Political Strategies for the Historical Victory in Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling in the Alaskan Arctic : The International Whaling Commission Meeting in Brazil, 2018

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Political Strategies for the Historical Victory in Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling in the Alaskan Arctic: The International Whaling Commission Meeting in Brazil, 2018

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1. Introduction

> Mr. Chair, no people should ever be forced to beg for food. Hunger should never be part of political agenda. And there should never be an automatic expiration date on a people's God-given right to feed themselves. (The former Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commissioner, George Noongwook's testimony at the International Whaling Commission meeting in September, 2018)

For four decades, the priority of indigenous subsistence whalers, Iñupiat and St. Lawrence Island (SLI) Yupik in Alaska, U.S., have been the protection of subsistence way of life, especially hunt for bowhead whales. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) is an international government body charged with the conservation and management of whales. Their decision has power to possibly ban or reduce quota for Alaska Native subsistence whaling. In September 2018, the IWC delegates approved renewal of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC)'s bowhead whale quota for seven more years, as well as its automatic renewal, as long as the population of whales remain healthy and sustainable. The aboriginal subsistence whalers in Alaska welcomed the decision as the historical victory.

This paper will explore the importance of subsistence whaling and long political struggles of Iñupiat and SLI Yupik in the Alaskan Arctic, history of the IWC and the AEWC, and political strategies that the AEWC took for the successful IWC meeting in 2018. Living in Alaska for 18 years, I was the senior researcher for the Alaska State government research institution, specializing subsistence hunting and fishing in the Alaskan Arctic. For various projects, our research team has collaborated with the North Slope Borough, the AEWC, and subsistence whalers in Utqiaġvik, the largest whaling community in Alaska. The data has been used for the National Environmental Policy Act for the proposed Alaska Natural Gas pipeline project in the Alaskan Arctic, as well as for the discussion of aboriginal subsistence whaling submitted to the science committee at the IWC meeting in September 2018. For the current research, I have closely worked with my collaborator and the former AEWC commissioner, George Noonwook, SLI

Yupik from Savoonga on the St. Lawrence Island. George is a respected elder and scholar, who served for the AEWC for 38 years as a commissioner and chairman. This paper will examine changing dynamics surrounding subsistence bowhead whaling in the Alaskan Arctic, wrought by political, economic, and historical events, and how the Alaska Native whalers won the significant victory at the IWC meeting held in Brazil in September, 2018.

Map 1 Subsistence whaling villages in Alaska (Created by Ryo Kubota)

2. Relations between Humans and Bowhead Whale in the Alaskan Arctic

Iñupiat, who live in the coastal region in the Alaskan Arctic, and SLI Yupik, who live on the St. Lawrence Island, located in the middle of the Bering Sea, have been hunting for bowhead whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) since time immemorial. The Alaskan Arctic coastal region straddle migration routes for bowhead whale, and whaling is the center of ritual, subsistence, ceremony and social organization among both Iñupiat and SLI Yupik (Bodenhorn 1989, 1990, 2003; Jolles 2003; Jolles and Oozeva 2002; Murdoch 1988[1892]; Spencer 1959). In Utqiaġvik, the largest whaling community in Alaska, for example, Iñupiat consume approximately 25 edible ton of bowhead whale annually (Mikow and Ikuta 2016). In the Alaskan Arctic, over 4,657 ton of wild food is harvested annually, which is considered to be over US$82million of "replacement monetary value" (ADFG 2017). Subsistence whaling, hunting and fishing are a principal characteristic of the rural Alaskan economy (Photo 1).

Photo 1 Whalers waiting for whale on the sea ice in Utqiaġvik (Photo by Hiroko Ikuta, May 5, 2007)

For Iñupiat and SLI Yupik, whaling means social relationships between humans, between humans and animals, and among animals themselves. Animals, according to Alaska Native hunters, intend to give themselves up to be killed (Ikuta 2011). Among Iñupiat, for example, the daily activity and personal rituals of women have a profound influence on the relationship between men and animals, as they prefigure and empower male productivity and so reinforce and re-emphasize the gender division in society (Bodenhorn 1993). Whales are thought to offer themselves to good hunters, whose wives treat the whales' souls with respect (Bodenhorn 1990; 2003). It is not a male hunter alone who hosts the animals, but the husband and wife together. The wife has the ritual responsibility of asking for and attracting whales. Thus, a whaling captain cannot hope to succeed in whaling without the physical and spiritual assistance of his wife.

