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Ranked Societies of the Alaskan Pacific Rim

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Ranked Societies of the Alaskan Pacific Rim

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The peoples of the southern Alaskan Pacific Rim (Aleuts, Koniags, Tanaina, Chugach, Ahtna, Eyak) have been characterized by a trichotomous model of "Eskimo," "Aleut," and "Indian." The groups were assumed to be units which were clearly defined by isomorphic boundaries of biology, language, and culture; these formed the basis for studies of native peoples in the region. Groups within these large categories were subdivided into tribelets following classic definitions. These kinds of classifications have created analytical problems. An alternate model will be used delineating societies as they existed in the 18th century and, with the exception of the Aleuts and Koniags, into the 19th century, which encompasses the pre-contact and early contact periods.

It is suggested that the southern Alaskan societies share characteristics which set them off as a unit from other societies to the north. They are discussed as societies which had two classes: a free and a slave. The focus of the discussion is on the organization of the ranking system within the free class. With an emphasis on wealth, inheritance, and a large kin group as requisites for position, raiding and trade were major techniques used to operationalize the system. Further elaborations among the Aleuts are examined in which, through a conical "clan" system, one chief rose to prominence on an island. Rights to strategic resources began to be usurped, but the shift to stratification was squelched by a combination of factors including incessant aggression which destroyed the kin base upon which the stratification ultimately depended. The southern Alaskan societies were found not to conform closely to ideal models of social organization. But, the anomalies can give insights into the dynamics of social evolution. [Ethnohistory, Ranked Societies, Aleuts, Eskimos, Athapaskans]

INTRODUCTION

Along the Pacific Rim of southern Alaska, a variety of societies (Tlignit, Eyak, Ahtna, Tanaina, Chugach, Koniag, and Aleut) have been dealt with generally as separate isolated groups; no real attention has been paid to the similarities between

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them. Several factors have contributed to this fragmented perspective. The region has both Eskimo and Athapaskan as well as Aleut speakers; the dichotomy drawn between "Eskimo" and "Indian" is partly responsible. The fact that some depended more heavily on land mammals while others were almost totally marine oriented also contributed to this view. However, in spite of these factors and in spite of the cultural differences that existed, there was an overall similarity among the groups which effectively set them off from less complex groups to the north. My purpose is to give a new, integrated perspective of the 18th and 19th century societies of the southern Alaskan Pacific Rim, and to examine the similarities and some of the anomalies in classification which result.

CLASSIFICATIONS AND CATEGORIES

Behavior, attitudes, and expectations of people vis-a-vis each other within a specified group normally differ from that between groups. It is paramount to define this group—the population—for social analysis. Failure to do so will bias the outcome of the study.

In Alaska, two major group definitions have been most commonly used and these tend to channel and direct research: the Eskimo-Indian dichotomy and the "tribal" divisions. They have surpassed the point of being models, reaching almost paradigm status in Alaskan research. They are no longer questioned but are taken as *given*; research is couched in terms of one or both "paradigms" and the implicit assumptions that accompany them. Major cultural and social aspects are assumed to be fairly uniform and consistent *within* the circumscribed population and different from those outside the boundaries to the extent that fundamental differences may be glossed over and significant similarities which crosscut the boundaries either underplayed or credited to "diffusion." In order to more clearly understand the dynamics of southern Alaskan societies, it is time to re-examine and dispell the old "paradigms" which obfuscate analysis.

Eskimo-Indian Dichotomy

The Eskimo-Indian dichotomy and its concomitant implicit assumptions of the co-ordinance of race, language, and culture has been used traditionally as a framework for arctic/sub-arctic studies. While it may be useful for some kinds of studies, I have found that it is of little analytical value in examining the social dynamics within groups of people and inter-relations between these groups. I have pointed out that interaction between small, autonomous societies in southern Alaska was based on alliances or the lack thereof regardless of whether the participants were Indian, Eskimo, or both [TOWNSEND 1979a]. Thus, raiding, trade, military alliances, and intermarriages formed major bridges between autonomous groups; linguistic affiliation was of lesser significance. Ethnicity *in terms of* Eskimo or Indian was unknown until well after European contact.

"Tribes"¹

The population of southern Alaska has been divided over the years into a number of separate named units which are presumed to have some empirical validity. Frequently, these are designated as "tribes." My concern here is two-fold. First, I question, along with other anthropologists, the appropriateness of the use of the notion of tribe as applicable to Alaskan phenomena. Second, I question whether the large "tribal" units have a unity which sets them off from other units of the same level.

Definitions of "tribe" by anthropologists are either extremely vague or do not conform to the reality of the Alaskan situation. Plog, Jolly, and Bates [1976: 604] consider a tribe to be an "egalitarian social group similar to the band in its informal leadership; it differs from the band in that mechanisms for pantribal solidarity exist which integrate all the local tribal segments." Similarly, Service [1971: 102-107] considers the main difference between bands and tribes is the occurrence of sodalities, such as clans, or age-grade societies in the latter. So far as I am aware, the "tribes" of southern Alaska never had mechanisms for pantribal solidarity nor, in the 18th and 19th centuries, were they egalitarian. While clans existed in Tanaina, Ahtna, Eyak, and Tlingit societies at least some of them cross-cut "tribal" lines as is discussed later (p. 130). There is evidence that Aleuts and Koniags had secret men's societies which involved all adult men of a village. Activities seemed directed mainly to frightening women, and there is no indication that they formed pantribal sodalities [LANTIS 1947: 27-33; VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 308-313; DAVYDOV 1977: 108-109]. Beals and Hoijer [1971: 688] define tribe this way: "politically independent group usually claiming a definite territory and often with a distinctive dialect and culture." A tribelet, a term also used for Alaskan units, they define as "a small politically independent group occupying a small territory but sharing a speech and most culture with other nearby groups" (p. 668). Neither of these is an effective model for analysis of or understanding of social groups in Alaska during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Some time ago, Kroeber voiced concern about the idea of "tribe" as an independent phenomenon. The tribe:

Might yet prove to be wholly a phenomenon of Caucasian contact, construal, pressure, or administrative convenience [1955: 312]. The more we review aboriginal America, the less certain does any consistently recurring phenomenon become that matches with our usual conventional concept of tribe; and the more largely does this concept appear to be a White man's creation of convenience for talking about Indians, negotiating with them, administering them—and finally impressed upon their own thinking by sheer weight (p. 313).

More recently Fried [1966, 1975] has examined the notion of tribe and found it to be a secondary phenomenon resulting from the contact of less complex societies with state societies. I will not repeat his very cogent arguments here, but merely note that in terms of the Alaskan situation, I agree with his conclusions. I cannot see large agglomerations of peoples, under the general rubric of Tanaina, Ahtna,

Tlingit, Koniag, Chugach, or Aleut possessing social unity. Sometimes many cultural traits are coterminous with the alleged boundaries, but at the same time others crosscut these. While some groups speak different languages, such as Tanaina and Koniag, others do not, namely Koniag and Chugach [KRAUSS 1973]. With regard to Tanaina and Ahtna, cultural similarities are so great that there is some question as to what distinctive cultural diagnostics would separate them into two different tribes, each with internal unity, *except* language. Even today, the limits of the tribe are vague in the minds of many southern Alaskan people.

I am not alone in my uneasiness with "tribe" used in reference to the southern (or for that matter, any) Alaskan populations. VanStone [1974: 8] observed that there was no "tribal organization" and only limited "tribal consciousness" among the Athapaskans. On the other hand, Osgood [1937: 13] elected to consider the Tanaina as "what might be called a nation, for want of a better term to indicate a group of definitely related subdivisions or tribes." De Laguna and McClellan (Ms.) circumvented the problem by referring to the Ahtna loosely as a "people," "natives," and as a "group," the last used in the non-technical sense. Birket-Smith [1953] discussed nine "tribes" of Chugach but neglected to explain just what "Chugach" was, if in fact it was a unit of some sort. Oswalt elected to use "tribe" redefining it to suit his needs:

The people in certain villages, hamlets, or camps who were considered by outsiders, and by themselves, as being set off from other such units and having a sense of ingroup identity [1967: 8-9].

Unfortunately, the tribe in this sense coincides more closely with an ethnic group than with what is generally understood as a tribe [cf. BARTH 1969: 11].

The ways in which Alaskan "tribes" and their boundaries have been established are complex and to some degree circular. The initial sorting can be traced to the Russians who controlled Alaska between 1741 and 1867. From the first voyages, tribal names were assigned to various peoples contacted. Baron von Wrangell [VANSTONE ed. 1970] made a systematic attempt to list and describe major groups. The descriptions were based on explorers' reports of settlements they contacted and on the observations of people in settlements with whom the Russians were in direct contact.

Following the United States purchase of Alaska in 1867, a number of attempts [e.g. DALL 1870, 1877; PETROFF 1884] were made to categorize Alaskan groups into the model of tribe assumed to be valid by Western society. A quick glance at the literature reveals a nightmarish array of various combinations of tribal names with assorted spellings referring to a myriad of populations and conflicting boundaries. This is especially true of populations that speak Athapaskan languages.

