Alaska’s Indigenous Peoples’ Strengths to Advance Arctic and Northern Regional Security

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Alaska’s Indigenous Peoples’ Strengths

I spent more than ten years studying the sociocultural impacts of industrial development on the Inupiat of the North Slope and their political development.

After finding that most of the political leaders were whaling captains, I followed them out to the ice.
Native Identity

Our clan claims ownership rights to the US military uniform and to the name “Lt. Frederick Schwatka.”

Under our law, because Lt. Schwatka failed to pay a debt to a clan grandfather, the Thunderbird clan claimed his name and the military uniform or semblances of them as liability payments.
Group Orientation

Our kinship and social organization reflect a major difference between our and the American society.

We conceive of ourselves not only as individuals, but more importantly as members of clans and extended families.
Property Laws

The Dakl’aweidi, Deisheetaan and Kaagwaantaan clans have also claimed the military uniform because of debts owed to them by the military.
The Arctic and High North as Native Homelands

Their resources came both from the land and the seas or the sea ice. They hunted sea mammals including the mammoth baleen whales and gray whales from the shore-fast ice in the open water leads and in the open waters during the fall months.

They became as familiar with the seas and sea ice as they were with their land terrain.

They considered the land, the seas and sea ice to be their homeland.
Traditional Ecological Knowledge

You’ve heard that the Arctic Indigenous populations had multiple terms for different types and parts of the ice. Pictured here is one graphic of ice that I collected while doing my field work. We might simply call it sea ice, but as you can see the Inupiat have multiple terms for ice.

OCEANIC TERMINOLOGY - NUNAURAQ TAGIUKKUN

1. land (nuna)
2. ice-pressure ridge (ivungich)
3. newly-formed ice (tuvaq)
4. land-locked ice (tuvgruaq)
5. open lead (uniniq)
6. ocean bluff-edge of open lead (agiuppak)
7. ice floe (puktaaq)
8. trail (apquitit)
9. a space of flat ice (ignignaq)
10. ice across open lead (sarri)
11. crack in the ice, usually located near the open lead (quppaq)
12. small floes along edge of open lead (sagraq)

Knowledge of the sea-ice environment is crucial to successful whaling. The Inupiat oceanic terms above were compiled by Harold Kaveolook.
Institutional Development and Change

With their adaptive skills, the Natives began to organize themselves under Western forms of institutions to protect their homelands, their way-of-life, and at the same time to seek the benefits offered under the new economic and political regimes.
Unity of Effort

In their thousands of years of occupation of the Arctic, the Indigenous societies have lived through both advancing and receding glacial ice periods. They further demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt to a proliferation of changes that came with Westernization during the last century.
Gunalchéesh, Háw’aa, T’yaxsn