LIFE BASED ON SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES**

### **Subsistence Activities in the Local Community**

Gwich'in daily lives are now much involved with industrial material culture. Many shuttle planes come and go regularly between each of their communities and Fairbanks, providing industrial supplies to the residents of rural settlements. Apart from food that can be obtained through their subsistence activities, they usually buy and eat food and drink such as bread, eggs, hamburger meat, crackers, coffee, milk or canned soda. Store purchased Western-style clothes are generally worn. Likewise, their lives in the settlements rely on electrical devices such as electric lights and refrigerators as well as TV sets or video cassette recorders similar to other American households. Their transportation relies on manufactured devices such as automobiles, all terrain vehicles, snowmobiles and riverboats with outboard motor.

Despite this, most Gwich'in who live in local settlements continue to hunt, trap, fish and gather. Hunting and trapping, in particular, are actively and frequently practiced by Gwich'in men. They often go out using snowmobiles, all terrain vehicles or riverboats, to hunt moose and caribou with high-powered rifles or to hunt waterfowl with shotguns. They also set traps and snares regularly to capture small mammals to obtain meat. Even Gwich'in living in urban areas, such as Fairbanks, eventually visit rural settlements and conduct hunting for moose or caribou. Also, the Gwich'in living in rural settlements often conduct hunting trips to other settlements to hunt particular species. For instance, Gwich'in living in Fort Yukon make a trip to Arctic Village through their network of relatives to hunt caribou, which cannot be obtained in the Fort Yukon area.

Most Gwich'in households living in Fove Yukon and other settlements in upper Yukon area have their own fish-wheel or fishnets and catch large quantities of the salmon every summer. These settlements are located beside tributaries of the Yukon River system, which makes it easy to access good fishing spots from people's homes, without requiring overnight stays in the bush as in the past. Generally the Gwich'in love fish and preserve stockpiles of them by drying or smoking, going back and forth to their fishnets or fish wheels during the summer. The Gwich'in also still gather several kinds of berries such as low-bush and high-bush cranberry or raspberry. They regularly go picking berries in August. They still have a thorough knowledge of flora around their territory, especially how to find edible plants.

Overall, the Gwich'in prefer to eat food obtained by their own efforts, rather than food that comes from outside their subsistence economy. They hunt, trap, fish and gather not only on special occasions but also in their everyday lives. These foods are still indispensable to their everyday diet. According to the study by Sumida and Anderson, "all Fort Yukon

households used some type of wild resources during the course of the survey period (1986–87) and an estimated 91.5 percent of all households made direct attempts at harvesting” (Sumida and Davidson 1990: 43).

They also practice traditional crafts of beadwork, and ways of making clothing using furs or skins of animals that they have hunted or trapped. Traditional clothing and the products of traditional beadwork are used in everyday life, but are especially important during festivities and/or as part of public presentations made by representatives of their ethnic group (Inoue 1999: 37–43) and as special gifts (Duncan 1997: 15).

It is important to note that the Gwich'in are in a legal position to continue their subsistence activities. Although some species of animals are protected from sport/commercial hunting by Alaska state regulations, indigenous Alaskans, including Gwich'in, are exempt from this regulation due to their Native rights. Even during the closed season, if Natives genuinely need the meat of protected animals for traditional rituals or feasts, their tribal council can ask the Government of the State of Alaska to grant permission to catch such animals. Also, Alaska Natives can use government food stamps, normally only to be exchanged for food, to purchase ammunitions or shotgun shells, or fishnets for their subsistence activities.

#### **“Real Foods” and Gwich'in Custom of Sharing**

According to Gwich'in, all meat and edible plants, which they have obtained from their land through their hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering activities should be considered “real foods.” They also call these kinds of food “traditional foods” or “native foods,” so, it is reasonable to note that they regard these foods are traditional for them.

“Real foods” contain good substances for their bodies and minds. One Gwich'in told me that “there are no poisons in it [meat of caribou, moose, or fish]” so, “it makes our bodies strong.” By contrast, food, sold in stores is “substitute” food. Moreover fancy foods, such as coffee or candy, are sometimes considered to be “poison” because they contain many substances, which are “bad” for people’s bodies and minds. In fact, some Gwich'in consume such “poisons” everyday. According to one Gwich'in, when she stays in an urban area, her body always gets into bad condition because of the “bad foods” she has to eat. Once she returns to her home settlement, her body always recovers because she can eat meats of caribou and fish. Many Gwich'in agree that, even when they have eaten enough Western food, they still feel hungry until they have had some “real foods.”

“Real foods” should not be exchanged for money, even inside Gwich'in communities. Even today, the Gwich'in share the meat of animals and fish from their subsistence activity with relatives, neighbors and friends. Sometimes, they send meat of caribou, moose or fish to their relatives or friends living in other settlements or urban areas. They always offer plates of this kind of food to visitors to their home. Food or drink purchased from stores can also be given to relatives or close friends who ask for it without payment. But, it is only for Western food, which Gwich'in commonly exchange and barter with each other.

One of the primary reasons for this taboo is that selling wild meat of mammals is illegal for any person in Alaska. However, the reason given by Gwich'in themselves relates, not to the illegality of this behavior according to a Western regulation, but to the fact that

these meats should be shared with relatives, friends and neighbors without being exchanged because that is their traditional way (also see Caulfield 1983: 58–59; Nelson 1986: 111). Indeed, the Gwich'in maintain their custom of sharing food within their society even today. People can obtain food without payment. I observed that, even when able to reciprocate immediately, people generally avoid doing so because that could be interpreted to mean that they do not wish to maintain a social relationship with the giver.<sup>5</sup> They also seem to consider that a person should not refuse another's offer because this damages social relationships in their community. At the same time, the Gwich'in usually feel uncomfortable to stay in a position of being a one-sided receiver.