Right after the successful whaling, there are a number of rituals and distributions with people in the community (Bodenhorn 1990; 2003). In addition, throughout the year, the whaling captains have the responsibility to provide meat the people who are in need, such as elders and widows. In the three major American celebrations, Nalukataq (whaling festival), Thanksgiving, and Christmas, feasts include both the distribution of whale meat by successful whaling crews and the provision of their hospitality to the entire community (Photo 2).

Photo 2 Bowhead whale head in Utqiaġvik (Photo by Hiroko Ikuta, May 6, 2007)

3. History of Bowhead Whaling in the Alaskan Arctic since the Late 19th Century

The whale, the core of nourishment, spirituality and social organization, is the most important creature for both SLI Yupik and Iñupiat. However, the major shift of subsistence whaling in the Western Arctic came after 1848 when the explorer Thomas Roy sailed through the Bering Strait and found a significant population of bowhead whales, which had already been driven to near extinction by commercial whalers in the Eastern Arctic. In reaction to Roy's discovery, numerous whaling ships sailed for the Bering Sea. The Bering-Chuckchi-Beaufort (BCB) bowhead population during this period had been estimated at approximately 30,000 animals. At first, bowheads were hunted for their oil, which was used as fuel, but by 1875 when petroleum had become widely available, the focus of commercial whaling shifted toward the harvest of their baleen, which was used in the manufacture of women's clothing, such as corsets and full skirt hoops. By the early 1890s, Yankee whalers had established permanent settlements in the mainland coastal villages and employed local Chuckchi, Siberian and SLI Yupik, and Iñupiat in commercial whaling (Bockstoce 1986: 275; Bodenhorn 1989: 28). Between 1848 and 1914, a total of 2,700 whaling vessels sailed past St. Lawrence Island toward Utqiaġvik. By the time when the last whaling ship departed, over 90% of the bowhead population had been lost. The population of Iñupiat and SLI Yupik had fallen as well, decimated by imported disease and starvation. The arrival of outsiders dramatically impacted the local economic systems, social organizations and traditional whaling practice (Bockstoce 1986: 231–254).

4. Impact of Oil Discovery in the Alaskan Arctic

Since Alaska was purchased by the United States from Russia in 1867, the U.S. federal government had never made a formal treaty with the Alaska Native groups. The discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay, the traditional territory of Iñupiat, located 200 miles from Utqiaġvik on the North Slope, induced the federal government to negotiate land claims with Iñupiat, along with other Alaska Native peoples. It culminated in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971. Instead of a direct cash settlement to individuals, ANSCA established 13 regional corporations in Alaska, among which were apportioned a US$962.5million cash settlement and title to 44.1 million acres (11% of the state) throughout Alaska. Alaska Native lands were apportioned to 12 of the regional corporations.[1)] Most of the lands assigned to the regional corporations were also designated indigenous cultural areas. The regional corporations acquired surface and subsurface rights to the land and became for profit organizations. ANCSA also mandated that each regional corporation must share 70% of all revenues from timber and subsurface estate, including mineral and oil development, with the 12 other regional corporations. Within the regional corporations, more than 200 village corporations, which acquired only surface rights to the land, were created as profit-making concerns. Consequently, Alaska Native peoples' connections to the land have become part of a

politicized ethnic identity, as well as a cultural and social identity.