Names of tribes have been acquired in three ways:

1. Place names which seem to have had only local significance but which were extended to neighboring populations. Tribal names that derive from a place name or a word meaning "people of...the specific district" include Eyak,

Chugach, Ahtna, Kenai or Kenaitze (analogous to Tanaina). [see, for example, BLACK ed. 1977: 84]

2. Names by which other peoples have called the group in question. These include Kolosh (analogous to Tlingit), which was derived from other native Alaskans, and Aleut, which apparently originated with the Russians.

3. Names taken from the word "people" or "real people" in the language of the people in question. These include Tlingit and Tanaina (*Dena'ina*).

Koniag could have derived from any of three sources [DAVYDOV 1977: 148; SARYCHEV 1807, II: 75; HRDLIČKA 1944: 16].

The extension of the name, from whatever source, to a large group of people with some presumed "tribal" unity is based primarily on the language spoken. In fact, tribal boundaries coincide with language boundaries except in the case of the Koniag and Chugach both of whom speak Sugpiaq (Sugcestun) Yupik [KRAUSS 1973: 827]. This latter division seems to have been based on the Russian distinctions and was originally locale designations.

The implicit reasoning in delineating tribes might be expressed in this way:

1. there is a language spoken by a small group of people—a village, a series of villages, etc.;
2. the name, derived from one of the sources listed above, is applied to this group; and
3. a tribe, by definition, is a group of people who share a distinctive language (and culture). Therefore, the parameters of the tribe are defined by the parameters of the language, and the tribal name is applied to the unit as a whole.

Once named and bounded, the aggregate of groups is presumed to be a real one with internal unity. The presumptive tribal names, of themselves, have *no* implications for social or cultural unity. That social or cultural parameters coincided in reality with language boundaries or that there was some form of homogeneous ethnicity throughout was taken as given rather than as an hypothesis to be tested.

The final result has been the establishment of tribes in the literature. Attempts have been made to trace the history of the presumed homogeneous group back in time [e.g. MORLAN 1975; NOBLE 1975]. Euro-American agencies in authority have accepted these tribes as valid pictures of things as they "really were and are," and in turn, the people so classified have themselves accepted the classification, albeit frequently only vaguely conceptualized.

To further confuse matters, "tribe" also has been used, principally in 19th century literature, and occasionally in the past and today by native peoples, to designate clans among Na-Dene speaking populations where such structures occur. Tribes in this sense have as much validity, in terms of ethnicity, as any general tribal designation devised by Western society.

Inclusive tribal names were not used in the past by the native peoples in the same sense in which they are used today. Rather, Aleuts, Chugach, Tanaina, and

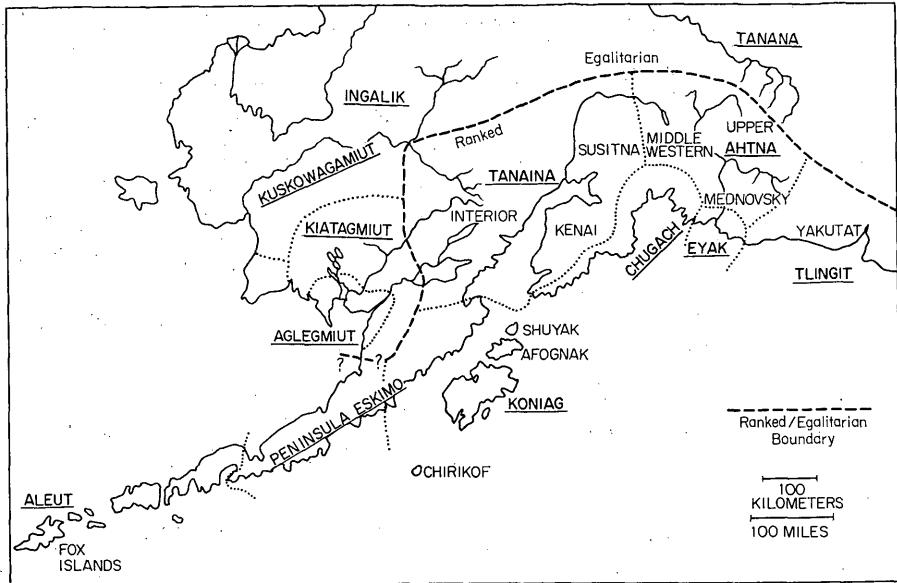


Figure: Southern Alaskan Societies.

others had specific names for smaller units of people. To some extent these tend to coincide with the alternate model I will use.

I believe the time has come to discard the Eskimo-Indian and classical tribe models in southern Alaska for socio-cultural purposes. Once these are abandoned, more productive models can be used that more clearly elucidate the socio-cultural dynamics of southern Alaska.

Societies

In the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a *mosaic* of autonomous societies² in southern Alaska. The locus of each society was the village or, frequently, several villages which were in close geographical proximity and which shared intense interaction and a number of kinship ties. Relations between members of the society differed from those established between societies. Societal boundaries were maintained despite the flow of personnel across them in the form of visitors, trading partners, seekers of sanctuary, or slaves. If southern Alaskan groups are viewed as a mosaic of a number of separate societies, rather than only a few large tribes, interactions between the people become clearer, regardless of whether they fit our present categories of Eskimo or Indian or tribal affiliation.

In some cases there seems to have been an ethnic identity that crosscut the societal boundaries. This is most clearly seen in societies which had clans and moieties. I suggest that it is this *kinship* affiliation, real or fictive which, as an identity, *sometimes* extended to the perimeters of the "tribal" boundaries and occasionally across them [see DE LAGUNA 1975]. As Wrangell observed [VANSTONE ed. 1970: 9]:

A Kenay [Tanaina] of the raven clan is taken as a relative by the Galtsan [Tanana], Mednovskiy [Lower Ahtna], or Ugalentsy [Eyak] of the same clan or moiety, even though he would not understand the conversation of the other (brackets mine).

Note, however, that the identity which crosscuts societal lines was one of unilineal kin affiliation *only*. It was *not* extended to non-clan members of the neighboring societies.

A tentative list of societies of 18th and 19th century southern Alaska can be suggested which is subject to revision. A major difficulty in delineating societies of this period is that not all societies now incorporated under a single tribal name were described. Information on some was not available before the 20th century after considerable change had occurred. I would consider each geographic division of Tlingit to have been a society (e.g. Yakutat, Chilkat, Sitka, etc.). From data available on the Eyak, this is the one instance where the societal and "tribal" boundaries appear to coincide. The Ahtna were composed of at least three societies which de Laguna and McClellan call the Lower Ahtna, known as the Mednovsky or Copper River people by the Russians, the Upper Ahtna, and finally the Middle and Western. I am not certain whether all three societies should be included within the ranked societies to be discussed below. Certainly the Mednovsky should be. For the Chugach, Birket-Smith [1953: 18-22] listed nine "tribes." These apparently were autonomous villages or village groups located about Prince William Sound and probably constituted separate societies. I would define at least three societies for Tanaina. The Kenai Peninsula villages would be incorporated into one, the Upper Inlet villages of Susitna River, Knik, and Tyonek would seem to have composed the Susitna society, and the third, the Interior, would include Iliamna, Lake Clark, Mulchatna River, Stony River, and Telaquana villages. At present the people of the villages within these three divisions *seem* to have shared a system of social action; kinship linkages were more numerous within the parameters than between them. The situation for the Koniag is still tentative. The people of the northwestern part of Kodiak Island may have formed a society separate from those of the southeast. This is alluded to in early comments by, for example, Shelikhov [1963] and Davydov [1977]. Afognak and Shuyak populations likely constitute separate societies. The Aleuts tended to segregate by island except in such cases as the Near Islands, which comprised one society.

Rank

At first, the picture is an atomistic one: a mosaic of small autonomous village based societies. However, these societies were linked at various times by alliances [TOWNSEND 1979a]. More significant was the fact that the societies of the entire Pacific Rim of south Alaska shared a broadly similar socio-political and economic structure which created similarities in cultural manifestations at the societal level and created the foundation and *raison d'être* upon which an entire system of interaction was perpetuated. That foundation was the institution of ranking.

A rank society is one in which positions of valued status are somehow limited so that not all those of sufficient talent to occupy such statuses actually achieve them. Such a society may or may not be stratified. That is, a society may sharply limit its positions of prestige without affecting the access of its entire membership to the basic resources upon which life depends [FRIED 1967: 109].

Those in valued status positions may have degrees of authority but they have no power to coerce. There is an absence of economic and political power (p. 258).

In rank society the major process of economic integration is redistribution, in which there is a characteristic flow of goods into and out from a finite center. Invariably that center is the pinnacle of the rank hierarchy...(p. 117).

(See also Sahlins [1972] for a discussion of redistributive economies.) In spite of the redistributor's position as a "collector" of goods, he cannot expropriate them for his own use; they must be redistributed (p. 253).

That the societies were ranked, and not egalitarian, goes far in explaining many cultural "traits" described in the literature and the kinds of interactions observed by the early Russians. The ethos of rank and its related importance of wealth symbols of status make more understandable the ready participation of all the groups in the Russian fur trade.

TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES

Rather than point out the idiosyncrasies of the various cultures of the southern Alaskan societies, I will concentrate on an outline of their similarities which created an overall Pacific Rim "culture." Concentration will be directed toward societies west of Tlingit. The latter will be considered tangentially. Details differ between groups but the general system was ubiquitous.³ The rank/redistribution system and the traits that derived from this system set these societies apart qualitatively from the egalitarian societies to the north.⁴

At the outset, I should make clear my position. The rank/redistribution system was developed and functioned prior to contact with Europeans; the system is not a result *merely* of Russian contact and the fur trade. Neither is it reasonable to credit the cultural manifestations of the Pacific Rim ranked societies simply to recent diffusion from Tlingit or other Northwest Coast societies. Rather, the system is expected in conjunction with the development of ranking in each society accruing from more reliable and concentrated food resources, larger populations, more continuous association of people, and redistribution [e.g. FRIED 1967: 183].

Ranking is related to food supplies that are reliable and concentrated and to the larger agglomerations of people this permits [e.g. FRIED 1967: 115-116]. The coastal zone and adjacent interior of south Alaska was a resource-rich region which provided a relatively stable food supply in quantities to support large populations in villages from as few as 50 up to about 1,500 persons⁵ in the Tlingit region. The coasts

teemed with sea mammals, fish, and shellfish. The Aleutians and Kodiak⁶ lacked large land mammals but the sea resources and fish amply compensated for this absence. Additionally, some Kodiak Island people acquired caribou from the adjacent Alaska Peninsula. Major caribou herds have been located within the Pacific Rim region with centers of habitation on the Alaska Peninsula, the upper Kuskokwim and Stony River regions, the upper Susitna River, and secondarily on the Kenai Peninsula in the last 200 years [SKOOG 1968: 205-240, 275-290]. Likely, caribou populations had considerable time depth in these areas. Moose was also plentiful in many parts of the mainland. The Chugach territory in Prince William Sound lacked large game animals; mountain goats were the only local large animal resource. However, similar to the Kodiak and Aleutian regions, fish and sea mammals made up for this absence. In addition to the land and marine resources, huge salmon runs gave a reliable source of food along the coast and were especially important to people living in the interior. In sum, people close to the coasts relied heavily on marine resources and fish while those somewhat inland struck more of a balance between land mammals and fish. The Tanaina of Iliamna Lake were able to supplement their land mammal and fish diet with occasional marine resources. Iliamna is only a short portage from Cook Inlet and the people travelled there for shellfish and sea mammals. Iliamna also has a resident population of seals which the local Tanaina hunted. Generally, there was a positive correlation between the complexity of a society and its proximity to the sea. Those nearest the sea possessed the most complex ranking systems; those at a distance in the interior, the least.

In part as a result of the rich resources available and knowledge of the techniques to acquire and utilize them, the population of southern Alaska at the time of contact was quite large although exact figures are not known. Estimations have been provided by Russians at a number of times, but many of these omit groups not in direct contact⁷ or were made after considerable population drop from diseases and other causes. I estimated [TOWNSEND 1977] that the total population for the entire Pacific Rim region under consideration would have been a *minimum* of 47,800 or 32,800 exclusive of the Tlingit.⁸ An overall density figure for each society or language group would be rather misleading. Within a region, people identified with a specific village and certain fishing or land or marine hunting areas, but a bounded geographical "tribal territory" seemed not to be a relevant concept. Therefore, a density calculated on such a basis would not be instructive.

It should be noted that all the societies included in this population figure lived within about 250-300 kilometers of the coast. With the exception of about 2,800 (approximately 2,000 interior Tanaina and 800 Ahtna), all were within less than 80 kilometers of the coast. The comparative nearness to the coast of all the societies and the existence of trade networks between the coastal and more inland societies made it possible for needed goods from both interior and coastal environments to flow freely between them.

Residence was in relatively permanent autonomous villages. Usually, several neighboring villages which shared a number of links, particularly of kinship through

intermarriage, comprised a society. However, the village was the largest effective social unit. Although village people might move to fishing camps in summer or go on extended hunting trips in the fall, the group did not break up socially. At fish camps people still remained in close contact with each other. Consequently, a continuity of personnel and relationships permitted a stable social system in which patterns of leadership and prestige could develop and be maintained.

Houses within the villages (or main winter villages) were large, fairly permanent multi-family dwellings. Occupants were normally related in some way, usually as lineage segments.

The social, political, and economic systems of each of the Pacific Rim societies were tightly interrelated. The focus of the organization was a leader variously referred to as a richman, headman, household or village head, or chief. Richman is a translation of Tanaina and Ahtna terms for such an individual, and will be used here as a general reference since implications of wealth are inherent in the position. Leadership in southern Alaska goes beyond the ephemeral form characteristic of egalitarian societies where leaders are in action only sporadically and then usually in the context of their special spheres of competence [SERVICE 1975: 71].

Descent

Kinship was one of the main integrating factors of the ranked societies. Tanaina, Ahtna, Eyak and Tlingit were organized in matrilineal descent groups. In my opinion, there is very good evidence that the Aleut were also. Lantis [1970: 227-235] has discussed this possibility at length citing a number of early sources including Veniaminov. Of particular relevance are the remarks by Sarychev [1807, II: 77]:

Hence it is, that the man, who can never with certainty claim the children as his own, that are born by his wives, has not an equally unlimited power over them as with the mother; nay, that the uncle on the mother's side has more authority than he.

The children of one father by different mothers are not regarded as brothers and sisters, and are accordingly permitted to intermarry; but the case is reversed, with respect to those by one mother and different fathers.

There are some indications that the Koniags had unilineal descent, but I have reached no final decision on this point. According to Birket-Smith [1953], the Chugach were bilateral. However, there is no conclusive evidence that such was the case in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Considerable social and economic change and population decline had occurred by the early 20th century when Birket-Smith made his study. By that time many changes in social organization for all the societies along the Pacific Rim had come about [e.g. TOWNSEND 1970]. Regardless, it is the fact that kinship pervaded the societies as the main principle of association, and *not* the specific kind of descent system used by each society, that is the critical point here. Although the ideology of kinship dominates ranked societies, the precise

character of the kinship systems shows little uniformity [FRIED 1967: 121]. In societies of the Pacific Rim, the kin group was the critical unit. This could be a lineage, lineage segment, or kindred; the important feature was a tightly knit group of people united through fairly close bonds of kinship.

Clans also occurred among the matrilineal Tanaina, Tlingit, and Ahtna. These were further organized into moieties with ceremonial opposition. The Eyak, according to Birket-Smith and de Laguna [1938: 123], were organized into two moieties which were not further subdivided into clans. The Aleuts had a lineage structure with its implications of exclusivity and potential in the ranking system, but apparently lacked the larger inclusive corporate kin groups, clans.

Residence patterns have led to considerable confusion in southern Alaska for those who search for rigid rules. Among all the southern Alaskan societies initial bride service was practiced. Subsequently, the girl went to live with her husband. If the prospective husband were a richman, he might be able to provide the girl's parents with a bride price sufficient for him to take her to his home immediately. Just what "his home" means was never clearly defined. It appears to me that within the matrilineal societies there was a strong tendency to avunculocality, rather than patrilocality as has been commonly suggested. The ethnographic data point to this likelihood, although there was room for flexibility. Given the emphasis on ranking and its concomitant stress on acquisition of valued goods which were owned by the local kin group, and given the importance of a group of male kinsmen as the nucleus of trading and raiding parties from which wealth and prestige accrued, the consolidation in a residence group of a number of men related in a common lineage would have been a most efficient structure [see SCHNEIDER and GOUGH 1961]. What Fried [1967: 121-123] has summarized for ranked societies as a whole seems verified in specific cases in southern Alaska. Post-marital residence was not uniform. Movement of personnel between households appears to have been quite common. Normally attachment to households was based first on a kinship link, and following that, on where one could establish the most advantageous position. People searched for residence with a kindred richman who was fair and who manifested the ideal virtues inherent in his position. The more highly ranked sought alliances in households that offered the greatest opportunities for position advancement. As a result, I have remarks by Tanaina informants that "if the richman did not treat the person well, he was free to leave and join someone else's household and work for him," or "if a richman saw a poor boy who was industrious, he would take him in and help him." Perhaps the boy might marry the richman's daughter [TOWNSEND 1960-73; see also OSGOOD 1937: 134]. Wrangell [VANSTONE ed. 1970: 11] also observed in the 1830s that Tanaina were free to ally with a richman, go to another village, or live separately.

The main point to be made with regard to kinship and residence is not the specific details of the structure within each society but rather that each household or group of households was made up of a group of clearly related individuals that comprised a social and economic unit. Members clung to the household not only

because of kinship but also because of personal advantages which might accrue from such membership.

Class, Rank, and Slavery

All southern Alaskan societies have been described either implicitly or explicitly at various times in the literature as being composed of classes: those of high rank (or "nobles"), "commoners," sometimes drudges or very poor people, and slaves [e.g. LANTIS 1970: 242-250; VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 164-165; BLACK ed. 1977: *passim*; DAVYDOV 1810-1812/1977; OSGOOD 1937: 131; DE LAGUNA and McCLELLAN 1975; BIRKET-SMITH and DE LAGUNA 1938]. At the same time it has been implied that they were egalitarian, and band organized, and they have been classified as central-based wanderers [e.g. VANSTONE 1974: 40-41; KARI 1977: 276; OSWALT 1967: 88, 90]. The result has been considerable confusion, and understanding of the social dynamics of the region has been obscured. It is becoming clear, however, that no rigid classification of the societies which adheres to ideal categories will be satisfactory. Rather the societies show characteristics of several kinds of organization.

