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# Notes on Information and Food-Resource Flow among the Urban Inuit in Montreal, Canada

Nobuhiro Kishigami

(National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan)

According to 2001 Census of Canada, the total population of Inuit in Canada is approximately 45,000. Approximately 8,000 of them are now living in southern Canada outside the arctic land (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). The census shows that there are 435 Inuit in Montreal area. However, if we take the number of patients, students, and homeless Inuit into account, we estimate that more than 800 Inuit constantly stay in Montreal. The population of Inuit seems to be rapidly increasing in Montreal.

After undertaking preliminary research on life of the Inuit in Montreal, Canada in 1996, I interviewed 54 Inuit in 1997 and since then, I have continued doing research even for short periods whenever I visit Montreal (Kishigami 1999a, b; 2002 a, b, c; 2004; 2006).

In August, 2004, I carried out follow up research with 52 Inuit in Montreal. More than 80% of those interviewed are different from those interviewed 7 years ago. In the last 7 years, there occurred two major changes relating the Inuit in Montreal. First, Baffin house (a patient transit house for the Inuit from Baffin Island) was closed down in 1998 by the Government of Northwest Territories, and Inuit patients from the Baffin region began to be sent not hospitals in Montreal, but those in Ottawa. Second, in 2002 even homeless persons with 2 IDs came to be allowed to receive welfare money in Province of Quebec, under certain conditions.

In this short paper, I outline the contemporary situation of the Montreal Inuit and then report on how information and food resources flow among them. It should be noted that I did not select my informants at random. My cases consist of all the Inuit I could contact while I was in Montreal. Also, I interviewed only 3 students in this research. In this way, my samples are not perfectly representative of the universe of the Inuit in Montreal in a statistical term.

## 2. Life of the Montreal Inuit in 2004

I would like to show several statistical tendencies of population ratio between male and female, ages, native places, residing length, residential districts, income of the Inuit

in Montreal.

**2.1. Ages and Sexual Ratio of Inuit in Montreal**

There are 17 men and 35 women in my research. The number of Inuit women is far larger than that of Inuit men in Montreal. This tendency is very similar to that in 1997.

Age	Male	Female
0 to 20 years old	1	3
21 to 30 years old	6	4
31 to 40 years old	3	15
41 to 50 years old	6	11
51 to 60 years old	0	1
61 to 70 years old	1	1
71 or older than 71 years old	0	0
<b>Total (52)</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>35</b>

Table 1. Age and Gender of the Montreal Inuit, 2004

As the Table 1 shows, a majority of the Inuit in Montreal are those between 21 and 50 years old. Also, there is no one who is 71 years old or above.

**2.2 Employed Inuit, Students and Unemployed Inuit**

If I classify the interviewed Inuit into three categories : employed Inuit, students and unemployed Inuit, there are 20 employed Inuit, 3 students and 29 unemployed Inuit.

	Male	Female	Total
Employed Inuit	6	14	20
Students	0	3	3
Unemployed Inuit	11	18	29
	17	35	52

Table 2. Jobs and Gender of the Montreal Inuit, 2004

Unemployed Inuit are more numerous than employed ones. The former are 56% of all the Inuit. 12 of the 29 unemployed Inuit are homeless persons. These people are about 23% of the total. There are 7 homeless males and 5 homeless females. The rate of male homeless persons is much higher than that of female ones.

### 2.3 Income of Employed Inuit, Students and Unemployed Inuit

Most of the unemployed Inuit depend on welfare money from the Province of Quebec and get about \$550 per month on average. This applies to the majority of homeless Inuit. The main income sources of students are from student loans and part-time work. On the other hand, most of the Inuit with jobs earn about \$2,000 or more per month. So, there is a clear difference of income between employed and unemployed Inuit.

Monthly Income	\$0 to \$500	\$501 to \$1000	\$1001 to \$1500	\$1501 to \$2000	\$2001 or more
Employed Inuit	0	1	6	1	12
Students	1	2	0	0	0
Unemployed Inuit	5	20	2	1	1
Total	6	23	8	2	13

Table 3. Income of the Montreal Inuit, 2004

### 2.4 Residential Districts

While the unemployed and student Inuit in Montreal tend to live in downtown Montreal, the employed Inuit tend to live not only in the central Montreal but also in its suburbs. Specially, the homeless Inuit have a preeminent tendency to stay in downtown of Montreal. On the other hand, the employed Inuit with families tend to live in the suburbs of Montreal.