ANCSA dramatically affected the lives of Alaska Native peoples and their relationships with the land and heritage (Berger 1985). One of the few profitable corporations is the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC), the regional Native corporation of Iñupiat on the North Slope. ASRC received a US$52,000,000 cash settlement as well as four million acres of land, which includes areas of petroleum reserves (Blackman 1989: 29; Bodenhorn 1989: 41). Because ASRC owns subsurface rights to the land, the petroleum industry must lease from it to drill for oil, making ASRC wealthy and powerful. Furthermore, in 1972, the State of Alaska agreed to the consolidation of Iñupiat land on the North Slope through the creation of a vast municipality, the North Slope Borough (NSB), giving Iñupiat greater control over territorial decision making. In 1974, the State of Alaska granted the NSB far-reaching powers, including the right to tax the petroleum industry. Iñupiat connections to the land, sea, past and tradition became ever more important, as they become politically astute in manipulating the power relations between themselves and the mainstream society. It was not coincident that bowhead whaling among Iñupiat on the North Slope attracted attentions from the rest of the world, and the International Whaling Commission (IWC) took serious issues with subsistence whaling in the Alaskan Arctic.

5. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) and the Establishment of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC)

The IWC was established by the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling in 1946. For many years, the IWC focused only on the regulation of commercial whaling activities in the world except the Western Arctic. During this time, there was no commercial exploitation of bowhead whale in the region; the commercial whalers had substantially reduced the size of the stock by the early 20th century. However, in the early 1970s, as opposition to commercial whaling operations started to grow, some countries raised concerns about the status of the BCB stock of bowhead whales and the indigenous peoples' subsistence harvest. At the time, Iñupiat and SLI Yupik whalers were not made aware of such an international interest.

In 1977, the IWC voted in favor of ending an exemption given to Alaskan Native for subsistence whaling. The IWC was alarmed by the findings of biologists who concluded that the low estimate of the bowhead whale population was related to the higher than average harvest taken by indigenous whalers in the 1970s (Huntington 1992: 110–115). The BCB stock of bowheads was estimated between 600 and 1,800 whales. Moreover, the amount of harvest in the region was dramatically increased. While the average annual harvest by Alaska Natives between 1910 and 1969 was 11.7 whales, the average between 1970 and 1977 was 32.7 (Huntington 1992: 10). These figures did not include the animals struck but lost. In 1976, the Alaska Native whalers struck 91 whales but they landed only 48 whales. In 1977, 111 whales were struck yet 29 were landed. In addition to the low population estimates, the harvest rates worried many scientists and managers and led to the IWC's ban.

The IWC took issue not only with the numbers of whales harvested, but also with the "modern" whaling equipment employed by Iñupiat and SLI Yupik hunters: aluminum boats, outboard motors, Citizen's Band radios, high powered rifles and explosive harpoons. The hunters had adopted many of these technologies from Yankee whalers almost a century previously. By the 1970s, not only was hunting safer and more efficient, but, most importantly, it enabled the Alaska Native whalers to engage in sharing their catch and their social responsibilities (Bodenhorn 2003; Huntington 1992: 110–115).

While Alaska Natives put emphasis on the cultural tradition of sharing meat, the IWC challenged the use of modern hunting equipment as a traditional means of subsistence (Huntington 1992: 11). Iñupiat and SLI Yupik remain traditional and conservative in *the social relations* formed through whaling and do not see a contradiction between these traditional activities and the incorporation of "modern" tools to facilitate them. The use of contemporary equipment does not conflict with Iñupiat cultural values in whaling as traditional activity defined by Iñupiat. As long as Iñupiat and SLI Yupik pay particular attention to completing the long-practiced activity based on their traditional values, it is considered a part of their tradition.

Iñupiat perceived the IWC's decision as a major external threat to their culture. The Alaska Native whalers did not share the concern over low population estimates. They thought there were at least 4,000 bowhead whales in the population. Biologists on whom the IWC relied hardly visited the Arctic ocean to conduct actual research, a few times in a lifetime at most. In fact, they did not have knowledge of bowhead whale in the way the subsistence hunters did. When the biologists saw a closed lead, they simply thought no whale passed by. However, Iñupiat whalers had observed bowhead whale often broke breathing holes in newly formed thin ice. The hunters also heard bowheads breathing from air pockets inside pressure ridges (North Slope Borough n.d.).

