Construction of Inuinnaqtun (Real Inuit-way) : Self-Image and Everyday Practices in Inuit Society

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Netsilik Inuit people living in Pelly Bay, Nunavut, Canada, in spite of having experienced great socio-cultural change since the 1950s, preserve their ethnic identity through priding themselves on being 'Inuit'. One key factor of their identity is an idealised self-imagery, which is condensed in the concept *inuinnaqtun* (real Inuit way; *inummarittitut* in other dialects). *Inuinnaqtun* is the Inuit ways of perceiving, thinking, acting, speaking etc, that is, the 'true' Inuit way of life. *Inuinnaqtun* plays an important role as an ethnic symbol in contemporary Canadian socio-political discourse. In this paper, by considering the cognitive basis of their self-imagery expressed in everyday practices, the following points will be analysed: (1) what *inuinnaqtun* is in present Netsilik society, and (2) how *inuinnaqtun* is constructed and reproduced in everyday Netsilik practices.

INTRODUCTION

In the political arena today, the Canadian Inuit people create and manipulate self-images as well as rectifying old stereotypes created by the Western dominant societies. This can be seen as a part of the Indigenous Movement, which has been spreading since the 1970s. By rectifying and manipulating of self-images in the political arena, the Inuit people are trying to create a positive self-image suited to betterment of their socio-political situation. Such self-imagery also serves to unite all regional Inuit societies of the Arctic in an effort to stem the tide of Western influence. Moreover, as Dybbroe pointed out, because 'the maintenance of cultural identity is a process related to symbolic control' [DYBBROE 1996: 50], and this process is 'a struggle for the right to a modern, "authentic" because of self defined, cultural identity' [DYBBROE 1996: 50], Inuit manipulations of self-images can be seen as attempts to establish control over their ethnic identity against Western hegemony. Therefore, the manipulation of self-images by the Inuit people plays an important role in the Inuit Indigenous Movement.

However, focusing too much attention on the manipulation of self-imagery in the political arena could bring about a failure to appreciate the ways individual Inuit use ethnic self-images to construct ethnic identity in everyday private life. It is certain that the Indigenous Movement has created a wide socio-political solidarity among local Inuit/Yup'it societies in the Arctic under a single new image of 'Inuit'. However, the group with which

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contemporary individual Inuit mostly identify themselves in everyday life is their own local society or extended family. Each individual is undoubtedly affected by Inuit self-imagery represented in the political arena, but such 'authentic' self-images do not necessarily constitute the whole of individual self-imagery. In other words, studying only self-images in the political arena may lead to a failure to understand the reality of the individual Inuit using self-imagery to construct a positive ethnic identity in everyday life, as can be seen in the following criticism of post-modern and post-colonial anthropology.

Post-modern, or post-colonial anthropology focuses mainly on the indigenous nationalist practice or discourse and 'invention of tradition'. 'Based on "the politics of identity", [postcolonial anthropology] created a monistic framework to interpret indigenous resistance to the modern technology of hegemony, and thus concealed "bricoleur tactics" of "subaltern" people in "the field of everyday life", which seem merely a compromise or obedience in the eyes of indigenous elite, but in reality are a form flexible and tenacious resistance to the dominant culture' [ODA 1996: 851].

In this paper, based partly on my own research in Pelly Bay, Nunavut, Canada, and partly on a recent study by Jean Briggs [1997], I shall focus on the ethnic self-images which individual Inuit embody in everyday life, in order to consider how individual Inuit use such ethnic self-images to construct a positive ethnic identity. Then I propose the following hypothesis: that ethnic self-images represented in everyday Inuit life have the flexibility and potential capacity to absorb socio-cultural changes and new socio-cultural elements, resulting from assimilation and integration into the nation-state of Canada and the capitalist world system. Through this mechanism of flexible manipulation of ethnic self-images, individual Inuit can construct a positive ethnic identity in spite of the great socio-cultural changes Inuit societies have undergone since the 1950s.