Many Gwich'in feel that this custom of sharing is very hard for outsiders to understand. According to one Gwich'in, "white people<sup>6</sup>" tend to feel uncomfortable if a Gwich'in offers them something without payment being involved—they tend to try to reciprocate immediately to feel free of the obligation. They also pointed out that it is often impossible to believe that the Gwich'in still maintain their traditional custom of sharing, even for members of other Native American groups. Gwich'in people proud that they still try to maintain their traditional customs, and that Gwich'in values are different from those of Western capitalism.

### **Superiority of Matters Concerned with "Living within the Bush"**

Besides food, Gwich'in tend to put a high value on other items, which are regarded as being associated with their traditional lifestyle. One of the best-known Athabascan crafts is beadwork. Their beadwork is applied primarily on animal skins, which they obtain through hunting. The beadwork was introduced to their aboriginal tradition of quillwork after contact with Europe through the fur trade. Although originally introduced by Europeans, nowadays, beadwork is regarded as an Athabascan Native craft, by both Athabascans and non-Athabascans. The Gwich'in still produce a variety of beadwork such as pairs of dance moccasins, mittens or gloves, gun cases, or baby straps. The Gwich'in apply their beadwork to daily necessities and use them in daily life, but beadwork plays an especially important role on special gifts to relatives and friends. That is, it is used to maintain their social relationship within their community. It also has cultural importance as a visible symbol of their ethnic group. The representatives of groups or settlements of the Gwich'in often wear caribou or moose skin jackets with beautiful beadwork on their shoulders as their "formal wear" rather than a Western suit, both within and outside their community. Especially, on traditional occasions such as the gathering or other traditional rituals, and on occasions when they go out of their community as representatives of the Gwich'in or Native Americans, the Gwich'in people tend to wear this kind of outfit, especially jackets or shirts made of moose or caribou hide, as their formal wear. It is reasonable to say that the traditional wearing of beaded moose or caribou skin is a social sign to indicate that the wearer is Gwich'in Athabascan. Especially, when they are going to meet non-Natives, jackets or shirts of caribou/moose skin are a cultural symbol of their tradition. The former Chief of Native Village of Fort Yukon tribal government said that he attended one party hosted by the President of the U.S., requiring a formal dress and tie, wearing his beaded moose skin Chief's jacket (Duncan 1997; Inoue 1999).

However, there are exceptions to the Gwich'in rejection of things Western. Gwich'in

hunters never compare firearms, steel knives, outboard motor boats and the like to the bows and arrows, bone knives, or birch-bark canoes which their ancestors used. Indeed, these industrially produced tools have largely, or often completely, replaced traditional ones. The difference between these tools and other Western goods, such as food, is that the tools are used mainly for hunting, trapping or fishing, and allow these activities to continue. Gwich'in hunters never hesitate to use these Western devices, and are proud of their knowledge of and their ability to handle them. Experienced Gwich'in hunters tend to be careful in their selection of equipment for their activities and are proud of their thorough knowledge about their equipment and their skill in choosing the best products. They also have almost perfect skills for maintaining and repairing them.

In fact, such knowledge and skills are indispensable for their modern hunting activities. They consider their ability to handle these tools as a part of their survival skills and regard these tools themselves as integral to their traditional activities. They do not compare Western tools negatively with their traditional ones, but proudly compare their ability to handle them with that of non-Gwich'in.

### **The Role of Hunting Traditions in Relationships between the Gwich'in and the Outside the World**

As I have mentioned before, Gwich'in, like other Natives, are usually disadvantaged in their relations with "white people" mainly because of discrimination. On average, they were forced to work under Western job customs. However, in some jobs, such as acting as hunting guides, military survival instructors, and acting as advisors to the State's Department of Fish and Game, Gwich'in individuals are able to have some control over their own situation. In particular, their orders are respected by others. It is important to note that in these jobs they are required to share their knowledge about their land and game, and to use their skills gained from personal experience through their traditional activities, that is, their way of living with their land. In other words, such knowledge and skills are advantageous and enable Gwich'in to improve their situation. The experience and skills gained from their subsistence activities are the key to changing their social relationships with Western people and Western society.

In addition, their traditional way of hunting forms an "untouchable" domain, separate from the outside world. As I have mentioned, the Gwich'in put a high value on "real foods". It is also important to note that "real food," especially wild mammals, are never obtained through commercial transactions, nor is it permitted by law for non-Natives to catch wild mammals for commercial purposes. Thus, obtaining and sharing "real foods" or the making and using of traditional garments form a domain of Gwich'in life, which non-Natives can never invade. This domain is concerned with their tradition of hunting and other subsistence activities. They obtain "real food" only through these activities, and share them through their traditional customs. All in all, in modern Gwich'in daily life, hunting activities and bush skills are very important not only for local subsistence but also for social life, especially in the context of relationships with members of the wider society.

#### **4. GWICH'IN GATHERING**

##### **The History of Gwich'in Gathering**

In 1988, just after oil-related development plans were announced, the Gwich'in on both sides of the border called for a meeting in Arctic Village, Alaska, and talked to each other about the development within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. It was natural that they chose Arctic Village to hold this meeting because it is the closest settlement to ANWR and, it has been used as a base for caribou hunting even by the Gwich'in living in other areas. Over 500 people attended that meeting from all of the Gwich'in settlements in Alaska and Canada. They followed their traditional way of gathering for a conference. They used only their own language during the meeting. Only one speaker was allowed to make a speech at a time. All other attendants would listen and would never interrupt the speaker before the end of their speech. At first, they also had prohibited the taking of written records for this meeting because of their tradition. But later, they recognized the importance of announcing the results of this meeting to the public. As a result, they prepared their written public statement titled "Gwich'in Niintsyaa: Resolution to Prohibit Development in the Calving and Post-calving Grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd" and made it available to the public (also see The Gwich'in Steering Committee 2003).

In this meeting, the Gwich'in Steering Committee was established "to protect our people, caribou, land, air and water." Its primary goal was "to establish Gwich'in cultural survival as a major issue in the debate over oil development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge" (The Gwich'in Steering Committee 2003). They also resolved to hold this kind of meeting biennially as "the Gwich'in Gathering." The settlement for holding "the gathering" was chosen from both Alaskan and Canadian settlements, in which the Gwich'in people are a majority. They think that to protect the Porcupine Caribou herd within the Alaskan refuge is a serious problem not only for the Gwich'in living in Alaska, but also for those living in Canada.