In order to contest the international decision, seven Iñupiat communities, most of which are located on the North Slope, and two SLI Yupik communities formed the AEWC to represent their interests of subsistence whaling.[2)] The AEWC called upon the U.S. federal government to honor its obligation to their own indigenous peoples and subsistence whaling. They also requested providing an accurate population of the BCB bowhead whale stock. In response to pressure from the AEWC and the U.S. federal government, the IWC had a special meeting in Tokyo, Japan in December. There, the ban on whaling was replaced with a quota system. A quota of 12 landed whales or 18 struck, whichever came first, was adopted.

Meanwhile, the NSB hired a team of biologists, with whom the AEWC and Iñupiat whalers closely worked, and established bowhead census and research program. In addition to counting whales, Iñupiat whalers also provide the scientists with tissue specimens to study biological function and health of bowheads. As scientists who speak scientific jargons, the NSB biologists provided data and interacted with the IWC scientific committee. Collaborative efforts of Iñupiat hunters and Western scientists were able to provide better estimates of the whale population and secure an increased quota closer to the actual need of the whaling communities.

Since 1981, AEWC has managed the bowhead whale subsistence hunt locally

through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. federal research agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The AEWC is a bridging organization that represents regional interests to national and international entities. Through the AEWC, Iñupiat and SLI Yupik whaling captains are kept in the loop of negotiations with the U.S. government and the IWC. The AEWC mediates the division of the quota among member villages and keeps track of inter-village quota transfers. It is their responsibility to monitor local implementation of Alaskan subsistence whaling regulations once they have been set.

Another important key player is the NSB which strategically support the AEWC and protect aboriginal subsistence whaling and BCB bowhead whale stock in the Alaskan Arctic. The U.S. federal government and NSB financially sponsor the AEWC and its activities. The scientists at the NSB Department of Wildlife Management closely work with Iñupiat whalers, the AEWC, the U.S. government, and the IWC.

In addition, the NSB has worked with a number of anthropologists. In the early 1980s right after the IWC disapproved Iñupiat subsistence whaling, the NSB contracted with anthropologist for various projects to examine the importance of whaling in the region (Braund 1983; Braund and Associates 1988, 1989a, 1989b; Braund et al. 1988). According to Braund and Associates, the bowhead harvest provides approximately 1.1 to 2 million pounds of food per year, freely shared by whaling captains with community members (1988; 1989a; 1989b). They argued that to replace this with beef, a regular diet of which few Iñupiat would find adequate to the cold, would cost $11million to $30million a year. More recently, in 2012–2015, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence worked with the NSB to conduct comprehensive subsistence surveys to understand harvests and uses of over 300 species and food security in five out of the six bowhead whaling communities on the Alaskan North Slope (Brown et al. 2016). Various studies, collaborated with the NSB and AEWC, show how Iñupiat have created social network and distribute the bowhead through sharing network (BurnSilver et al. 2016; Kishigami 2013; Kofinas et al. 2015). All the results show how important bowheads are for the people in the region culturally, socially, and economically.

6. The 2002 IWC Meeting in Shimonoseki in Japan and Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Ban

As the IWC scientific committee accepted the expanded population numbers provided by the NSB biologists and Iñupiat and SLI Yupik whalers, the quota for aboriginal subsistence whaling in Alaska grew. In 1997, the IWC had set a block quota of 280 whales in 1998–2002. This allowed Iñupiat and SLI Yupik whalers to strike 67 whales per year at a maximum, and if not used, 15 strikes may be carried into the next year. The number made the subsistence whalers comfortable to feed their communities. In the same year, the AEWC agreed to give seven strikes from their quota to indigenous peoples in Chukotka, Russia each year. The sharing of the quota continues to this day.

In 2002, however, the IWC stunned the whaling communities by banning the aboriginal subsistence whaling again. During the meeting in Shimonoseki, Japan, the

Japanese government tried to use the aboriginal subsistence whaling quota to gain support for their agenda from the U.S. government. The former AEWC commissioner, George Noongwook, recalled the meeting.