Areas	Employed Inuit	Unemployed Inuit	Student	Total
Western Montreal	5	4	1	10
Downtown Montreal	3	15	1	19
Eastern Montreal	3	5	1	9
Lachine	5	2	0	7
Dorval	1	0	0	1
West Island	5	0	0	0

South Shore	0	1	0	1
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Table 4. Residential and Staying Areas of the Montreal Inuit, 2004

2.5 Gender Differences of Residential Length

The staying length of male Inuit is shorter than that of female ones in Montreal. There is not one Inuit man who has been continuously there more than 10 years. On the other hand, there are 16 Inuit women who have resided more than 15 years in Montreal.

Length	male	Female	Total
Less than 1 year	3	6	9
1 to 5 years	7	6	13
6 to 10 years	7	4	11
11 to 15 years	0	3	3
16 to 20 years	0	9	9
21 years or more	0	7	7

Table 5. Length of Montreal Inuit male and female

2.6. Native Places of Montreal Inuit

The Inuit in Montreal come primarily from the eastern arctic, especially Nunavik (arctic Quebec) and southern Baffin Island. There are 35 Inuit (about 67%) from Nunavik, 14 (about 27%) from the Nunavut and 3 (about 6%) from other regions.

Village Names	Male	Female	Total
(Nunavik)			
Salluit	1	2	3
Akulivik	1	1	2
Puvirniqtuq	0	2	2
Inukjuak	2	4	6
Umiujaq	0	1	1
Kuujuarapik	2	5	7
Chisasibi	1	3	4
Kuujuuaq	0	6	6
Quartaq	1	2	3
Kangiqtujuuaq	1	0	1
(Nunavut)			

Iqaluit	2	6	8
Cape Dorset	0	2	2
Pond Inlet	1	0	1
Sanikiload	0	1	1
Gjoa Haven	1	0	1
Barthust Inlet	1	0	1
(Labrador)			
Northwest River	1	0	1
(Others)			
Quebec Province	1	0	1
BC Province	1	0	1

Table 6. Native Places of the Montreal Inuit Male and Female

### 3. Information and Food-Resource Flow among the Montreal Inuit in 2004

#### 3.1 Kind of Media and Food for Flow in Montreal

In the 2004 Montreal research, I asked the Montreal Inuit about a number of media such as telephone, mobile phone, fax, internet, radio, television, video, newspapers, magazines and books in addition to material resources flowed and shared such as food, cash, liquor and gifts.

Concerning flows of information, face to face communication is very important among the Montreal Inuit. However, as they are dispersed all over the Montreal region, telephones and mobile phones are the most useful and important communication tools for them. The majority have their own or shared phones. Even homeless Inuit can use phones at the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal or at their friends' houses or use public phones. Surprisingly, a few homeless Inuit even have their own mobile phones with them.

The Inuit in Montreal do not often use fax machines except at work. On the other hand, 4 – 5 years ago several Inuit in Montreal began to use the internet as a communication means. Especially, Inuit working at the Makivik Corporation, the Avataq Cultural Institute, and the Kativik School Board located in the Montreal region use the internet not only to gather information but also to communicate their family members, kinsmen or friends working at village municipal offices or the Co-Ops in the north.

Also, there are several computers connected to the internet at the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal. Many unemployed Inuit, including homeless persons, can use the internet for the e-mail communication, playing the games and listening to music there.

There are several interesting tendencies concerning use of television, radio and video among the Inuit in Montreal. They use these media fewer hours a day than the Inuit in the arctic regions. Also, the Montreal Inuit can be classified into two groups: those who like watching television programs and those who like listening to radio programs. Concerning the television programs, they like programs on nature, world travels, documentary and indigenous peoples. The radio programs they like to listen to are various kinds of music. Several employed Inuit prefer watching movies on video to other things. Also, the unemployed Inuit including homeless persons can have access to television, radio and video for daytime from Monday to Friday at the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal.

Although most of the Inuit in Montreal do not read newspapers, magazines and books, several employed Inuit read newspapers such as the *Montreal Gazette* and *The Globe and Mail* everyday. Although unemployed Inuit read the newspapers at the Native Friendship Centre, they tend to read the garage sale and horoscope sections.