The Gwich'in Steering Committee started to act to stop the development. They made their appeal through all kinds of media. They also asked tribal groups of Native Americans in the whole of the United States to support their activity. Although the Committee had many difficulties on the way, they were able to stop the development at least temporarily. In 1992, the U.S. Senate passed a drastically modified energy bill, which did block drilling in ANWR.

The Gwich'in haven't stopped their activity to protect the Porcupine Caribou herd. They are watching what may happen during President George W. Bush's term in the White House. The Gwich'in activists are attempting to change the status of the coastal plain of ANWR to "national monument" or "bio-cultural reserve," which would close off the land to the prospect of future oil-related development. They are lobbying former President Jimmy Carter to ask his support in changing the status of that area.

##### **Outline of Agenda for 6th Biennial Gwich'in Giikhii Gathering**

"The 6th biennial Gwich'in Giikhii Gathering" was held from June 22nd to 26th 1998 in Fort Yukon, Alaska. All of the sessions and events were held at the community gymnasium located in the downtown area of Fort Yukon. Games and events for "alcohol awareness

week” were held separately at the Community Care Center. The actual gathering did not follow it exactly, but we can see the outline of the agenda for the gathering as follows.

Everyday, they opened their meeting with a traditional dance by the dance groups of different settlements. Although it was not mentioned, this is not just a dance performance but also has an importance as an “opening prayer.” The traditional dance and prayer were also performed between sessions.

On the mornings of June 23rd to 25th, they started sessions about social problems that they were involved in, including ANWR development. Sessions continued throughout the day, covering a variety of topics. From around 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm, they had a Potlatch at the same place everyday. After the Potlatch, they held cultural events such as a talent show, a “give away potlatch,” or traditional outfit contest followed by a dance party, which continued until midnight.

### **Modern Gwich'in in “Two Worlds”**

To consider how they can act against oil development on the coastal plain of ANWR to protect their way of living is still the most important subject of the gathering. The main subject in the session about ANWR development was to consider how they should educate the importance of caribou in the social and spiritual life of the Gwich'in to non-Gwich'in people.

At first, they confirmed the legitimacy of the relationship between the Gwich'in and the caribou:

For thousands of years, our ancestors relied on the Porcupine River Caribou Herd. Each spring they watch first the pregnant cows, and later the bulls and yearlings leave their country in their northern migration to the coastal plain at the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge;

The caribou of the Porcupine Caribou herd have provided the Gwich'in with a high proportion of food and raw materials for clothing and a multitude of tools, weapons, ornaments, and ritual objects for thousands of years;

This is the caribou birthing place and nursing grounds. The Gwich'in are caribou people. Today, as in the days of our ancestors, the caribou is still vital for food, clothing, tools, and are a source of respect and spiritual guidance for the Gwich'in.

The conference shifted to focus on the spiritual importance of caribou for Gwich'in:

In mythical times, the Gwich'in and the caribou lived in peaceful harmony;

In a time, when all creatures spoke the same language, our ancestor and the caribou were one. Even now, long after they evolved into two different beings, it is said that every caribou has a bit of our heart in it, and every one of us has a bit of caribou heart;

The birthplace of the Porcupine River Caribou herd is considered Sacred. The Gwich'in call it "Vadzaih googii vi dehk'it gwanlii," the Sacred Place Where Life Begins.

It seemed very difficult for others, especially to non-Native Americans, to comprehend such statements because they sounded too mythic and abstract. But actually, all of those statements have been backed up by the Gwich'in's practical experience of daily life. As we mentioned, caribou is the "real food" for the Gwich'in people, and traditional outfits made of caribou skin confirm that the person who wears it is Gwich'in. Hunting large animals such as caribou is deeply integrated with Gwich'in social identity. Also, their bush skill for hunting provides certain advantages to the Gwich'in in their relationship with non-Natives. Most of the Gwich'in adult male have at least experienced hunting caribou, or still continue to hunt caribou or other large animals. Even for females or children, they often have a chance to eat caribou meat, which is provided through the network of sharing. They also are familiar with legends of caribou and hear many stories about hunting caribou from their husband, brothers, father or grandfather. But, it is very hard to promote or recreate such feelings about daily experiences for someone who has not lived in their land.

To break through this difficulty, they seemed to be trying to change their tough, closed attitude of their society to outsiders to a more open one. One of the important subjects of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, which led this session, was how they could use the mass media to broadcast their statements to the world. Another main concern was using the internet to send their message from door to door.

Sarah James, the Chair of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, concluded the session as follows:

We are in this political position against a powerful opponent, the oil companies. We need to continue to work and allow no compromise. This needs to be reaffirmed at each gathering.

One speaker added:

As Indian people, we have to protect these calving grounds. We have to protect the spawning grounds and the nesting grounds. We are one nation and one voice against oil development. I want to hear it. Are you going to continue protecting those grounds?

The audience showed their approval by applauding.

Although they are separated by the border between Canada and U.S.A., the Gwich'in on both sides still maintain a close relationship and connection. Especially, after the plan for ANWR development was announced, the Gwich'in leaders from both sides are working together to organize "the Gwich'in Nation." The flag of "the Gwich'in Nation" was displayed on the wall of gym. The banner proclaimed: "united to protect our natural resources."

During the week of the gathering, several other subjects were discussed in separate sessions. In the session on the Yukon River watershed, they discussed how they could protect

their environment working together with other Native. "The Gwich'in Nation," as a member of "the Yukon River Intertribal Watershed Council," is cooperating with other member of this council in working to protect the environment of the Yukon River watershed. In the session of the gathering, for example, they decided to work eliminate the use of Styrofoam dishes and plastic bags in the community. They also decided to create battery collection sites as a way to reduce hazardous pollution. They insisted that they could reaffirm their opposition to oil development in ANWR by protecting the Yukon River watershed. In another session, the leaders agreed that each community should stand strong against substance abuse such as alcoholism or drug abuse inside their community.