BACKGROUND OF SELF-IMAGERY:
AN AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE TOWARD DOMINANT HEGEMONY

Canadian Inuit societies have indeed experienced great socio-cultural changes in the process of assimilation and integration into the nation-state of Canada and the capitalist world system since sedentarisation in the 1950s. They have been integrated through the school education, medical service, welfare, legislation, and currency systems. Fur trading, sale of carvings and wage labour also have promoted dependency on the capitalist world system. Moreover, the flood of Western dominant culture through mass media has changed their culture greatly. As the result of these socio-cultural changes, on the surface it seems to be difficult to find 'traditional' life-style in their present everyday life. It is certain that, as some anthropologists [e.g., DORAIS 1997; KISHIGAMI 1996; STEWART 1995; WENZEL 1991] have pointed out, Inuit societies have coped with assimilation and integration by preserving some 'traditional' patterns of socio-cultural systems, such as the principle of social organisation, language, intimate relationships with their 'land' (nuna) through subsistence activities, and world-view. However, the stereotype drawn out in ethnographies and documentary films, like the image of 'the autonomous hunter and gatherer who leads a seasonally migratory life', is the image farthest from their present real life. Nowadays, 'Inuit

society, in many respects, is as modern as its Euro-American counterpart' [DORAIS 1997: 3].

Inuit themselves recognise these socio-cultural changes and their subordinate status to Western hegemony. As Brody [1975; 1976] reported, they hold the following ambivalent attitude towards these socio-cultural changes and their subordinate status, which results from assimilation and integration since the 1970s. On one hand, they appreciate the benefits brought with assimilation and integration, such as modern equipment like snowmobiles, medical service and welfare, and often say: 'Our life is better than before sedentarisation' and 'The Canadian government helps us lots'. However, on the other hand, they feel displeased with their socio-politically subordinate status to the hegemony of Canadian dominant society, and are apprehensive that the younger generation may lose their 'traditional' culture. In other words, while they welcome and need the benefits brought with assimilation and integration into Canadian dominant society, they are displeased with their subordinate status, and regard the results of assimilation and integration as threatening to their ethnic identity.

Holding this ambivalent attitude towards their present socio-political situation, Inuit are confronted with the problem that they need to represent the positive images for not only themselves but also their opposition, that is, the Canadian dominant society. Certainly it is the Canadian dominant society, called 'white people' (*qaplunaat*), who threaten their culture and ethnic identity. Thus, they contrast themselves to 'white people' when constructing the self-imagery that forms the basis of ethnic identity. However, these are the same 'white people' who have brought them the benefits of assimilation and integration. Therefore, judging the 'white people' negatively to construct their positive identity might lead to a denial of the benefits brought by these same 'white people'. In other words, it is impossible for Inuit to reduce their relationships with Canadian dominant society to the simple scheme of 'suppression and resistance'. It may be said that the Inuit are confronted with the necessity of satisfying contradictory demands to construct their own positive ethnic identity by contrasting themselves with 'white people', while positively evaluating the same 'white people' for the benefits they have provided.

Actually, Inuit rarely express negative images of 'white people' in everyday life, although they often contrast themselves with 'white people' in order to construct positive ethnic self-identity. As Briggs [1968: 54] points out, they often regard 'white people' as 'childish' (*nutaraqpaluktuq*) and themselves as 'adult'. However, they also hold a positive image of 'white people': 'White people are good people (*pithauRut*) who help us lots'. For example, my Inuit informants often express to me the following image of 'whites':

> We are never afraid of 'white people' because they are 'good people' (*pithauRut*) who
> have 'affection' (*naglik*) and help us lots. The people of whom we are really afraid are
> not 'white people' but Inuit. That is because we Inuit have big 'spirit or reason'
> (*ihuma*), but 'white people' have only small 'spirit or reason' (*ihuma*).

In other words, Inuit judge positively both themselves and 'white people' by drawing positive images for both, in which they regard themselves as the 'adult' with superior 'reason' (*ihuma*), and 'white people' as the 'good people' who do not have enough 'reason'

(*ihuma*) but have deep 'affection' (*naglik*).