> Japan always supported our quota requests until they decided to use our quota as a bargaining chip in 2002 in Shimonoseki… Japan needed 11 votes to be against subsistence whaling, and they must have recruited it (Interview with George Noongwook on August 25, 2019).

Many Alaskan whalers strongly voiced their opinion against the Japanese action and tried to protect their subsistence way of life. The U.S government responded quickly. They informed the IWC that they may withdraw from the IWC and comply with the U.S. domestic laws for subsistence whaling. The IWC gathered in a special meeting in the same year. Noongwook said,

> Their [Japanese] agenda was to try to force the U.S. government to support their quota requirements but it back fired. It took a special meeting to renew our request the following October. The U.S. Alaska Congressional delegation and Secretary of State Colin Powell held the Japanese IWC Commissioner as personally responsible for that event accused him using us gambling chips (Interview with George Noongwook on August 25, 2019).

The IWC eventually renewed the block quota for aboriginal subsistence whaling in Alaska and Russian Far East. The crisis was defused but never forgotten.

The Shimonoseki meeting reminded the AEWC of possibilities that they may lose their subsistence whaling rights again not because of the population and health of the BCB bowhead whale stock, but because of political struggles and international relations among the member countries. They were also aware that both pro- and con- whaling countries and organizations became strategic to accomplish their agendas. Noongwook explained,

> From that event [Shimonoseki in 2002], we began seeing both pro- and anti-whaling countries started recruiting other non IWC member countries to join the IWC to vote on their behalf. Consequently, the IWC member nations ballooned to 88 members in 2019 from 55 members in 2002. It has become a dysfunctional organization because they allowed non-governmental organizations, such as animal welfare groups, and anti-whaling groups, to recruit land locked countries to become members of IWC (Interview with George Noongwook on August 25, 2019).

Since then, the AEWC and the NSB biologists sought for various strategies and waited for the right timing to accomplish acquiring the perpetual subsistence whaling right.

The IWC requires a population abundance estimate to be submitted for the BCB bowhead whale stock every 10 years. In 2011, with the assistance of the AEWC, the NSB, and other research institutions, the NOAA conducted the study utilized both an

aerial Photo identification and ice-based count. The photo identification count showed a best estimate of 27,133 bowhead, a number comparable to the mid 19th century population estimates (North Slope Borough n.d.). The ice-based study yielded a best estimate of 16,800 (15,200–18,700), and the IWC recognized the latter counts as valid. The net rate of the BCB stock increase since 1978 has been estimated as about 3.2% per year (IWC 2019; North Slope Borough 2019).

The AEWC has proven that the bowhead stock in the Western Arctic is healthy and growing. Whales have been important nutritionally and culturally for the people in the region. Contemporary technology has been incorporated into traditional hunting methods for more efficient harvest and humane deaths for whales. Based on the evidence of scientific data and social sciences studies, as well as political environments, the AEWC and its advisory team targeted that critical turns of events would be the IWC meeting in September 2018.

7. Preparation for the IWC Meeting in Brazil, 2018

In 2016, Joji Morishita, the Japanese commissioner, became the chairman of the IWC. There was no scheduled IWC meeting in 2017, which meant Morishita would be the meeting chair in 2018. The AEWC found having Morishita as a chairman would be a great advantage for them. According to Noongwook, Morishita was sympathetic to the AEWC's efforts.

> Joji Morishita became the Japanese IWC Commissioner and was selected by his peers in the IWC meeting as the chairman in 2018. He has attended IWC Aboriginal Subsistence Committee Meeting prior to becoming a chairman and became a member of the subcommittee. From those meetings, the AEWC became aware of which countries to be targeted for the 2018 IWC meeting in Brazil to try to gain their support for our request (Interview with George Noongwook on August 25, 2019).

Since 2016, the U.S. and the other 3 subsistence whaling countries have followed the lead of the AEWC and its team of advisors and scientists to lay the groundwork for the IWC meeting in 2018.