They followed their traditional way of meeting during the session. Only one speaker, who was indicated by holding "the talking stick" made of diamond willow, was allowed to make a speech at any one time. All other attendants listened and never interrupted his/her speech until the speaker was finished. Unlike Western debates, speakers were not divided into two groups such as "con" and "pro." Speakers never attacked others' weak points or inconsistencies, but concentrated on stating their own idea about the subject. According to their tradition, the session will continue, and speakers may take as many turns as necessary to reach a consensus. During this process, speakers may hear good points from each other, and they may make up a new idea, and reach a consensus. Indeed, it is a very natural and reasonable way, but it is not suitable for arguments about subjects with deadlines, since no one knows when they will reach a consensus. To solve most of the problems the Gwich'in are now facing, they need to work with or fight against non-Gwich'in societies. That is, most of their subjects must observe deadlines if they want to get the desired results. Of course, the Gwich'in people understand the importance to meet the deadline within the context of the Western way. However, it seemed that it was not natural for the Gwich'in people to do so at the expense of their traditional way of making decisions.

Outside the gym, I heard some Gwich'in criticize the sessions:

They talk only on the surface. They are too easy to reach a result. They made many compromises without talking enough. There are also many steamrolling;

I don't like this kind of gathering because they never try to understand each other. They don't talk enough about our problem. It is too short.

Of course, the leaders who lead sessions of the gathering knew about these problems. They face cultural gaps not only in court, but also in their own community.

In the session by the Gwich'in youth to pursue education and to preserve the Gwich'in language, I could hear their struggle to survive in two different worlds:

We have to learn modern Western ways as much as Indian ways. It's two different educations, two different worlds. That is how we live today. If we are going to be healthy in our lives, we need to know both worlds. Real change will only come when Gwich'in people run the institutions that govern them;

We have to learn the white man's ways so we can come back and help our people. I want to learn all I can and maybe be a chief someday.

They also argued the importance of passing on their traditions, especially their language, to the next generation:

We cannot rely on schools to teach our kids Gwich'in language. We have to teach our language ourselves. The reason why we don't know our language is because it wasn't spoken to us. We are willing to learn;

Using the distance learning program, we can get a college degree living in the village. We never have to leave. So, we can learn both (the Gwich'in language and subjects being taught in college);

To preserve our language, we should go one step further. Tribal schools should be established. The tribes must have total language immersion from preschool. You must learn in Gwich'in (language), study history in Gwich'in. If you learn history in English, you can see only white man's point of view.

Their statements reflect a sense of an impending identity crisis, which the Gwich'in youth have. They knew that many of them, especially those who live in urban areas, lose touch with their traditional values. On the other hand, they are facing strong discrimination against Natives. The Gwich'in youths who attended this session seemed to regard Western ways as tools to govern themselves and to protect their way of living. On the other hand, passing on the traditions, including their language, should be done by themselves in their traditional way.

Originally, this youth session was not given a place on the gathering agenda. However, the Gwich'in youths of both Canada and Alaska gathered together to discuss their vision for the future. Like other sessions, they also followed the Gwich'in way of discussion, and held the talking stick of diamond willow when speaking. In the statement of the gathering on the last day, the leaders of the gathering apologized to the young Gwich'in and agreed that they needed to listen to the opinion of future leaders.

#### **“Potlatch”: The Feast for Affirming Social Ties**

After sessions, “the potlatch” was held as supper everyday. The word “potlatch” is the term in English conversation by Alaskan Gwich'in for their traditional practice of feasting (Gwich'in living in Canada tend to use the word “feast” for the same meaning). Several kinds of ceremony known as “potlatch” have been practiced among the Northern Athabaskan society (Simeone 1995). The Gwich'in society used to be composed of three matrilineal clans and, traditionally, members of the potlatch giver's own clan would help in things such as collecting gifts. They then invited leaders or elders of other clans as their main guests. The giver gave gifts and treated the guests unilaterally. So, it is reasonable to say that traditional potlatches among Gwich'in society were feasts in which the Gwich'in could display the

potential relationship of opposition among clans. Even now, the Gwich'in holds the potlatch when people come together such as the Christmas/New Year season or when they have large events. But most of the potlatches held by Gwich'in nowadays are no longer social events to express the opposition between clans or other groups. They are large feasts, which are held as luncheons or dinner parties.

Potlatches were held from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. everyday during the week of the gathering at the community gym of Fort Yukon. During the time for the Potlatch, the gym was full all the time. In these Potlatches, any conflicts between particular groups were not expressed. It seemed like just a free supper. But, participants of the potlatch can meet relatives and friends who live in remote settlements. Especially for young people living in urban areas, the potlatch is an important opportunity to meet elders who know about their traditions. They can also rebuild a connection to the society of the rural community, so they can learn their tradition again. Thus, for Gwich'in people, the potlatch creates an opportunity to reaffirm the tribal ties and for connecting with their tradition.

Although there were some plates cooked from ready-made materials, the plates of "real foods" such as boiled caribou meat, moose head soup, barbequed salmon, or cranberry jam were regarded as main dishes in the potlatch. It is important to note that all of the "real foods," served in the Potlatch were donated by participants. Especially, the meat of animals or fish, which are rare in the Fort Yukon area, were donated by people from other settlements. For example, caribou meat was a gift from Arctic Village of Alaska and Old Crow of Canada, chinook salmon were donated by Stevens Village. People also worked as voluntary cooks or waiters for the potlatch. Participants were encouraged to bring plates back to their family. Thus, the whole system of the potlatch was a large display of the traditional way of sharing. People donated "real foods" to share with each other and did voluntary work. They could eat for free, and brought plates back to their family. Participants of the potlatch, especially children from urban areas, also could see the essence of the traditional way of sharing, and could practice it.