Elsewhere [TOWNSEND 1978, 1979b] I have argued that slavery existed in all the Alaskan Pacific Rim societies in the pre-contact period. This was not merely a case of a handful of captives or human chattels who were kept somewhat on an *ad hoc* basis. Rather this was an *institution* of slavery. Slavery, in its fundamental definition, is a condition in which a person is the property of another and forced to work for him. The totality of the slave's powerlessness in principle and the idea of the slave as a piece of property are the critical criteria [NIEBOER 1909: 5; FINLAY 1972: 4]. This definition fits well the circumstances which held in the 18th and 19th centuries in southern Alaska. Slaves were obtained by capture or by trade. Additionally, orphans were occasionally converted to this class. Slaves had no rights, and were forced to work, were sold, or were sacrificed at the pleasure of the master.

Given the existence of slaves, the societies, by definition, were stratified in that one group of people within a society did "not have equal access to the basic resources that sustain life" [FRIED 1967: 186]. There were two classes, the free and the slave.

It is within the free class, however, that further questions of characteristics arise. Rank, not stratification into additional classes, was the means of ordering, although the "class" terms prevail. It is said that Tanaina had two "classes": nobles and commoners [OSGOOD 1937: 131, 135] as well as slaves [VANSTONE ed. 1970: 11]; Ahtna had an aristocracy, commoners, drudges and bondsmen, and slaves [DE LAGUNA and McCLELLAN 1975]. Eyak drew a distinction between the "chief" and his family and others in the society. They also kept slaves [BIRKET-SMITH and DE LAGUNA 1938: 128-129, 139-140]. Chugach and Koniag were similarly organized [e.g. BIRKET-SMITH 1953; DAVYDOV 1977], as were the Aleuts [e.g. VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 164-165] and Tlingit [e.g. KRAUSE 1956]. Veniaminov [1840, II: 164-165] described the system among the Fox Islands Aleuts:

The Chiefs and their children and nephews formed the upper class which was composed of those renowned for their warlike exploits and skill in hunting. Their descendants formed the class of the so-called "honorable" proper. The class of commoners was composed of all the plain Aleuts who were in no respect distinguished, and of the freed slaves. The slaves were all the prisoners of war and their descendants.

Veniaminov's further discussion makes it clear that we are dealing with rank, not class. Lantis, unwilling to abandon "classes" completely, admitted consternation in attempting to understand Aleut "classes" in the strict sense and reached the conclusion that "the fundamental units, whatever they were, had varying rank and were not rigidly divided into two free classes" [LANTIS 1970: 245]. De Laguna [1972: 462] clarified the system as a ranked one for the Yakutat Tlingit:

From the chief of the whole sib down to the lowliest there was a series of graded ranks. It would be incorrect, I believe, to think of such a series as made up of definite classes or, on the contrary, as a hierarchy of evenly spaced positions. Nor should we assume that each individual was definitely assigned to a separate step on such an ascending stairway. Rather, there were marked gaps or discontinuities of rank between family lines even within the same lineage; conversely, for many purposes, members of the same family line or of closely related lines were considered as equivalents.... "Relatives" of a chief in an inferior line of his lineage could not aspire to rise as long as there were potential heirs among his close relatives.

There were valued positions of status to which there was limited access in all the Pacific Rim societies. But, within the free class there was not a group (class) of people with similar amounts of power who exerted similar forms of control (or lack of control) over basic resources, tools, and techniques of production and flow of socially available energy [HARRIS 1975: 396]. All within the free class had access to strategic resources.

Degrees of Ranking

Ranking was *not* equally elaborate among all the societies of the Pacific Rim which participated in the system. It should be stressed that each society was autonomous, and the elaborateness of the system varied markedly within the parameters we now set out as tribes. I suggest that societies in which the institution reached its greatest florescence were those of the Fox Islands Aleuts, the southeastern Koniags, and the Tlingit. Somewhat less elaborate were the Aleut societies of the Andrianov and Rat Islands, the Kenai Peninsula Tanaina, the northwestern Koniag, and the Chugach societies. Likely the Eyak were somewhat less deeply involved. The most simply ranked were the Near Islands, the Susitna and Interior Tanaina and the Mednovsky (Lower Ahtna or Copper River Indians). I am unsure of the degree of ranking as opposed to egalitarian organization of the more interior Ahtna societies (the Upper and the Middle and Western).

Richmen and Redistribution

The rank societies of the Pacific Rim were built around the principle of redistribution or pooling [see FRIED 1967; SAHLINS 1972]. The richman was at the apex of this system and acted as redistributor minimally for his kin group but frequently for the village or society as well. The richman and his immediate relatives usually constituted the high-ranking members of the village. Less wealthy kinsmen lived in the large house which ostensibly "belonged" to the richman, that is, to his lineage (or kindred), or they lived nearby. They contributed at least part of their production to him, and this constituted part of the redistribution. It was to the advantage of the richman to entice as many kinsmen to join him as possible. In order to do so, he gave generously and held supporters in part through unbalanced (generalized) reciprocity, creating an obligation on their part.

Feasting was one of the major means of redistribution and might or might not be held in conjunction with a "potlatch" where wealth was displayed.

Sauer, during his visit between 1790 and 1792 obtained an early description of the ecological significance of feasting as a part of the redistribution among the Fox Islands Aleuts. He referred to a time before the Russian contact:

Although they formerly had places wherein to deposit the produce of the chase, they never were accustomed to lay in a stock for the winter; for they only preserved their food until it came to their turn to feast. As, however, at that time, the islands were populous, and their villages extensive, this method was nearly the same thing; for the different villages visited each other in regular rotation, and were guests until the whole quantity that they had collected was exhausted, which was not till their fishing season re-commenced...[SAUER 1802: 273].

Feasting provided not only a means of redistribution of food and an insurance against shortages among any of the villages but also created a network of alliances between villages underwritten by generosity.

Displays of wealth and major redistribution of goods to members of the village or to those of other villages and other societies at the feasts and "potlatches" for special occasions constituted the most ostentatious aspect of rank and redistribution systems among Pacific Rim societies [e.g. BIRKET-SMITH and DE LAGUNA 1938; DE LAGUNA 1972; LANTIS 1947; OSGOOD 1937; TOWNSEND 1965]. A variety of excuses were used to give such a "potlatch" including honoring of living individuals, house-building, "repayment" for assistance, helping a poor member of the community, honoring a favorite child for some exploit, welcoming a visitor, memorializing a death, and so on. However, the most important aspect of the rank/redistribution system lay not in these obvious displays but in the relationship of the richman to the community.

A richman held authority in each independent village, although he had no real power to coerce. He retained authority by virtue of prestige which derived in part from generosity and conforming to the ideals of the society as well as from wealth

controlled within his kin group. There were rarely attempts at a greater level of political integration. Veniaminov provided a description of authority of a richman that could be applied with modifications to most of the other Pacific Rim societies:

The former government of the Aleuts might be called patriarchal. Every village consisted of kinsmen and formed only one family, where the elder of the clan, called Toen (Toukkoukk), had power over all, but his power was almost the same as the power of the father over children who do not live with him [1840, II: 166].

This may not be entirely correct. The Russians on Unalaska and Umnak in the early 1760s indicated that some of the villages had two or three toyons ("chiefs") which would suggest more than one residence [e.g. COXE 1970: 92-184 *passim*] with each richman or toyon at the head of his kin group.

Within the village, the richman, acting as a leader of his kin group, upheld the group's traditions, cared for the unfortunates, and was the most industrious. He acted as host to visitors and:

was to watch over the common good, protect the borders of the village (each village had its separate sites for hunting); not permit strangers to hunt in places belonging to the village; not permit hunting within foreign borders, and thereby give cause for enmity [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 166].

His position required considerable managerial skill and industry to organize and lead trade ventures, arrange and sometimes lead raids, and look after village welfare. He organized and often led economic activities of the villagers, but he rarely did much of the actual labor himself, and never engaged in menial tasks such as carrying water and cutting wood; that was the work of his slaves. Thus a richman was primarily an organizer and leader who was generous with his own resources. The freedom from labor was a symbol of prestige and rank. In the Aleutians, he received the same share of fortuitous goods (beached whales, driftwood and so on) that washed up on the beaches as did the rest of the population; no larger portion accrued because of his status. He maintained order in the village and adjudicated internal disputes, but imposition of penalties had to have the assent of the high ranking people, the "honorable." Among Aleuts, the richman, by authority of his position within the village, could enlist anyone in his group to aid his son or nephew in doing something for the common good of the village, but, as is implicit in the distinction between *authority* and *power*, he could not demand services for his personal needs. The richman or his close relatives (sons or nephews) initiated and led raids which brought in valued goods and slaves. However, at least in the case of the more complex Aleuts, a raid could not be initiated without the agreement of the richman of the other villages of the same island and without the assent of the oldest richman. The position of richman embodied the prestige of the village; an insult to the leader was an insult to all and was avenged by all [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 166-167].