The IWC had 67th meeting in Brazil from September 4th to 14th in 2018. In order to prepare for the meeting, the AEWC planned to have the IWC's Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Working Group (ASWWG) meeting in April, 2018 at Utqiaġvik, the largest subsistence whaling community in Alaska. To provide the IWC commissioners and ASWWG members with better understandings of subsistence whaling in the Alaskan Arctic, biologists at the NSB Department of Wildlife Management conducted tours for the group members on the sea ice, where spring subsistence whaling was about to begin. An Iñupiat whaler pointed out to the members on tour when a bowhead was breaking through thin new ice. The ASWWG member from India was amazed to listen to the sounds of bowheads and seals under sea ice through a hydrophone set up by the NSB biologist. The commissioners and group members, including the ones who opposed

subsistence whaling, experienced and observed aboriginal subsistence bowhead whaling among Iñupiat in the Arctic for the first hand (North Slope Borough n.d.).

During the ASWWG meeting at Utqiaġvik, the members voted to support the United Nation's Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples initiatives to secure economic and subsistence activities presented by Dalee Dorough, the chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council.[3)] It meant recognizing subsistence whaling practiced by Iñupiat, SLI Yupik, and other indigenous peoples as human rights.

In addition, the ASWWG received the proposal from the U.S. government that the bowhead whale subsistence quota be allowed to renew automatically, and thereafter, the harvest level remains the same as long as the IWC Scientific Committee continues to verify the BCB stock of healthy population (North Slope Borough n.d.).

Meanwhile, in the early April 2018, the Alaska Congressional Delegation authorized the Secretary of Commerce to protect the bowhead whale subsistence harvest and Alaska Native food security under the U.S. law, if the IWC failed to act on bowhead whale quota during the IWC meeting in September 2018 meeting (Murkowski 2018).

8. The AEWC's Strategies in the 2018 IWC Meeting

For the 2018 IWC meeting, the AEWC came up with three major objectives: a) secure the next block quota at the same annual harvest level as the last; b) the current 67 annual strike limit remains, and half of the original strikes should be available in the following years. It means if circumstance prevented whalers from utilizing all 67 in a given year, up to 33 of all unused strikes with a limit of 100 strike within the three-block period should be available; c) practice of a new IWC Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Management Procedure starting in 2026 (North Slope Borough n.d.).

The AEWC was also concerned a strong influence of anti-whaling non-government organizations (NGO) on non-whaling countries, which gradually became visible since the Shimonoseki meeting in 2002. According to Noongwook,

> NGO bought out 10 Latin American countries to become anti-whaling communities. They are against U.S. subsistence whaling and began targeting ASWWG to dissuade our groups to disband. But it has never worked because we knew we were stronger politically together (Interview with George Noongwook on August 25, 2019).

In order to fight back, the AEWC and the U.S. government planned to try a single bundled agreement in all aboriginal whalers from the U.S., Russia, Greenland, and the Caribbean nation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The AEWC needed to secure at least 75% votes from all IWC nations that would participate in the ballot. Those included countries and delegates opposed subsistence whaling, such as a group of Latin American nations, Hindus who were vegetarians, non-whaling countries, and those who were dealing with political pressures in their international relations. Some countries were against subsistence whaling because they were pushing whale watching as tourist attraction to boom their rural economies. During

the IWC meeting, the AEWC conducted a lobbying campaign, and each member was assigned to speak with certain delegates from other countries and secured their favor votes. In the lobby, they distributed printed materials and played a video to describe the importance of subsistence whaling for Iñupiat and SLI Yupik in Alaska (North Slope Borough n.d.).

9. Outcome

In the 2018 IWC meeting, tremendous efforts to protect aboriginal subsistence whaling in the Arctic that the AEWC had made for decades were finally rewarded. Vote for the proposal of aboriginal subsistence whaling was 59 in favor and 7 against with 5 abstentions, which meant 83% of votes cast are in favor. (IWC 2019) The IWC adopted the landmark proposal that changed the international regulatory framework for aboriginal subsistence whaling. It promised to uphold the right of Iñupiat and SLI Yupik whalers to hunt in perpetuity. Noongwook said, "this is all we wanted during the past 41 years of struggles."