### **Cultural Events: The Display of Traditions and Way of Passing Them**

After the dinner potlatch, they held several events for entertainment everyday. On the 24th, they had a talent show. In this event, participants showed their skills or accomplishments in front of the audience and competed for a prize. Although, there were some participants who played the guitar and sang American country music, most of the skills they showed were concerned with Gwich'in bush life. Some showed their skill of imitating animal sounds such as moose or duck, which have been used to call the game they have been hunting. Some others showed their talent for "story telling." This is the skill of telling their experience or an original story humorously. The Gwich'in used to tell funny stories to avoid freezing to death, or suffering from cabin fever. Another young Gwich'in showed his skill in the "hot potato," their traditional game in which a player tries to keep a ball in the air. He tried it only by kicking, so it looked like ball juggling in soccer, but he used a smaller ball made of caribou (or moose) hide stuffed with hair, as is the traditional way.

There were several judges for this contest, but the participants also seemed to be judged by the audience reaction. As soon as the winner received a prize, some audience members

asked the winner to pay for a party to be held that night. In Gwich'in society, a person with extra property should share them with the public—or at least must not try to hide them—and distribute them to others who ask. In fact, many private parties were held at night during the gathering week. To hold a private party, every participant should do something; for example, one male brings moose meat, which he took to the party, another buys dozens of “pop” (canned soda) to share. Even if short of money or food, people can go to carry a container of water. One Gwich'in described this as follows: “We take care of each other.”

On the night of the 25th, one of the elders of Fort Yukon hosted “the give away potlatch.” This potlatch was practiced in more traditional style than dinner potlatches, which were held every evening. The potlatch giver invited several people who had helped him as main guests, and gave them a number of gifts of valuables in front of the audience. This type of potlatch used to be held as a person's passing ritual, especially as a memorial potlatch for an important person. But recently, it is very rare to hold this potlatch in Gwich'in society because it is too expensive to prepare.

The giver invited over ten men as main guests to the give away potlatch that night, and the gym was full with the audience. At first, the giver, helped by his family and relatives, displayed his gifts at the center of the gym. He made a speech to open the ceremony, and called on the main guests in turn and announced their achievements. All of the guests would stand in front of piles of gifts facing the audience. The giver expressed his thanks to the guests, stating their achievements again and passed gifts to them. The list of gifts for each of the main guests was as follows: one hunting lever action rifle or a 12-gauge shotgun (costs over \$300 each), several cartons of ammunition or shot-shell for the gun, one moose hide gun case finished with traditional beadwork and one industry-made blanket. The combination of gun, blanket and beadwork is very popular as gifts in Northern Athabaskan potlatches since the fur trade era (Simeone 1995). Guests were passed gifts from the host in front of the audience. They hugged the giver. Most of the guests made a thank you speech in front of the audience and showed their gifts to the audience.

After that, family members or young relatives of the giver started to distribute gifts to the audience. Valuable things such as expensive blankets or beadwork went to respected elders, and smaller gifts such as T-shirts or work gloves were distributed to everyone there. They also passed gifts to outsiders like me. The presents to the audience seemed very important in this potlatch. The audience checked everything; the quality and quantity of gifts, whether the guests' achievements were worthy of receiving gifts or not, the giver's behavior, and the speech of all attendants. All of these affected evaluations of both host and guests.

After the give away potlatch, they held “the traditional outfit contest.” In this event, entrants competed with their traditional costumes of beaded caribou or moose hide. Over 30 people entered the contest, but the majority of entrants were young males and females in their late-teens or twenty's. At first, they walked around in the gym to show their outfits to the audience. Then, they stopped in front of the judges and paused. A great cheer arose from the audience.

After the daily and special events such as the talent show, “the give away potlatch” or the traditional outfits contest, the audience enjoyed a dance party till midnight. The dance music, which is played when the Gwich'in people join together, is “Athabaskan fiddle

(violin) music.” Although the Scottish traders of the Hudson’s Bay Company brought it to their society, today, it is regarded as the traditional music of Northern Athabaskan. The Athabaskan fiddlers and their bands play a variety of fiddle music, and there are also many kinds of dances for each variety of music. The most popular dance with the Gwich’in is “the jig dance.” Accompanied with a tune in fast tempo, couples entered in turn and danced with fast steps. Because only one couple is allowed to dance at a time, a couple can dance only until the next couple enters. Although there were no particular judges, the jig dance could be regarded as a kind of contest because it is danced one-by-one in front of an audience and dancers can win applause from the audience if they dance well. Thus, most of the entrants to the jig dance were young couples who had the confidence to dance the jig. They had prepared beautiful pairs of dance moccasins of beaded moose or caribou hide trimmed with beaver or rabbit fur. That is because the audience would watch their stepping feet.

On one night, a lady in her eighties entered the jig dance. Then, not only her partner but also all of the other male entrants circled her and danced to show their respect to her, and the fiddle band played louder. One of the male dancers told me that he could feel a strong bond, which transcended the age gap. One of the hosts of the gathering agreed and said, “It is a way we give each other strength and show recognition for our elders.”

Another kind of dance performed to a slower tune such as “the two step” allowed everyone to enjoy dancing. Many people danced “the two steps” with their old friends to affirm their friendship. This kind of dancing was also a good opportunity to build new relationships. When I took pictures of people dancing “the two steps,” one of my friends teased me: “Hey Toshi, why don’t you catch a girl and join us? This is the way at Fort Yukon.”

It is important to note that most of the events were concerned with their tradition. In the talent show, the audience could watch and listen to the entrants’ skill in duck calling or moose calling, and could enjoy the traditional story telling. Attending the “give away potlatch,” people could be a part of a traditional ritual. By being part of the audience for the traditional outfit contest, people could confirm what their traditional wear was. In addition, there were many opportunities to maintain social ties with people of different generations or from different areas. So, it is reasonable to point out that those events were not just for entertainment during the party. They were important opportunities to affirm the originality of their culture, the social bond of the tribe and to reconfirm their identity. In addition, those events were also good opportunities to teach their tradition to young children, especially those who lived in urban areas where these traditional things cannot be experienced. Attending those events, young people were encouraged to learn a variety of traditions and actually practiced them. So, those events provide many opportunities to display the Gwich’in traditions to affirm their social bond, and helped to pass them on to young generations.