The richman and his immediate relatives consistently wore symbols of prestige including dentalium shells, special valuable furs, and after contact, large quantities of trade beads. Amber was also highly prized, particularly in the Aleutian Islands and Kodiak. More important, he held slaves who were used for ostentatious display, menial labor, sometimes sacrifice during grief or at a death, and for trade.

Inheritance of Leadership Position

The position of richman was an "inherited" one in all the societies, but this situation should be examined further. In the Aleut, Koniag, Chugach, Eyak, and Tlingit societies, the position of richman (i.e. "chief") was said specifically to have been inherited⁹ [e.g. BIRKET-SMITH 1953: 92; BIRKET-SMITH and DE LAGUNA 1938: 127, 450; BLACK ed. 1977: 21; DAVYDOV 1977: 190; DE LAGUNA 1972: 462; VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 167-168]. The Ahtna leadership was given over by a man as he aged to a younger man who was his son, matrilineal nephew, or other relative [DE LAGUNA and McCLELLAN 1975]. By the time Osgood studied the Tanaina in 1931 and 1932, their situation was less clear. Some informants maintained that the position had been inherited while others denied it [OSGOOD 1937: 132-133]. Confusion of his data is likely due partly to the fact that his informants were recalling a period after European contact during which social and economic changes had occurred. It is also possible that to become a leader, inheritance was more important to some of the Tanaina societies while wealth stood out in others. Wrangell, who was in southern Alaska in the 1830s, clarified the close interrelationship of wealth and inheritance in Tanaina leadership. In discussing potlatches and feasting:

A person who distributes his fortune to his countrymen most extravagantly during a festival receives the greatest esteem in his village and in the entire moiety; others take his advice and never contradict him. Thus originates a *toyon* (chieftainship), or, better to say, esteem of him; the authority of the elders (*kyshka*) is not based on genealogy, although in large part they pass it on to their heirs; at the same time it is conditional and anyone can either recognize the elders or move to another village where he can do what he likes and even live away from everyone [VANSTONE ed. 1970: 11].

In the Alaskan Pacific Rim societies, rank was clearly based on two linked factors: wealth and inheritance. High rank without wealth was meaningless. Inheritance itself can be seen to be composed of two kinds: inheritance of position and inheritance of wealth. Together, these "create" the potential leader who must then demonstrate his worthiness of the position through the correlated requisites of generosity and living up to the ideals defined by the society, as well as acquiring more wealth.

A large following of relatives was also requisite to attaining and maintaining the position of richman and for the kin group to retain its position as the highest ranked within the society; for example, "their [Fox Islands Aleut] Toigons or Princes are those who have numerous families, and are skilful [*sic*] and successful in hunting and fishing" [COXE 1970: 181: brackets mine]. (See also note 9 for the comments of

Krenitsin and Levashev regarding the importance of kinsmen.) Labor and support of a large group of kinsmen were critical, for they contributed to the accumulation of goods necessary for gift giving to maintain prestige and position and goods for trade to enhance the economic position of the group, much of which was also redistributed. They were also critical for social support in any conflicts which might arise. It would appear that leadership was retained by a kin group, and ostensibly its richman, through as many generations as it could maintain its wealth and hold the consolidated support of the kin unit.

Consolidation of Rank

There was a tendency for marriages between high ranking families within the same society in order to consolidate wealth and authority. Among the Fox Islands Aleuts:

Marriage was forbidden only for those born of the same womb. No other relationship or reason could be an obstacle. Therefore, in order to multiply their clan to the point, if possible, where the whole settlement would consist of individuals of the same blood, they generally selected the bride from their own clan and principally the daughter of their [presumably maternal] uncle on the assumption that the bride and bridegroom as closest relatives will love each other the more¹⁰ [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 76: brackets, the translator's].

A similar practice of a boy marrying the daughter of his matrilineal uncle and the advantages in terms of consolidation of wealth particularly among high ranking families has been noted for the Tlingit [OBERG 1973: 34-37]. De Laguna [1972: 463] confirmed this for the Yakutat Tlingit: "aristocrats were careful to marry only those of equal social rank." As late as the 1880s marriage patterns of close kinsmen persisted among some Tanaina societies much to the consternation of the Russian Orthodox priests. In 1881, Hieromonk Nikita [ALASKA HISTORY RESEARCH PROJECT 1936-38, II: 63] bemoaned a man living with his aunt, the ideal marriage partner for consolidation of wealth and rank in a matrilineal system. In such a case, the marriage of a woman to her brother's (i.e. richman's) son would have made the couple's heir the closest relative possible to the elder richman. The offspring would have been his sister's son and his son's son. In addition the child's status would be certain to be equal to the richman's own [see OBERG 1973: 34-35]. Another marriage reported by Nikita [ALASKA HISTORY RESEARCH PROJECT 1936-38, II: 63] was that of a man married to his half-sister related by the same father but a different mother. Such a marriage arrangement is known in conical "clan" systems [KIRCHOFF 1959: 267] to ensure that the rank of descendants remains constant and that wealth can be consolidated within a close body of kin. We would need to know how extensive such an arrangement was before reaching any final conclusions of its implications for the Tanaina ranking system.

Relationships

The ranked societies of the Alaskan Pacific Rim were autonomous villages or

groups of neighboring villages with extensive kinship links and frequent interaction. Because of the autonomy, and the small social and geographic scale of the societies, resources were restricted to those available in the immediate region and were particularly limited in comparison to the needs and demands implicit in the ranking system.

In the direct exchange of goods for equivalences, particularly in the absence of a general purpose money, strains are created because of each party's concern that he receive his fair share. Such relations hold the potential to be disruptive and would threaten the unity of a small society. Consequently, direct trade or barter did not occur. Rather, *within* a society, with its interdependent personnel, exchange of goods and services was based on the principle of generalized reciprocity which tended to decrease with kinship distance. Goods circulated within the society by redistribution via the agency of the richman and through gift exchanges between individuals in order to maintain the fiction that crass economic dealings were not taking place and to underline the solidarity of the group. Gifts make friends and create obligations [see OBERG 1973: 93-96; SAHLINS 1972]. Aleuts, for example, considered it shameful to enter into direct exchange with members of the society. Go-betweens were used in any negotiations when someone wanted an item or had one available. Owners of the goods were held in strictest confidence although their identity, in fact, was usually known to all in the society [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 110-111].

In ranked societies there is an accumulation of non-strategic values which is frequently the basis of or means for validation of rank distinctions [FRIED 1967: 142]. While the societies were basically self-sufficient in terms of subsistence resources to maintain life, the locally available goods were not sufficient for the total needs and desires of people participating in a rank system which emphasized acquisition and redistribution of not only basic but also wealth goods. Beyond the more obvious importance of the exchange of needed or valued goods was the relationship between people. The exchange of goods underwrote the alliances with their mutual obligations and responsibilities which accrued. Relationships with other societies were mandatory.

Between societies, non-local goods could be obtained in two primary ways: through alliances in which strangers became friends and gifts disguised the balanced exchange, or through raiding (negative reciprocity in Sahlins' [1972] terms) in which goods (and people as a form of goods) were taken without reciprocating equivalent value. The first alternative was by far the most advantageous since not only goods but a wide ranging social alliance usually resulted. However, the relationship was always more brittle than that *within* a society and extra care had to be taken to avoid insults or slights which might cause the association to break off and dissolve into conflict. For this reason, hosting and extra gifts were lavished on visitors during trade; other kinds of links, such as intermarriages, were often negotiated in order to extend affinal kinship obligations. Elsewhere [TOWNSEND 1979a], I have discussed the specific kinds of interactions which existed between the Pacific Rim societies. Not only did such alliances facilitate trade in both common and wealth goods, but

they increased the authority and the prestige of the richmen of the kin units involved.

The richmen formed the critical links in the relationships between societies. It was through their connections that goods flowed and obligations for assistance were instituted. Alliances between richmen of different societies were of two often related types. The first was a trade partnership grounded in generosity, presentations, and elaborate hosting. The other was marriage which could grow from the trade partnership but was not a necessary component of it. Veniaminov [1840, II: 76-77] discussed its importance for the Aleuts:

But for political reasons, that is, to avoid enmity and to establish ties of friendship, they also took wives from various distant settlements. This was done in the belief that no one would dare to offend or humiliate him who had extensive kinship ties through wedlock. Such an individual was esteemed and renowned as quick-witted and bold. His descendants sang his praises in their songs and tales, and he was especially renowned who could be regarded as the primogenitor of many settlements.¹¹

The importance of the obligations of affines to assist when necessary in both military and social situations cannot be underestimated. During conflict, different villages and different societies frequently allied against others for common advantages. I suggest that it was at least in part through the demands made on affines that such military alliances could be struck. Similarly, I suggest that affines were often important in trade alliances so necessary for the perpetuation of the ranking system throughout the entire region. Thus, through a widespread set of kinsmen and affines both in his own and in other societies, the prestige of a richman and his lineage was maintained and expanded.