The reason that they can appreciate positively both themselves and 'white people' is that Inuit have two criteria for judging a person. According to Briggs [1968: 49; 1970: 311-366], the most important qualities for the idealised Inuit personality (*inuinnaq*: real Inuit or real person) are 'reason' (*ihuma*) and 'affection' (*naglik*), in terms of which a man's worth is judged. 'Affection' (*naglik*) is the concern for another's physical or emotional welfare and 'a standard of moral behaviour which serves as a major criterion of human goodness' [BRIGGS 1968: 17]. 'Reason' (*ihuma*) is the 'intellectual faculty to be *sine qua non* of socialisation and of adult competence' [BRIGGS 1968: 42]. Thus, Inuit use the criterion of 'reason' (*ihuma*) to construct a positive ethnic self-identity, and use the criterion of 'affection' (*naglik*) to judge 'white people' positively. In other words, they resolve the problem of judging positively both themselves and 'white people' by use of double criteria.

However, this does not mean that Inuit do not regard themselves as 'good people' having 'affection' (*naglik*). The condition of the ideal Inuit is to have both important qualities, 'affection' (*naglik*) and 'reason' (*ihuma*), even today. Inuit emphasise 'reason' (*ihuma*) when they are under the necessity of constructing positive ethnic self-identity. Here arises the problem of what is an 'adult' having 'reason' in the context of everyday life. In the next section, I will consider what is an 'adult' with 'reason' for the Inuit by examining how Inuit represent their ethnic self-image in everyday life.

SELF-REPRESENTATION AS AN 'ADULT': IMAGE AS A 'TOOL'

Briggs [1997] pointed out that individual Inuit use their self-images as a 'tool' in everyday life, in order to justify their own opinions in the negotiations or confrontations with 'white people', or another Inuit who may have different concerns, as well as to construct positive ethnic self-identity. According to Briggs, the 'emblems' which are the constituents of self-imagery are selected from a pool of 'cultural traits' according to the purpose in each occasion, but these 'cultural traits' selected as 'emblems' lose 'emblem' status and return to the ranks of ordinary 'cultural traits' in other contexts. Moreover, she showed that 'except when an "official" or institutionalised identity is at issue, consensus concerning the validity of an emblem is unnecessary' [BRIGGS 1997: 233]. There is no 'authentic' stereotype that all individual Inuit use to draw ethnic self-images. 'Different individuals, living different lives and struggling with different issues' [BRIGGS 1997: 233] may have different ethnic self-images constructed from different 'emblems', and 'disagree about whether a particular emblem is or not appropriate' [BRIGGS 1997: 233-234]. In some extreme occasions, it is not impossible that they may represent contradictory self-images in different contexts.

For example, the comparison of the following instances presented in Briggs' study [1997: 230-233] shows the inconsistency of ethnic images and their dependency on context. In one case, Inuit people who were opposed to the introduction of any laws made by 'white people', especially a bylaw restricting the use of guns to adults, represented the ethnic self-image contrasting with 'the law-creating and law-abiding nature of "white people"' [BRIGGS 1997: 230]. The self-image represented by these Inuit is that of the 'autonomous decision-makers who need no law and are free from any law'. However, in another case, when a Inuit

person who tried to justify the introduction of a bylaw concerning dog control, was speaking in a meeting to some Inuit people who were opposed to the introduction of this 'white people' law, he said: 'A person who neglects a dog will have to pay $25 fine; that has been Inuit law for many years' [BRIGGS 1997: 233]. In this case, the person who tried to justify the introduction of this bylaw converted it into 'Inuit law', which may mean the 'custom' concerning dog control. The 'emblems' that are used in the self-images in both cases, that is, 'the autonomous decision-makers who need no law and are free from any law' and 'the people observing the "custom" concerning dog control', are selected from 'cultural traits' of Inuit, but are inconsistent because the purposes of these self-representation are different. In other words, what 'cultural traits' are selected as 'emblems' depends on the purpose of each self-representation.

These instances presented by Briggs show that self-images represented in everyday Inuit life are not drawn after the model of a rigid image corresponding to an 'authentic' stereotype. Certainly, there are some younger Inuit who speak of the idealised ethnic self-image which they define as being 'authentic' and try to realise this ideal image. However, as Brody [1975: 142-144] and Briggs [1997: 232] report, these younger Inuit have been assimilated into the Canadian dominant society and are regarded as being like 'white people' by both themselves and others. It is these assimilated Inuit who adhere to 'the frozen world defined as "true Inuit"' [BRIGGS 1997: 232] and try to realise this ideal image of a 'true Inuit'. Actually, some Inuit whom I know adhere to the idealised image of the 'real Inuit', but are judged, against their expectations, to 'act like a white person' (*qaplunaaqpaluktuq*) by another Inuit villagers.