### **The Closing Ceremony**

On the morning of the last day, some Gwich’in performed prayer combined with a song and dance just as they had on other mornings of the week. The fiddle band played Christian songs, and the audience joined-in to sing some of them. After lunch, the Priest of the Episcopal Church performed a divine service for closing the gathering. Deacons

and volunteers brought the altar from St. Stephen Episcopal Church of Fort Yukon for the service. An attendant sang hymns. So, ceremonies from two different “religions” had been held in succession at the same place. But I didn’t hear any complaints about this from Gwich’in people. It seemed to symbolize the modern Gwich’in life. Nowadays, most of the Gwich’in are Christian, but many of them are also keeping their traditional point of view of the world. Some others never regard themselves as Christians and try to regain their traditional religion, but they never bother their Christian neighbors.

After the service, the First Chief of the Native Village of Fort Yukon Tribal Government, who hosted this gathering, concluded with the results of the sessions. All of the results were announced in turn, and the audience rose to their feet and applauded to give their consent to each of them in turn.

After that, the First Chief presented a commendation ceremony for those who served in the gathering. At first, he thanked the chiefs of the 14 other Gwich’in settlements of both Alaska and Canada. Special appreciation was given to the first chief of Chalkyitsik who worked as a partner to the Chief of Fort Yukon. The leader of Fort McPherson was also called upon as a representative of the Canadian residents to receive a gift from their Alaskan partners. Then, the Fort McPherson leader called all of the participants from Canada to show their appreciation to the people of Fort Yukon. Leaders hosting the gathering passed letters of appreciation to all of the staff and volunteers who served at the gathering. They also announced the names of donors who provided money or services to help support the gathering. Finally, they called the representative of Inuvik, the Canadian settlement where the Gwich’in and the Inuit live together, to thank them for their donation of Inuit food. The ceremony closed with dancing by the dance group from the Canadian settlement. The people of Fort Yukon offered food and drinking water to people who were going to go back to remote settlements by riverboat.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Struggle with the Gap between Two Different Senses of Value**

In the preceding sections we have described the Gwich’in Gathering. As I have mentioned, “real foods,” which are obtained through hunting, trapping, fishing or gathering, should not be sold but shared among Gwich’in people through their traditional way. One Gwich’in stated:

Caribou is not just a food but what makes Natives connect together, and help us confirm “who we are.”

Thus, “real foods” such as caribou meat is connected not only with Gwich’in physical survival but also with their traditional way of life. Their custom of sharing “real foods” is a key to maintaining social relationships within their community. They never refuse someone’s request for food nor pay back immediately for someone’s offering because this behavior causes disruption of their potential relationship of mutual aid and interdependence. The Gwich’in people never behave in a way that could cut the chain of symbiotic relations

because if they behaved that way, they would have to give up social relationships in their community. Thus, "real foods" provide opportunities to maintain their social bonds to other Gwich'in people. Furthermore, maintaining their sharing or interdependence tradition is one of the important sources of group identity to the Gwich'in. As we have seen, the Gwich'in can be distinguished from "white peoples" or "highway Indians" by their practice of this custom. In addition, their subsistence activities and sharing customs for "real foods" forms a domain, which the non-Native can never invade. Thus, it is reasonable to support the idea that maintaining traditional subsistence activities and the custom of sharing foods are necessary to form the group identity for the Gwich'in in their modern life. In other words, these are indispensable to maintaining their group identity.

Indeed, a clause of ANCSA defines the term "Native" as follows:

"Native" means a citizen of the United States who is a person of one-fourth degree or more Alaskan Indian, Eskimo or Aleut blood, or combination thereof (Public Law 92-203).

Legally that is true and, this legal definition affects many aspects of the Alaskan Natives' economy and social life. But for Gwich'in people, the blood quantum seems to be less important than to live as Gwich'in. Of course, they never regard people who are not related to any descent group in Gwich'in society, as "Gwich'in." Actually, one Gwich'in said "any person has to be born Gwich'in to be Gwich'in." However, for anyone related to a Gwich'in person, that is, someone regarded as "Gwich'in" by other member of their society, what is more important is how they live; whether they practice hunting, fishing and gathering to obtain "real foods" or at least connect with and contribute to their system of sharing "real foods" within their society. Any person behaving in this way, even persons who do not satisfy the ANCSA regulation of blood quantum, would never face alienation from their rural community at least on the level of daily life. On the other hand, any person who behaves like a "highway Indian" cannot survive socially in Gwich'in rural community. Even for those living in urban areas, it is very important to keep a connection to the chain of sharing "real foods" to affirm their group identity.

So, in damaging the caribou herd, oil development will cause a crisis of the Gwich'in cultural/social tradition, and as a result, will threaten the identity for the Gwich'in. But, as we have mentioned during the session against ANWR development, it seems very difficult for non-Native Americans living in a capitalist economy to understand this non-capitalistic aspect of Gwich'in life. Most Americans, other than Natives, understand that oil development may damage the Porcupine Caribou herd and change its migratory route. They know that can be a cause for "ecocide." Nevertheless, it is very hard for them to imagine how oil development affects Gwich'in society. Most non-Gwich'in may understand that development may bring about a problem of supplying food to some small remote settlements, which can be solved by compensation.

Although the practical experience of daily life underlies all of their statements in that session, the Gwich'in sounded too mythic or too abstract for non-Natives. They may take their statements as "myths," which cannot be effective in Western law. Not myths but

practical data are required in court. This aspect of Gwich'in life is the key to understanding the importance of caribou for the Gwich'in, but, at the same time, it seems to be the most difficult for Gwich'in activists to explain to people living outside of their community. We also have seen that the Gwich'in youth's session reflects a sense of impending crisis of those difficulties. We should pay attention to their public relations activities using mass media and Internet to struggle with this difficulty.

### **Caribou as a Symbol of the Gwich'in Tradition**

As we have seen, the main subjects of the sessions of the gathering were about strategy for their political actions against ANWR development and for administrative actions to protect the environment of the Yukon River watershed. We can generalize these two main subjects as their activities to maintain the environment, which will allow the Gwich'in to continue their way of living with hunting, fishing or gathering activities, and as a result, to maintain their social ties by sharing "real foods" from these activities.