Obviously, the employed and student Inuit are far more accessible to various kinds of media for communication in Montreal than those who are unemployed. On the other hand, face to face communication is the most important means for the unemployed Inuit (especially, the homeless).

The Montreal Inuit miss and eagerly hope to eat Inuit food. Arctic char, caribou meat and *maktaq* (beluga skin parts) are sometimes sent to Montreal from the north and distributed among them. These country foods are eaten at the Makivik, Avataq, Kativik School Board offices, at the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal for lunch, at the Association of Montreal Inuit monthly supper, or at individual homes in Montreal. When the Inuit eat country food, they mostly share and eat it with other Inuit.

It is interesting to note that the homeless Inuit share food, cash, cigarette, and liquor with any other homeless persons around them. To them, sharing networks surpass the ethnic boundaries.

### 3.2 Information and Food-Resource Flow and Exchanges between Montreal Inuit and Their Kin and Friends in the Arctic

There are a lot of food and information exchanges between the Inuit in Montreal and those in the arctic.

The Montreal Inuit, except several homeless persons, communicate with their family members, kinsmen, or friends by phone. Several employed and student Inuit make phone calls to their family and friends in the arctic villages almost everyday. Also, even unemployed Inuit, especially homeless persons, can use free phones at the Native

Friendship Centre or at the homes of their friends' or public phones with pre-paid calling cards to call their family, kinsmen and friends. Furthermore, they can make collect calls to the north. Through phone communication, various kinds of information are going and coming between Inuit in Montreal and those in the arctic.

Many Montreal Inuit make phone calls to their family members or kinsmen and ask them to send frozen Caribou meat and arctic char to Montreal. Also, Inuit lacking in money often ask their relatives to send them some cash through the Co-Op or the Bay store (the former Hudson's Bay Company store) by phone.

Several employed Inuit send some tools, machine parts difficult to obtain in the arctic, birthday gifts or/and Christmas gifts to their family members and kinsmen in the arctic from Montreal. On the other hand, because most of the unemployed Inuit are too poor, they do not send anything to the arctic.

#### 4. Places of Information Exchange and Food Sharing among the Inuit in Montreal

There are several specific spots or places for sharing food and information exchange among the Inuit in Montreal including several working places, the Native Friendship Centre, Association of Montreal Inuit, parks, shopping centres, bars, Nunavik House, schools and hospitals in the Montreal region.

##### 4.1 Working Places

There are several working places of the Inuit such as the Makivik Corporation, Kativik School Board, Avataq Cultural Institute, Air Inuit etc. in the Montreal region. These places are the spots to exchange information and share food among the Inuit workers. At lunch time, they often share and eat country food from the arctic. Many unemployed Inuit often visit these places to get information from the arctic and eat country food.

##### 4.2 Native Friendship Centre of Montreal

Breakfast and lunch are provided to native visitors from Monday to Friday at the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal. The customers of the centre are unemployed and homeless natives in downtown area. Many Inuit have breakfast and lunch there. Also, this centre is a place for information exchange among them. They can leave their messages for their friends at the centre and even can use free phone and internet to communicate with other Inuit in and outside Montreal.

Currently, two projects, the Street Project and the Food-Van Project, operate for the benefit of unemployed natives, especially the homeless. The centre sends three workers



(2 Inuit and 1 First Nations person) to downtown area to look for homeless natives from morning to evening everyday except weekends. If they see native persons in trouble, they will help them.

Also, from late afternoon to late night everyday except weekends the centre sends a food van with 3 workers (2 First Nations persons and 1 Inuk) downtown area to provide food and drink to homeless natives.

The unemployed Inuit, especially homeless Inuit, benefit from these projects.

#### 4.3. The Association of Montreal Inuit

The Association of Montreal Inuit was officially established in 2000. This association held a monthly supper on every last Saturday of each month at the drop-in centre in summer time and at the Anglican Church in Lachine in other seasons until March, 2005. The monthly supper provided country food to the participants and a place for information exchange among them.

However, as this monthly supper was held far from downtown Montreal, unemployed and homeless Inuit staying there hardly participated in it.