The way Inuit, who are regarded as 'real Inuit' (*inuinnaq*) by both themselves and others, utilise 'emblems' and ethnic self-images to construct their own positive ethnic identity is more complicated and can be highly flexible. Briggs [1997: 231] reported the way the Inuit elder utilised 'emblems' and ethnic self-images to confirm his ethnic identity. This elder was regarded as 'real Inuit' (*inuinnaq*) by both himself and others, but always felt 'a need to dramatise his Inuitness to Inuit audiences and perhaps to himself as well' [BRIGGS 1997: 231], because his father was 'white person' and he 'looks like a white person'. According to Briggs [1997: 231], the elder made the following joking conversation with his wife in the presence of Briggs and an Inuit woman who was married to a Euro-Canadian.

elder's wife: "My husband, being a *Qallunaaq* (white person), cannot drum and dance."

elder: "Yes, I can: I did it once."

elder's wife: "He broke the drum."

(They were all drinking tea with biscuits. The elder's wife got out frozen caribou and thawed it for Briggs. The other woman joined her eating it.)

elder: "Because I am a genuine Inuk I cannot eat frozen caribou."

In this joking conversation, the 'emblems', that is, 'drum dancing' and 'eating frozen caribou', were used, but these 'emblems' endanger the elder's ethnic identity because he can neither drum dance well nor eat frozen caribou. Then, making the opposite comments to the

ordinary ethnic image of Inuit, that is, 'because I am a genuine Inuk I cannot eat frozen caribou', he posed to his audiences the question 'What is Inuit?' and left them to solve this problem. This way of self-representation, as Briggs pointed out, is 'a very Inuit thing to do' [1997: 231] and emphasises his Inuitness, because this way of self-representation is regarded as the judicious 'adult' way, which corresponds to their self-image as the 'adult' who has 'reason' (*ihuma*).

According to some anthropologists [e.g., BRIGGS 1968; 1970; 1991; FIENUP-RIORDAN 1986; 1990; MORROW 1990] who studied the personality and self-representation of Inuit and Yup'it, the judicious 'adult' who is regarded as having 'reason' (*ihuma*) is the autonomous decision-maker, who keeps his or her 'equanimity in the face of difficulties and frustrations, both social and physical' [BRIGGS 1968: 49], and voluntarily conforms to approved modes of social behaviour. These 'adults' are considered in high regard both for one's own autonomy and for the autonomy of others, and have 'a realistic, pragmatic view of the environment and skill in one's daily activity' [BRIGGS 1968: 49], without having any preconceived ideas as to others and environments, nor making any hypothetical inferences and generalisations which are not based on his or her direct experiences.

For example, to the Inuit, three questions are unwelcome and considered as 'childish' questions: 'those concerning motivation (one's own and other people's): the nature of other people's activities: and the future' [BRIGGS 1968: 53]. To pose a question like 'why does he or she do so' is the rudest of questions because that sort of question concerning people's activities and motivations is considered to threaten individual autonomy. To predict future events, even the immediate future, is considered to be 'childish', because one may change one's mind according to the circumstances of the natural environment, which are so changeable that one's plan may be interfered by the change. Moreover, to define or generalise the nature of others and environments uniformly and rigidly is considered to be 'childish' thought with little 'reason' (*ihuma*), because different individuals have different experiences. Any existences are considered to have multiple potentiality, which may not be reduced to a unitarily rigid definition, but be utilised as occasion may demand. Actually, Inuit have a 'reputation for being able to make anything out of anything' [BRIGGS 1968: 46] by utilising the multiple potentiality of objects. For example, from the viewpoint of these 'adult' Inuit with 'reason' (*ihuma*), 'a Primus key is converted into a gunsight, the key of a dry milk can be made into a needle for sewing a dog harness, a nail becomes a barbed fishhook' [BRIGGS 1968: 45-46]. Therefore, the judicious 'adult' way of self-representation is not to make a unitarily rigid self-definition but to utilise his or her multiple potentiality.