Economy

The economy of the Pacific Rim ranked societies was multicentric; there were two or more spheres of exchange. Minimally these included the common sphere and the wealth sphere [e.g. BOHANNAN 1963: chapter 15]. Specific items within each varied with the society, but generally the common sphere would include such goods as dry fish, caribou skins, sinews, seal oil, snowshoes, whale meat, whale oil, various furs, and boats: canoes, baidarkas and baidaras. The wealth sphere included dentalium shells, mother-of-pearl plaques, amber, coral, and copper. The Aleuts included special wooden hats in this latter sphere. After European contact, iron and trade beads were integrated into the wealth sphere. Slaves may have constituted a separate sphere of a higher level in at least some societies. Apparently only wealth goods could be used in exchange for slaves. All the wealth goods and slaves could be converted into prestige. Slaves were also used as a general standard of value between societies in pre- and early contact times. Similarly, dentalium shells also served as a standard of value, but this may have occurred only after Russian contact [OSGOOD 1937: 134-135; VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 240-241]. Other goods could be priced in terms of slaves or dentalium [MERCK 1937; VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 165, 218, 240-241;

MEARES 1790: xxviii; BIRKET-SMITH 1953: 93; SHELIKHOV 1963: 28], but neither constituted a general purpose money.

Slaves

Slaves were especially significant in the ranked/redistributive system within societies and in relations between societies. They were obtained initially from two sources: orphans and other statusless people within the society, and captives from other societies. Secondly, either of these two types could be acquired from other societies through trade. Captives taken in raids were retained by richmen for menial labor. They also contributed their labor to the acquisition of goods useful for redistribution or trade. They could be used for ostentatious display and for sacrifice. Finally, they themselves were a commodity that could be traded for other valued goods such as amber and dentalium [TOWNSEND 1978, 1979a, 1979b].

Raiding

Generally, raiding increases substantially in ranked societies over that in egalitarian societies partly because of the desire for accumulation of non-strategic goods and tendencies to consider affronts a threat to status [see FRIED 1961, 1967]. It is instructive that in all the societies under consideration here raiding parties were instigated and sometimes led by the richman, although under some circumstances the actual leader might be a son or nephew¹² [e.g. OSGOOD 1937: 111; BLACK ed. 1977: 84; BIRKET-SMITH and DE LAGUNA 1938: 146; BIRKET-SMITH 1953: 102; VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 99–104]. Regardless of who actually led, high ranking persons of the society organized and conducted the raid from which they stood to benefit the most. Conversely, it was their status which was most immediately threatened by the casual affront, and which would suffer most if the venture failed. The leader selected his warriors, who were normally members of his kingroup, and consequently, any goods taken during the raid were funneled immediately into the wealth of that group. The Aleuts brought the captured goods to their leader at the conclusion of a successful raid. He retained his portion and redistributed the rest. Warriors of low status, including those without kin and the leader's slaves who might take part in the raids, could not retain captives, although they did share in the material goods taken. Captives selected for death rather than slavery were tortured; body parts were cut off and these remained as trophies within the kingroup to be displayed as symbols of their past glory [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 102–104].

Only a richman with a past reputation for valor and good leadership qualities could organize a raid [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 100]. Military leadership status depended upon and derived from prior general status, not the reverse, and utilized the pre-existing structure of the kin group [see FRIED 1961: 144, 1967: 182].

At least with the Fox Islands Aleuts, a raid could not occur unless the initiating richman obtained the assent of the other richmen of the neighboring villages of his island society, and particularly the eldest of them [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 167]. Conceivably this had not only political but pragmatic rationale since any retaliation

from the proposed victims could be vented against any of them as participants in the same society.

Alliances and raiding were opposite sides of a coin implementing the flow of goods, and raiding was closely allied with ranking and the institution of slavery. Raids were undertaken against societies with whom no alliances currently existed, and therefore no goods could be peacefully exchanged. On the other hand, alliances were often balanced on a razor's edge of etiquette and could be dissolved by an intended or unintended slight which constituted an affront to status. One of the frequently stated purposes of a raid was to avenge a recent insult or reactivate revenge for wrongs to ancestors in the past. In spite of the moral justifications in terms of threats to status, one of the main goals of raiding was to acquire goods and slaves without reciprocation. Presumably, an alliance might be broken off and one party resort to raiding if he felt he was consistently receiving the short end of the trading.

Within the raiding and the taking of captives for slaves, there was the potential for the creation or the re-creation of the alliance and peaceful relationships. If, after several skirmishes, victory was not attained, the leaders of the opposing groups attempted to negotiate a truce for a specific period of time. Hostages were exchanged to insure that the peace was maintained while negotiations for a more permanent peace were entered into by the leaders [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 104]. Presumably the hostages were lavishly treated, and the permanent peace was underwritten with gift exchanges. Similarly, when captives were taken from a defeated village, the richmen of the villages allied to the victim village might organize to negotiate for the release of captives considered worth while (i.e. high ranked captives). During the negotiations, the captors and the allies of the captives exchanged hostages who were treated with exceptional hospitality, feasting, and presentations, thus laying the foundations for more friendly and advantageous alliances in the future. The ransomed captives would have been indebted to the richmen who had negotiated their release, in effect increasing the latter's range of supporters [BLACK ed. 1977: 92; MERCK 1937; OSGOOD 1937: 133; TOWNSEND 1979a].

Some captive female slaves married into the family of the captors. These were high ranking people, and consequently alliances between high ranking families (although for the moment, enemies) potentially could develop. Children of such intermarriages might act as important links between the societies later. Finally, as indicated earlier, slaves who were neither ransomed nor married flowed into the wealth sphere of the economy to enhance the richman's position. The institution of slavery permeated the rank societies and was another element which set them apart from the egalitarian societies to the north [TOWNSEND 1979a].

Further Socio-Political Developments

For a period preceding Russian occupation, there is evidence of further socio-political development in the eastern Aleutians and perhaps on Kodiak Island. Much of the information is derived from the writings of Veniaminov who was in the Fox Islands between 1824 and 1834.¹³

The resources of the Fox Islands were generally abundant but they were not distributed equally throughout the region and were not unlimited. The population, in the 18th century, had reached several thousands. Veniaminov [1840, II: 176-177] was told that at the time of the Russian arrival in the 1760s the population was ten times that which Sarychev reported in 1792.¹⁴ Every suitable place on each island was settled. Veniaminov had estimated the population at between 12,000 and 15,000. Regardless of whether this figure is accurate or not, he clearly made his point that conflict between the Aleut societies and between Aleut and other societies was at a high point, and that population pressure was a contributing factor. In fact, he maintained that the population had begun to drop before the arrival of the Russians because of the extensive fighting. Another possible result of the population pressure was the expansion of the Aleuts eastward into the Shumagin Islands and the Alaska Peninsula regions.

The Aleuts had a lineage but probably not a clan structure. In contrast to a clan, a lineage is an *exclusive* structure in which membership must be demonstrated by specific links to a common, known, ancestor. A lineage also may offer its members differential access to corporate resources and to status, thus serving as an instrument of ranking and ultimately stratification [FRIED 1967: 125-126].

In the Fox Islands and perhaps on Kodiak, the socio-political system seemed on the verge of stratification within the free class. The organization resembled a "conical clan" system [see KIRCHOFF 1959; FRIED 1967: 126-128; SAHLINS 1968: 24-25, 49-50; cf. FRIED 1957], but did not reach the level of complexity that Sahlins described for the "chiefdoms." The conical clan (technically lineage) distinguishes between kinsmen on the basis of their distance from an ancestor. It is simultaneously a descent group and a unit of political order [SAHLINS 1968: 24, 50]. Its presence, even in an incipient way, is suggestive of increasing complexity in some areas of the ranked region west of the Northwest Coast and implies that the foundations for "chiefdoms" and stratification were being laid down.¹⁵

Sauer, who was at Unalaska between 1790 and 1792, first reported the occurrence of a chief¹⁶ for the entire island who superceded other richmen, but there is no indication of a primogeniture kinship basis in his discussion:

According to the best intelligence that I could obtain of the population of all the Aleutian Islands, the number of males (including children) does not exceed eleven hundred.... Formerly one village on this island contained more than the above number.... At that time they had one chief presiding over the whole island, whom they called Kikagadogok, being chosen by the natives from among the Tokok or Dogok, chiefs of villages (for it is pronounced both ways at different islands). The rest are vassals, distinguished by the name of Talha [SAUER 1802: 272].

At this point, the descent groups were being ranked in relation to each other but the criteria for that ranking are not known.

Veniaminov's account of the Fox Islands system clearly indicates its conical nature and importance of primogeniture:

A few villages, the inhabitants of which had sprung from one family, formed a state or community in which the oldest chief, descended in a direct line from the forefather who had first settled the island, was the ruler. If no direct descendant was available, the head chief was selected from among the chiefs for his wisdom, true valor and superiority in the art of hunting. He had the same power over all the chiefs and villages forming their society that each chief enjoyed over his own village. It was his duty to protect all and to intervene in cases of offense or insult done to the honor of his subjects. In the event of war, he commanded over all and concluded peace with the assent of the other chiefs. Without his wish or assent, none of the chiefs subject to him could commence war with their neighbors or even undertake an expedition against the Kodiaks or embark on any weighty enterprise. Of all that was cast up on the shore, there fell to him a share equal to that of the rest. Therefore, such chiefs were wealthiest of all and consequently the strongest.¹⁷ The very respect that his neighbors bore him depended on his strength and influence over his subjects. The head chief, having such power or rights, could call himself the lord of his island or region; but never was there among the Aleuts a chief or lord who enjoyed the right of ruling over several or all societies¹⁸ [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 167-168].