At the session for stopping ANWR development, speakers emphasized the importance of caribou in their spiritual life. Although caribou have not been found in some areas including Fort Yukon, "protecting the Porcupine Caribou herd" has come to be the main focus of concern for all of the Gwich'in people including residents of the Fort Yukon area. Of course, this is reasonable because residents of these areas also love caribou and often obtain its meat from their relatives, and they also make trips to hunt caribou in northern areas. But it is important to point out that, besides moose, Dall sheep, any kind of waterfowl or fish, caribou have come to be a symbol of their whole way of living with hunting, trapping, fishing or gathering in the bush and the sharing of "real foods" from these activities.

As we have seen, they used their legends to affirm the legitimacy of the relationship between the Gwich'in and the caribou. This kind of statement is announced inside the Gwich'in society repeatedly. Their legends educated the youth that caribou have been a special being for the Gwich'in people. Every participant in the session could learn or confirm the importance of the caribou. They also could feel the traditional relationship between the Gwich'in and the caribou by participating in events after the sessions. For example, they could eat caribou meat at the potlatch, and being in the audience of the "traditional outfits contest," they could see beautiful caribou dresses worn by young Gwich'in. All of the participants could share that feeling, which ties the Gwich'in people together as members of the same ethnic group.

The caribou has also played the role of a bond, which ties the Gwich'in living separately from each other, and in different situations. The crisis of the caribou herd alarmed the Gwich'in of both Alaska and Canada, because it could destroy their traditional life. This fear made them work together against the development, although the development was legally a U.S. matter, because the lifestyle of the Canadian Gwich'in also depends on the herd. The Gwich'in on both sides of the border affirm their group identity as one ethnic group, "the Gwich'in," through their activities. So, it was reasonable for them to organize "the Gwich'in Nation" across national borders in order to protect their natural resource.

Indeed Slobodin has pointed out that "in their own eyes the Kutchin (Gwich'in) were

'people of the deer' almost as fully as were natives of the Subarctic Shield" (Slobodin 1981: 515), before ANWR development. But the importance of caribou as the symbol of their ethnic group identity has increased since their activities against development started.

This kind of symbolization of caribou has also been broadcast outside Gwich'in society through every form of mass media and been distributed over the internet. They refer to themselves as "the caribou people" or "people of the caribou" in these media. It seems a very effective way to outline the situation in which the Gwich'in people have been involved to trying to educate non-Native people. Therefore, the caribou has also started to play a role as an important symbol in the relation with outsiders.

### **Function of the Gathering: Maintaining Traditions and Affirming Social Bonds**

It is important to note that, other than the sessions, cultural events held during the gathering were displaying several aspects of the Gwich'in tradition. To hold traditional events like "the give away potlatch," people needed to learn the way of their tradition. To dance the jig in front of the audience, or to attend the talent show, entrants needed to practice traditional skills. To attend the traditional outfits contest, entrants needed to make traditional costumes or at least ask someone to make them and learn from elders about their tradition of caribou/moose skin clothing. To generalize, hosts or entrants of the cultural events are encouraged to learn their traditions more thoroughly.

The audience could also experience a variety of their traditional culture during the gathering week. For example, the audience of "the give away potlatch" could recognize that the host gave hunting tools such as guns as valuable gifts with Gwich'in traditional beadwork to his main guests. That displayed to the audience that hunting has been one of their traditions. The participants in the potlatch dinner could experience the whole system of the sharing tradition. They could recognize that many donations have been made and many people have voluntarily offered to hold the potlatch. They could enjoy plates of meat from remote settlements. They could help others serve the plates and bring plates back for their family.

Because most of those events are very rarely held in the city, these were special opportunities to affirm their group identity for participants from urban areas. Those people have faced a crisis of their group identity. One participant who came from Fairbanks said:

Living in the city, you wonder if he (her son) is getting the right set of values. It seems like we are being attacked from all sides just for being ourselves. But here, we are family.

One of the founders of the gathering also pointed out that the experience of the gathering strengthened their faith in each other and they used it to heal. As I mentioned, they often had opportunities for people who did not know each other to play together and build strong ties. During the jig dance, the old lady was encircled by ten younger men and they all danced together. After the opening prayer by the traditional dancers from Arctic Village for the morning of the 25th, the audience joined the dancers and they sung and danced together.

So, the Gwich'in who attended the gathering have had many opportunities to experience their traditional customs. They could also renew old relationships and make new ones while

strengthening the social bond, which participants share. It is reasonable to point out that they could affirm their group identity by attending such events.

I could not explore the Gwich'in activity against oil development itself as a whole. Although I believe it is important to explore, it is too involved a subject to be treated here in detail. I hope to discuss this case separately. Also, I could not discuss the importance of a small settlement as a cultural/social sanctuary for Gwich'in people. The first Gwich'in Gathering was held in Arctic Village, the closest settlement to ANWR territory, which has been a Mecca for hunting caribou. Although I believe that this small settlement plays the role of sanctuary at several levels of Gwich'in social life, I could not report this subject here because I have only just started to make contact with people living in Arctic Village. I also will take this matter up at the next opportunity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is based on a field research among the Gwich'in Athabascan society of interior subarctic Alaska. My deepest appreciation is to the people of Fort Yukon, Arctic Village and Venetie, the settlements where field research was carried out. Many people of these settlements gave me plenty of valuable information. I owe a special debt to the people of Fort Yukon, which I visited repeatedly. They always welcome me to their society with warm hospitality, and supported my study. Especially, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence L. Alexander and their family, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Carroll Jr., and Ms. Patricia Stanley gave me a lot of important information, read the draft and made a number of critical suggestion and comments.