Thus it may be said that according to this criterion of the 'adult' way of self-representation, the younger Inuit who adhere to 'the frozen world defined as "true Inuit"' [BRIGGS 1997: 232], that is, try to make a unitarily rigid self-definition which they have to follow, are judged to 'look like white person' (*qaplunaaqpaluktuq*). On the other hand, the Inuit elder whose appearance is that of a 'white person' and whose behaviour deviates from the stereotypical Inuit image of Inuit, is considered to be an 'real Inuit' (*inuinnaq*) because of his way of self-representation, in which he utilises even deviation to confirm his personal ethnic identity. In other words, an 'adult' who corresponds to his self-image, and is imbued with 'reason' (*ihuma*), is a person who does not fix his ethnic self-image as 'authentic'

stereotype, but flexibly constructs ethnic self-images out of the 'emblems' which are selected as occasion may demand from a pool of 'cultural traits'.

SELF-IMAGES IN EVERYDAY INUIT LIFE:
PROLIFERATION OF THE 'REAL INUIT WAY' (*INUINNAQTUN*)

Then, what behaviours or customs are to be included in a pool of 'cultural traits', from which 'emblems' are selected? According to Briggs [1997: 228-230] and Brody [1975: 125-144], the following various ethnic markers should be included.

First of all, behaviours and customs that are strongly charged with value, and considered to have been preserved since pre-sedentarisation times, tend to become the 'emblems'. These behaviours and customs are considered to be the 'adult or real Inuit way' (*inuinnaqtun*), contrasting well with the ethnic images of 'white people'. For example, the 'adult or Inuit way' (*inuinnaqtun*) includes: being free from laws and times; having high regard both for one's own autonomy and for the autonomy of others; keeping intimate relationships with the 'land' (*nuna*) through knowledge and skilful subsistence; maintaining navigation and survival technologies; giving services freely and helping each other; sharing food; eating 'real foods' [BRODY 1975: 130] such as raw meat and frozen fish; speaking '*Inuktun*' (Inuit language); having Inuit names; telling and listening to 'traditional' stories; playing 'traditional' Inuit games; being patient and keeping one's equanimity in the face of difficulties and frustrations, both social and physical, without getting angry; and so on. Moreover, the behaviours and customs, which the Canadian dominant society regards as Inuit 'tradition', are often utilised as the constituents of self-images by Inuit. It is not necessary that these behaviours and customs are popular in modern Inuit societies. For example, they include 'traditional' drum dancing, dog team, fur clothing and igloos (snow houses), which are not prevalent in modern Inuit society, and 'Inuit Art' which is made for export to the outside world, not for self-enjoyment.

Furthermore, Inuit often select as their ethnic 'emblems' even the behaviours and customs which originally resulted from contact with Western societies: jig dancing which was originally learned from the Scottish whalers; the custom of drinking tea; the skilful technique of trapping which was introduced into Inuit society as the result of the contact in the 19th century; Christianity to which they converted in the 20th century; and so on. Moreover, insofar as I know, even the behaviours and customs which were introduced as the result of the assimilation and integration into Canadian dominant society can become their ethnic 'emblems', under the condition that these are practised in the 'Inuit way' (*inuinnaqtun*). This would include, for example, the 'Inuit way' of operating snowmobiles and motor boats, the 'Inuit way' of working for wages, the 'Inuit way' of celebrating Canada Day, etc. Such behaviour and custom certainly originated from contact with Canadian dominant society, but they can be converted into Inuit 'cultural traits' by practising them in an 'Inuit way' (*inuinnaqtun*). Almost all behaviour and custom conducted in everyday Inuit life can become ethnic 'emblems', on the condition that they are practised in this way and contrasted to the ways of 'white people'.