#### 4.4. Parks, Shopping Centres, Bars, Nunavik House, Schools and Hospitals

There are several spots such as Atwater Park, Atwater Shopping Centre, Peace Park, several bars, the Nunavik House (a patient transit house) and hospitals in downtown Montreal as well as Dorval Shopping Centre near the Pierre Trudeau Airport for the Inuit to see other Inuit. They can often exchange information and share food there.

#### 5. Conclusion

Concerning the flows of information and country foods, there are internal differences among the urban Inuit in Montreal. While the unemployed Inuit including homeless ones exchange information primarily on a face-to-face basis, or directly through friends by word of mouth, those with jobs tend to communicate by telephone, fax, and /or e-mail. Furthermore, while the employed urban Inuit communicate with their families or kinsmen in arctic home villages to obtain "country food" such as caribou or arctic char, the unemployed seldom do so. These examples suggest that economic stratification (differential accessibility to cash) rather than socio-physical distance or proximity between an Inuk and another leads to differing accessibility to information and food resources among the urban Inuit. These circumstances are not prevalent among most Inuit in the North, whose accessibility to information and food resources is based on kinship and/or proximity.

As already mentioned, while unemployed Inuit, especially the homeless, tend to stay in downtown Montreal, employed Inuit tend to live in the suburbs. There is no intimate and close interaction between the two groups. The suburban Inuit tend to socialize with other employed Inuit or non-Inuit persons. Although they take pity on unemployed and homeless Inuit in the city, they seem to avoid keeping contact with them in Montreal. A small number of rich Inuit can keep Inuit identity in the city because they can eat Inuit food and keep social relationships with their family and kinsmen in the arctic through utilization of information and transportation tools. On the other hand, the majority of poor Inuit have serious difficulty to keep the identity because they cannot get the food from the arctic and seldom communicate with their family and kinsmen in the arctic. Thus, I argue that differences of accessibility to information media as well as cash among the urban Inuit have led to forming at least two urban Inuit divisions with at least two different ways of life.

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Appendix 1 CENSUS OF CANADA 2001. CUSTOM DATA ON INUIT POPULATION

SUMMARY TABLES BASED ON CHRISTINA PLEIZIER'S DETAIL AGE/SEX TABLE (DIRECTLY OBTAINED FROM STATISTICS CANADA).

Source : summary tables based on the detailed age/sex table prepared by Christina Pleizer for Inuit Relations Secretariat DIAND. This table was distributed to persons concerned by Donat Savoie and Robert Bone by e-mail.

	Number	%
Nunatsiavut	2,345	5.2
Nunivik	8,705	19.3
Inuvialuit	2,975	6.6
Nunavut	22,560	50.1
RofCanada	8,485	18.8
Canada	45,070	100
Canada		
0-14	17,465	38.8
15-64	26,205	58.1
65 & over	1,400	3.1
Total	45,070	100
Nunatsiavut		
0-14	800	34.1
15-64	1,430	61

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65 & over	115	4.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,345</b>	<b>100</b>

**Nunavik**

0-14	3,645	41.9
15-64	4,790	55
65 & over	270	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,705</b>	<b>100</b>

**Inuvialuit**

0-14	1,010	34
15-64	1,820	61.2
65 & over	145	4.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,975</b>	<b>100</b>

**Nunavut**

0-14	9,345	41.4
15-64	12,595	55.8
65 & over	620	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,560</b>	<b>100</b>

**Rest of  
Canada**

0-14	2,675	31.5
15-64	5,560	65.5
65 & over	250	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,485</b>	<b>100</b>

Appendix 2

**Inuit Residing Outside of Their Land Claim Regions**

<b>Major Inuit Urban Centres</b>	<b>2001</b>
Happy Valley-Goose Bay	1,100
Yellowknife	660
Edmonton	460
Ottawa/Hull	455
Montreal	435
Toronto	355
Vancouver	260
St. John's	205
North West River	195
Calgary	190
Halifax	165
Saskatoon	120
Whitehorse	115
Hay River	105
<b>Total in Major Inuit Centres</b>	<b>4,820</b>
<b>Total in Minor Centres</b>	<b>3,665</b>
<b>Total Urban Inuit</b>	<b>8,485</b>

Source: Statistics Canada. 2001 Aboriginal Population Profile. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/Profil01ab/PlaceSearchForm1.cfm>; and Statistics Canada. Special Request from INAC. (Note) This table was provided to me by Dr. Robert Bone of the Inuit Relations Secretariat DIAND.