My special thanks are due to Dr. Ian Keen, Dr. Ann Fienup-Riordan and Dr. David G. Anderson for making a number of academic suggestions and comments. I would also like to thank Dr. Takashi Irimoto and Dr. Takako Yamada for offering me an opportunity to present this paper. I wish to thank Dr. Russell T. Gould and his family for their helpful support during my field research and warm hospitality at their home in Fairbanks. I would like to thanks Mr. Reza Fiyouzat and Mr. Gregory McCoy for their proof reading of a draft of this paper.

## NOTES

- 1) Several alternative spellings exist, including "Athabaskan," "Athapascan" and "Athapaskan" (Osgood 1975). I use the spelling Athabascan because several Tribal Governments and councils of Alaskan Gwich'in have used it.
- 2) The spelling "Kutchin" was formerly used for this group. In Canada, the word "Loucheux" was also used for the members of this group (Slobodin 1981). Today, the spelling "Gwich'in" appears more frequently, especially in their own publications, which I have followed.
- 3) I visited Alaskan Gwich'in settlements as follows; Aug. 1994, Dec. 1994 to Jan. 1995, Aug. to Sept. 1995, Dec. 1995 to Jan. 1996, Aug. 1996, Dec. 1996 to Jan. 1997, Dec. 1997 to Jan. 1998, Jun. 1998, Aug. to Sept. 1999, Aug. to Sept. 2000 and Dec. 2000. I stayed mainly in Fort Yukon, and visited some other settlements includes Arctic village, Venetie and Circle.
- 4) The Porcupine herd is named after its spring and fall crossings of the Porcupine River, which run through the northwestern part of the Gwich'in traditional territory, during its annual migration.

- 5) I usually bring some small souvenirs to my Gwich'in friends. They always have received my gifts and then gave something back, or did something for me, such as freely offering a dog sled ride immediately. I believe that the reason for this exception was because they knew that I would leave soon and were afraid to miss an opportunity to give back to me.
- 6) The terms "white people" should be regarded as a Gwich'in folk term in their English conversation, which refers to European American or Caucasian, but sometimes includes all non-Native Americans such as Asian American. They often have negative connotations.

## REFERENCES

- ACHESON, A. W.  
 1981 Old Crow, Yukon Territory. In J. Helm (ed.), *Handbook of North American Indians vol.6, (Subarctic)*, pp. 694-703. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.
- ARNOLD, R. D.  
 1978 *Alaska Native Land Claims*. Anchorage: Alaska Native Foundation.
- BALICKI, A.  
 1963 *Vunta Kutchin Social Change*. Ottawa: Northern Co-ordination and Research Centre, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.
- CAULFIELD, R. A.  
 1983 *Subsistence Land Use in Upper Yukon-Porcupine Communities Alaska* (Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence Technical Paper No. 16). Fairbanks: Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence.
- DAVIDSON, A.  
 1994 *Endangered Peoples*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- DUNCAN, K. C.  
 1997 *A Special Gift: the Kutchin Beadwork Tradition*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press.
- FAST, P. A.  
 1995 *The Healing Path of Gwich'in Athabascans*. Ph. D. dissertation, Department of Social Anthropology, Harvard University.
- FREDSON, J.  
 1982 *Stories told by John Fredson to Edward Sapir*. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
- The Gwich'in Steering Committee  
 2003 *The Gwich'in Steering Committee homepage*. <http://www.alaska.net/~gwich'in>. Accessed November 14 2003.
- INOUE, T.  
 1996 From clan to "Native American": The potlatch among Alaskan Athabaskan and the Changes of their group identity. *Josai International University Bulletin* 4 (1): 187-206.  
 1999 The Beadwork as a "cultural tradition": The cultural function of the beadwork and its social value among modern society of Alaskan Gwich'in. *The Bulletin of the Hokkaido Museum of Northern Peoples* 8: 31-56.
- KADEL, S.  
 1998a Gwich'in gather as one nation vs. oil development. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, June 26 1998: A-1.

- 1998b Gwich'in reaffirm culture. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, June 28 1998: A-1.
- 1998c Youths poised between two worlds, *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, June 28 1998: A-1.
- MCKENNAN, R. A.  
 1965 *Chandalat Kutchin* (Arctic Institute of North America Technical Paper 17). Montreal, Washington D. C. and New York: The Arctic Institute of North America.
- MISHLER, C.  
 1993 *The Crooked Stovepipe: Athapaskan Fiddle Music and Square Dancing in Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- NELSON, R. K.  
 1986 *Hunters of the Northern Forest: Designs for Survival among Alaskan Kutchin*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- OSGOOD, C.  
 1936 *Contribution to the Ethnography of the Kutchin*. Yale University Publications in Anthropology 14. New Haven: Yale University Press.  
 1975 Athapaskan? In A. M. Clark (ed.), *Proceedings: Northern Athapaskan Conference, 1971* (Canada National Museum of Man Mercury Series Ethnology Service Paper 27). Ottawa: National Museum of Man.
- SHIMPO, M.  
 1993 *Kanada Senjumin Dene no Sekai, Indian Syakai no Hendo* (The World of the Dene, a Canadian Indigenous People—Social Change in the Indian Society). Tokyo: Akashi Syoten.
- SIMEONE, W. E.  
 1994 *Rifles, Blankets, and Beads: Identity, History, and the Northern Athapaskan Potlatch*. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press.
- SLOBODIN, R.  
 1962 *Band Organization of the Peel River Kutchin* (Anthropological Series 55). National Museum of Canada Bulletin 179, Ottawa.  
 1981 Kutchin. In J. Helm, (ed.), *Handbook of North American Indians vol.6 (Subarctic)*, pp. 514–532. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.
- SUMIDA, V. A. and D. B. ANDERSON  
 1990 *Patterns of Fish and Wildlife Use for Subsistence in Fort Yukon, Alaska* (Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence Technical Paper No. 179). Fairbanks: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence.
- U. S. Congress Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs  
 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government of Publishing Office.
- VANSTONE, J. W.  
 1974 *Athapaskan Adaptations: Hunters and Fishermen of the Subarctic Forest*. Illinois: Harlan Davidson Inc.
- YERBURY, J. C.  
 1986 *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade, 1680–1860*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.