Therefore, self-images represented in everyday Inuit life are kaleidoscopic, because

almost all behaviour and custom conducted in contemporary Inuit societies have the potential possibility of becoming ethnic 'emblems'. Thus, while helping my Inuit mentor with work in daily activities (such as repairing a snowmobile and building a wooden shack), I was often told that I was no less learning Inuit culture than when learning the Inuit language (*Inuktun*), or going along with him to learn hunting, fishing and navigation techniques. As some anthropologists [e.g., BRIGGS 1968: 39-47; 1991: 262-273; CARPENTER 1955: 139-140; 1973: 30-31; NELSON 1969: 373-382; 1976: 203-206] point out, Inuit conduct almost all daily activities, even repairing a snowmobile, using an electric saw, driving nails, etc, in the 'Inuit way' (*inuinnaqtun*), contrasting with the 'way of white people' (*qaplunaaqtun*). For example, while the 'way of white people' (*qaplunaaqtun*) to repair a snowmobile is to substitute new parts for broken ones according to a manual or plan, the 'Inuit way' (*Inuinnaqtun*) is to substitute the parts similar to broken ones without consulting any manuals. Then, succeeding in repairing the machines, which 'white person' has failed to repair in the way of 'white people', Inuit often say: 'White people know nothing' (*qaplunaat qaulimangngittut*). Thus, conducting these daily activities in 'Inuit way' (*Inuinnaqtun*), Inuit continually reproduce and confirm positive ethnic identity.

Accordingly, it is actually impossible to describe exhaustively all 'cultural traits' which can become ethnic 'emblems', because any behaviour or custom in everyday Inuit life, even new customs originally introduced from the Canadian dominant society, can become ethnic 'emblems' on the condition that these are practised in the judicious 'adult or real Inuit way' (*Inuinnaqtun*). In other words, by absorbing new customs flexibly, the pool of their 'cultural traits' always proliferates. Based on this flexible and proliferate nature of ethnic self-images, Inuit can create self-images to confirm their positive ethnic identity as occasion may demand in everyday life.

CONCLUSIONS: MANIPULATION OF SELF-IMAGES AS 'BRICOLEUR TACTICS'

In this paper, I have shown how Inuit represent ethnic self-images and use these images as a 'tool' to justify their own opinions in negotiations as well as to confirm positive ethnic self-identity in everyday life. In these self-images, Inuit regard themselves as the 'adult' with 'reason' (*ihuma*), whose way of self-representation is not to make an unitary self-definition but to utilise his or her multiple potentiality as occasion may demand. In other words, the 'adult' with 'reason', which corresponds to one's self-image, represent the person who does not fix the ethnic self-images as 'authentic' stereotypes, but flexibly constructs ethnic self-images out of the 'emblems' selected from a pool of 'cultural traits'. Moreover, this pool of 'cultural traits' flexibly absorbs new customs and continuously proliferates. Any behaviour or custom in everyday Inuit life, even new customs originally introduced from the Canadian dominant society, can become ethnic 'emblems' on the condition that these are practised in the judicious 'adult or real Inuit way' (*inuinnaqtun*). Thus, the self-images represented in everyday Inuit life have flexibility and the potential capacity to absorb new socio-cultural elements resulting from assimilation and integration into the Canadian nation state and the capitalist world system. It is this flexible way of self-representation that is considered to be 'adult or real Inuit way' (*inuinnaqtun*).

This flexible nature of self-images seems to play an important role in the process of socio-cultural adaptation of the Inuit to changing circumstances resulting from assimilation and integration. Inuit preserve their ethnic identity through priding themselves on being 'Inuit', in spite of having experienced great socio-cultural changes since their sedentarisation in the 1950s. This may be considered to be a process of reconciling positive ethnic identity and socio-cultural changes to each other. In this process, converting new socio-cultural elements into their own 'cultural traits' by practising these new customs in 'Inuit way' (*Inuinnaqtun*), they have harmonised ethnic self-images with socio-cultural circumstances resulting from assimilation and integration. In other words, based on this flexible extension of self-images, they adapt themselves to changing socio-cultural circumstances, preserving positive ethnic identity in everyday life.

It may be said that this flexible usage and extension of self-images according to changing circumstances are 'tactics' in 'everyday practices', as referred to by Certeau [1987 (1980)], or 'bricoleur tactics' in 'the field of everyday life' as referred to by Oda [1996]. That is, 'unconscious but flexible and tenacious resistance to the dominant culture, although it seems merely a compromise or obedience to the dominant culture' [ODA 1996]. Through this mechanism of 'tactical' manipulation of self-imagery, Inuit people unconsciously but flexibly resist to the Western hegemony and reproduce positive ethnic identity in everyday life, in spite of accepting the socio-cultural changes resulting from assimilation and integration into Canadian dominant society.

Acknowledgements

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