There are a number of factors which, when examined within the context of Veniaminov's description of an island chief, support the hypothesis that more complex structures were developing during this period of population pressure.

The position of richman was an inherited one. Implicit in the inheritance of rank is the potential for stratification unless other factors offset the tendency. If such a system was strictly adhered to for several generations, a single lineage likely would emerge as the high ranked one with those further from the "founder" left in less prestigious positions. However, to be a leader also required a large following of kinsmen and material resources for gift giving. These requisites could be met by some but not all richmen. Men who headed local descent groups in relatively lush resource areas stood a greater chance of the descent group increasing and having access to resources both for redistribution and for exchange with other richmen's groups for valued goods. For example, one locale on the north shore of Umnak had one of the few sources of the highly valued amber so heavily in demand [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 95].

The position of the ranking local descent group also was enhanced by advantageous marriages with other powerful and high ranking descent groups in other societies, as Veniaminov has pointed out (see above, page 141). Such practices gave a widely distributed group of kin and affines with reciprocal obligations for aid and access to valuable goods.

Authority seems to have begun to consolidate in the hands of the high ranked people to the exclusion of those of lower rank. For example, in legal matters, a richman could not arbitrarily pronounce a sentence upon an offender. What at first seems to be a restriction on his power and a tinge of egalitarianism, proves to be just the opposite. The "*assent of all the 'honorable's*" [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 167,

emphasis mine] was required. "Honorable" consisted of the descendants of the richman, his sons and nephews, that is, probably the high ranking members of a single descent group, or, since there may have been two or three richmen in some villages [e.g. COXE 1970] the high ranking of the other descent groups as well. Regardless, "power" was being consolidated in the hands of a segment of the population: those of high rank. There is no mention of the need to gain assent of the adult population as a whole.

A richman was the only one who could initiate a raid from which additional valued goods were likely to accrue and by which he might improve his status. He required assent to undertake the raid but *only* from other richmen and the chief [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 167], who were likewise highly ranked and probably linked to the initiator as kin or affines. However, the chief could forestall attempts to gain wealth and improve status by lesser richmen by refusing permission and thus restrict access to valued resources. Those who formed the nucleus of the raid were primarily of the richman's immediate kin, and they stood to profit most from any loot obtained. Low status Aleuts were restricted from ownership of certain kinds of booty (pp. 103-104).

A richman who was a lineal descendant of the founder of the island society and thus the "chief" of the island had additional rights to a share of resources throughout the island, not merely those in the vicinity of his village. This served to broaden the gap of wealth between himself and other lower ranking richmen, and, parenthetically, the other lower ranking descent groups of his society.

With the chief position being fixed by primogeniture, an enterprising richman of lesser position might decide to establish a name for himself by migration. A story of one such adventurer is informative (pp. 279-290). "One of the most powerful and renowned Aleut progenitors" (p. 279), but presumably not in direct line for the chief position, who lived on the northeastern side of Umnak, grew tired of his routine activities "such as he could perform around his locality and in the circle of his comrades, [and] decided to win renown for himself and his clan by some glorious and memorable deed in foreign lands" (p. 279). In other words, he was restricted in his attempts to gain higher status for himself within the confines of the Umnak social system. He secretly gathered volunteers and set out with a great force of his kinsmen and those of his wife. The secrecy was probably necessary since the undertaking of any such venture would have required assent of the island chief and other richmen. It was probably unlikely that he would have received assent for two reasons. The move to win renown could be seen as a threat to the status of the other high ranking men. He took with him close kin and affines, likely depriving other ranked men and the chief of supporters. Travelling east they settled in two villages each with exclusive rights to resources in their immediate areas. Encroachment was forbidden without permission of the leader who had become chief. Violence erupted when some ignored the rule and encroached on their neighbor's resources. The chief and other survivors returned in disgrace to Umnak. Disgrace came not only from an

unsuccessful venture but also from the loss of kinsmen, a requisite for maintaining high status.

Through the inheritance of high status together with the policy of intermarriage between high ranking individuals of different descent groups, a group of ranking individuals was created that had means of increasing wealth within that group, and avenues for advancement in status. These means included access to links with other villages and other societies through which advantageous trading could be conducted, and rights to initiate and carry through raids. Raiding had a positive feedback aspect, but it was, by and large, a closed system within the allied high ranking groups: only richmen could initiate raids, from which they gained both prestige for valor and wealth goods. A reputation for valor and successful raids was necessary to gain a following and be permitted to initiate raids from which more renown and wealth was won. The more ostentatious side of the redistribution system also contributed to the maintenance of the high ranking positions. Food and goods were redistributed throughout the group of kinsmen, the village, the society, or guest society. However, distribution was in accordance with position.

The chief, at the apex of the ranking system, had additional rights and privileges which worked to maintain his position through special channels to wealth and prevent others from threatening the position. Power began to be consolidated in one segment of the society to the exclusion of another: the lower ranked.

To this setting of ranked lineages with an inherited chief status based on primogeniture and differential rights and privileges of the high ranked of the descent groups, one final element needs to be added: that of differential rights of access to strategic resources—those resources necessary for subsistence [see FRIED 1957: 24].

Each village had exclusive rights to hunting places in its territory and encroachment resulted in retaliation. It was the richman's obligation to protect such rights against outsiders. However, exclusive rights to strategic resources began to develop more clearly in some locales, and this precipitated escalation in conflict:

Thus...it is known that the weaker and poorer families were excluded more and more from the means of sustenance and thus were compelled to leave their territory and seek the means of existence in other localities. Then after gaining strength in their new homes, they became the enemies of those who had previously squeezed them out and later of all the individuals of that tribe [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 94-95].

The Aleuts were on the brink of incipient stratification within the free class.

While the lack of a frontier into which to expand may give rise to independent genesis of social stratification in communities based on kin group cores when population pressures increase [FRIED 1957: 22], the presence of a frontier may mitigate against such development. A frontier was available in the Aleut case, but it was not necessarily vacant land. Rather, those who were gradually denied access to necessary resources might immigrate to more sparsely populated islands where haven could be taken with relatives or allies. Otherwise, displacement of a weaker population

could be accomplished by attack. If successful, the leaders gained not only territory in which to settle but fame for valor.

The population pressure together with increasingly restricted access to rights both within and between societies which forced some to encroach on adjacent territory, and the drive of ranked men for valued goods and fame to enhance position created a volatile situation:

And finally, little by little, these feuds and enmities became so strong that not only did the inhabitants of one island fall upon the inhabitants of another, but even between inhabitants of the same island there arose such enmities that not only did they refuse to assist each other in case of attack but they slew everywhere they could and did every possible kind of injury [VENIAMINOV 1840, II: 185-186].

A critical result of the conflict was the destruction of large segments of kin groups, so that the chiefs began to lose their base of necessary followers and their authority diminished (p. 170).

Although ranked societies are relatively stable, as seems to have been the case with most of the southern Alaskan societies, stratified ones, or those approaching stratification such as the Aleuts, are not. These latter will quickly develop a more complex state political organization or revert back to a simpler form [see FRIED 1967: xi]. The trend toward stratification can be reversed when those usurped from necessary resources are able to establish themselves elsewhere to gain strength and to take revenge. Further, when there are a number of small scale ranked and emerging stratified societies contending for limited resources, and when restricted access to resources within a society creates a disgruntled group that can still retaliate, conflicts can result that destroy the population base upon which the stratification depends. The system may then return to a more simple ranked one. The Aleuts are a case of aborted stratification.

SUMMARY

In the 18th and 19th centuries along the south Alaskan Pacific Rim there existed a heterogeneous population organized into a mosaic of small ranked societies inter-related through a complex network of trade underwritten by military, social, and marriage alliances. Raiding was the reverse side of trading through which booty could be gained outside of alliances to enhance position. Within raiding, however, were mechanisms to implement peace and advantageous alliances.

The presence of slaves *de facto* created societies stratified into two classes, free and non-free. Ranking within the free class occurred at several levels. Initially, individuals were ranked within the local corporate descent group of which there were normally two or more in a village. Second, the local descent groups might be ranked in terms of each other, so that one or two individuals emerged as the richmen, or leaders, of the village. Finally, in at least one place, the Fox Islands, there was

potential for the development of more complex structures when large populations and pressure on resources were coupled with a rank system that restricted access to high status positions and required accumulation of goods for verification and enhancement of status.