The major outcomes for aboriginal subsistence whaling in Alaska were the followings. For the years 2019–2025, the annual strike limit would be 67, and the unused strikes up to 50% of the annual strike limit or 33 whales may be carried forward from the 3 previous quota blocks and added to the strike limit for any year. It would result in 100 strikes in maximum available per year. Regarding the IWC's new aboriginal subsistence whaling management procedure, beginning in 2026, the quota will be extended every six years as long as the existing catch limits do not harm the stock. Three quarters of voting IWC members will be required to pass these changes (IWC 2019; North Slope Borough n.d.).

10. Conclusion

The AEWC's success of the 2018 IWC meeting resulted from decades of struggle against international politics, and they grant the AEWC significant powers to co-manage sustainable harvest as long as the BCB bowhead stock is healthy and stable. Since subsistence whaling management takes for granted the wider political context of international marine mammal management, solutions to the political problems could not be found in the realm of co-management between bureaucrats and indigenous peoples. This management system is the product of Alaska Native's resistance to political incorporation in the local, national, and international levels.

Bowhead whaling has been a part of subsistence way of life and sustained the bodies and spirits among Iñupiat and SLI Yupik peoples. Yet, it does not mean that they have always unified ideas and opinions. For example, Utqiaġvik, the largest whaling community, itself has more than 50 whaling captains with over 200 whaling crew members. The Iñupiat land of North Slope is larger than the state of Utah in U.S., and people live with various priorities. Some of them are living inland and depend on caribou, not whale. Yupik on St Lawrence Island have different culture, environment,

language, and economic situation from those of Iñupiat. In the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act of 1971, while Iñupiat gained power and wealth and created the North Slope Borough, SLI Yupik chose to acquire full title over surface and subsurface rights to their reserve land, without the cash settlement. The decision to opt out of ANSCA caused SLI Yupik to become one of the financially poorest communities in Alaska. In 2018, the median household income in a village on the island was less than a half of that of Utqiaġvik. The AEWC needed to create the unified view and request as Alaska Native whalers to the IWC. They were also required to explore how outcomes of the legal and regulatory process can be incorporated into their traditional and regulatory decision making.

In the national level, one of the unique dimensions of the AEWC's bowhead whaling management process has been the rise of Iñupiat and SLI Yupik collaborations with bureaucrats, biologists, anthropologists, and politicians, who were historically considered to be disturbing wild life management by indigenous peoples (See the discussion of TEK, Nadasday 1999; 2003). In fact, the subsistence whaling ban decided by the IWC in 1977 came from the data and suggestions by outside researchers. However, when the AEWC was established, the indigenous peoples chose to collaborate with the researchers and bureaucrats in order to deliver persuasive data and information to the international audience. The AEWC also successfully gained tremendous support from the U.S. government. Colonial history, laws and asymmetrical power relationships between the dominant Euro-American and the dominated Alaska Native societies have contributed to resource management of the latter's traditional lands and subsistence activities. Yet, the U.S. federal law sanctions subsistence hunt of bowhead whales by Iñupiat and SLI Yupik, and their back up was the key for the successful meeting in 2018.

After IWC's favorable decision for Iñupiat whalers in 2018, the major concern surrounding subsistence whaling has shifted to sustainable development of offshore drilling in the Alaskan Arctic. In 2019, both George Noongwook, the AEWC commissioner, and Craig George, the NSB chief biologist, retired after almost four decades of service. It was the end of era of struggles and now moves to the new period.

Notes

1) The 13th corporation was established for Natives living outside of Alaska and was, therefore, non-landed.
2) The nine whaling villages sent representatives to AEWC: Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, Utqiaġvik, Wainwright, Point Hope, Savoonga, Gambell, Kivalina and Wales. Later, Little Diomede and Point Lay joined AEWC (AEWC 2019). In 1999, people in Little Diomede caught a bowhead whale for the first time in 62 years (Jolles 2003: 322). All the villages in the AEWC are Iñupiaq communities, except for Savoonga and Gambell on St. Lawrence Island, which are Yupik communities.
3) "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and

development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities… In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence."

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