The southern Alaskan societies have been discussed generally within the context of Fried's ranked societies. Actually, they show characteristics of several kinds of classifications, and anomalies preclude an exact correspondence to any one. For example, Sahlins [1968] discussed two major types of "tribes": segmented tribes and chiefdoms. Overall, the southern Alaskan societies would correspond to the segmented tribes although Sahlins' concept of the tribe is much broader than the form which existed in Alaska. Second, the segmented tribes are said to be egalitarian, although this is clearly not the case in southern Alaska. Ranking was of paramount importance in the structuring of social relations. Leadership in segmented tribes is said to be either through big-men who achieved their position and/or petty chieftains to whom the position tended to be ascribed [SAHLINS 1968: 21-22]. Richmen in southern Alaska combined characteristics of both; in some societies the "big-man" aspect was more noticeable while in others the ascribed elements were emphasized. There were not normally people in two separate positions vying for leadership. On the other hand, political organization never reached the level of chiefdoms, and there was never the integration of disparate social groups in an overall "chiefdom"; segmentation of the units persisted in spite of elaborations in the local political sphere.

Finally, another complication is introduced by the occurrence of slavery in societies which "theoretically" should not have slaves. By definition, slavery forces the "segmented societies" also into the category of stratified societies, although their overall complexity is considerably less than would be expected. Slavery, in fact, may be one of the keys to the anomalies in understanding southern Alaskan societies. Where rank and wealth were important and where raiding was common and resources permitted maintenance of additional personnel, the acquisition of people as well as goods as a major form of wealth would be easily developed. People not only could be traded as goods for other valued commodities, they also provided labor. Slaves never became the primary source of production that is characteristic of large scale slave based economies, but production was increased substantially beyond that possible merely using kinsmen. Slaves did menial labor freeing others for more productive work which enhanced the kin group of the owner. The availability of slaves to do the more degrading labor likely acted as an inducement to other free people to join a richman's household, adding to this strength [TOWNSEND 1978, 1979b].

In southern Alaska, then, there were two systems of social relations. One was ranked familial and one was slave. The slave system helped to pressure the familial one toward stratification in the free class by providing certain kin groups with greater access to labor and production. Redistribution requirements and the freedom of freemen to move from one richman to another acted as a hedge against over-development of power within restricted groups [TOWNSEND 1978, 1979b]. In places where rights to strategic resources were beginning to be usurped, the frontier provided a

rallying place for those displaced, aggression reached disastrous proportions and the full development of stratification was squelched.

In societies such as those of the Tanaina, Chugach, Eyak, and Ahtna, the ranked system was fairly stable. In areas where territory was clearly restricted to the finite limits of islands, such as in the Aleutians and Kodiak, and where population growth began to put pressures on the societies and the environment, incipient stratification began to develop from the segmented base but it was never culminated.

The anomalies in the structure of southern Alaskan societies warn against too strict an application of ideal models to historic cases. However, these same anomalies can give insights for a better understanding of the dynamics of social evolution.

NOTES

1. The discussion of tribe here is a technical one and is not to be taken as implying that social entities did not exist in these areas in the past or that they lack time depth. This is not a discussion related to current territorial and political interests and should carry no adverse implications to land claims or other mid-20th century political issues.
2. A society is considered to be:
 - a system of social action: (1) that involves a plurality of interacting individuals whose actions are in terms of the system concerned and who are recruited at least in part by their own sexual reproduction; (2) that constitutes a set of social structures such that action in terms of them is at least in theory capable of self-sufficiency for the maintenance of the plurality of the individuals involved; and (3) that is capable of existing long enough for the production of stable adult members of the system of action from the infants of the members [LEVY 1966: 20-21, note 10].
3. Sources for this section dealing with traditional societies are derived mainly from Birket-Smith [1953], Birket-Smith and de Laguna [1938], Black ed. [1977], Coxe [1970], Davydov [1977], Krause [1956], de Laguna [1972], de Laguna and McClellan [1975], Langsdorff [1814], Lantis [1970], Osgood [1937], Masterson and Brower [1948], Sarychev [1807], Sauer [1802], Townsend [1965, 1970, 1960-73, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1978, 1979a, 1979b, and 1974 ed.], and Veniaminov [1840].
4. The Northwest Alaskan Eskimos between Norton Sound and Point Barrow are not included with the egalitarian block but were ranked [BURCH 1975]. However, they do not seem to have reached the level of complexity of the Fox Islands Aleuts or Koniag Eskimos, although they may have approached that of the Tanaina and Chugach.
5. The 1,500 persons is a post-contact figure [TIKHMENEV 1978: 428].
6. Unimak Island in the eastern Aleutians did have caribou. Brown bears were found on Kodiak Island.
7. For example, estimates of Tanaina are for Cook Inlet in direct contact with Russians, although they are extended to imply *all* Tanaina speaking societies. Frequently such a population estimate may have been only for the natives around a post or only for Christian natives. Veniaminov [1840, II: 177] suggested a figure of between 12,000 and 15,000 for the Aleuts but it is not clear whether this was for *all* Aleuts or only for those in the Fox Islands.
8. I have estimated [TOWNSEND 1977] the population of the Aleutian Islands to have been

approximately 16,000, Kodiak Island region at least 8,000, the Tanaina speaking populations 5,000, Chugach populations 2,000, Eyak 1,000, Ahtna at least 400 for the Mednovsky population alone and at least 800 for the three societies combined, and Tlingit 15,000.

9. Veniaminov [e.g. 1840, II: 167-168] and Sauer [1802: 272] indicated that inheritance, although not the only factor, certainly played a part in the Aleut position of "chief." However, Krenitsin and Levashev, who were in the Fox Islands between late summer of 1768 and summer 1769, maintained the opposite.

The office (of chief) is not hereditary but is generally conferred on him who is most remarkable for his personal qualities; or who possesses a great influence by the number of his friends. Hence it frequently happens, that the person who has the largest family is chosen [COXE 1970: 218-219; MASTERSON and BROWER 1948: 59-60; brackets mine].

10. Lantis' [1970: 228] translation varies slightly from the one quoted. "To increase their kin group, the bride was generally chosen from their own kin, most preferably the daughter of the first uncle." These were cross-cousins according to Lantis' interpretation.
11. Lantis [1970: 254] translated the same passage.

People who were interrelated by marriage into other settlements were famous and were sung about in their songs, especially those who could be considered the *progenitors* of many settlements (emphasis mine).
12. Although McClellan [1975: 233] says that "the Ahtna did not have special war chiefs," de Laguna and McClellan state that the war party was led by a special war chief, not the regular chief.
13. Veniaminov collected information about Aleut society prior to Russian contact, and his informants were recalling a period of some 60 or 70 years past. Where it is possible to cross-check with earlier observers, his accounts seem relatively accurate. Elsewhere in Alaska, we are cautious because data from informants which is *supposed* to be pre-contact may actually reflect a period after influences of the fur trade have been felt in the native social and economic systems. In the Fox Islands, however, such a situation is unlikely with regard to the socio-political descriptions provided. The Russians and the fur trade entered the Fox Islands abruptly, in the 1760s, and in only a few years violence had broken out. Following the subjugation of the Aleuts, the Russians destroyed the privileged position of richman. Only later did they attempt to reinstate a similar institution. Veniaminov came from a feudal stratified state society and it could be suggested that he projected some of the Russian class concepts onto the Aleuts. This argument is not consistent with the data he and others have provided.
14. Sarychev [1807, II: 72] estimated the Unalaska population in 1791-1792 to be 323 males, which was only one-third of the pre-contact number. Sauer [1802: 272] gave the male population of all the Aleutians as about 1100 but noted that prior to disruptions from contact a single village on Unalaska had that large a population.
15. There is some suggestion that such a system was operative for the Koniag on Kodiak [e.g. BLACK ed. 1977: 91]. Davydov reported [1977: 190]:

their villages, situated on the coastline of the island, each had its chief.... Some of the chiefs rule over many settlements and are all descended from one tribe, and named after the bays or capes near which they live.... In earlier times, the status of the chiefs was hereditary—but the choice of a successor rarely fell upon the sons but more likely upon one of the nephews.

Unfortunately, the statement is ambiguous; it is not clear whether the chiefs or the entire population "descended from one tribe." The Chugach had a hereditary position of "head chief" who presided over one or several villages but the conical aspect is not so clearly stated [BIRKET-SMITH 1953: 92]. Because the information was obtained in 1933, it is possible that the "head chief" over several villages may refer to the Russian institution of "chief" for liason which was fashioned on the aboriginal systems but not necessarily synonomous with them. There is less evidence of a conical structure among other Pacific Rim societies west of the Tlingit.

16. I will use the term "chief" to distinguish an individual whose authority supercedes that of the lineage (or kindred) richman and extends beyond his own village to encompass a larger region containing a number of villages. His authority boundaries may be conterminous with those of the society.
17. The richman of a village normally received his portion of the resources—beached whales, driftwood, and so on—that was washed up on the shore in the area *adjacent to his village*. In this case, the "island chief" apparently received a share of the resources found on beaches *anywhere* on the island.
18. Another translation of this passage is available for comparison of accuracy. The most critical part reads:

Several villages descended from one ancestor or one kinship group composed a state or community, where the older Toyoun, descending in a straight line from the first forefather who settled upon the island, or if such a one was not to be had—one chosen among the chiefs for his wisdom, bravery, and prominence in skill at hunting held the same power over all the chiefs and villages composing the community as the subordinate Toyoun had over his village [LANTIS 1970: 251–252].

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