CHANGING SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND KINSHIP AMONG THE ALASKAN HAIDAS

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The Alaskan Haidas, concentrated in the town of Hydaburg on Prince of Wales Island, are the least known sub-division of this tribe. What infomation we have concerning the Haidas relates mostly to the British Columbia groups.

Hydaburg is today a community of some 350 individuals, with usually less than a dozen white inhabitants exclusive of those few married to members of the tribe. The one remaining Alaskan Haida town since 1911, it has taken on many features of the American rural community —commercial fishing and a co-operative cannery as the economic base, an elected town council and mayor, government-supervised school, a Presbyterian church organization, a material culture based upon the Sears Roebuck catalogue, and frame houses occupied by a single conjugal family and perhaps one parent. This family is economically independent of nearly everything but the fish runs. English has replaced Haida almost entirely among the younger people, and Haida is retained by their elders only in conversations with contemporaries and in public prayers.

Despite the generally high degree of acculturation apparent in the social organization of the community today, there is a general awareness of a non-English kinship system employing aboriginal terms, applied in a more or less systematic and aboriginal manner. The older people are not otherwise much less accultured than their children and grandchildren who speak and use only English, but among the elders the kinship knowledge is still active.[1]

ABORIGINAL SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND KINSHIP STRUCTURE

The evidence concerning the aboriginal Haida kinship system indicates that it was of Crow-type, with bifurcate terminology in the first ascending generation, matrilineal descent, and identification of the father's sister's daughter with the father's sister. This was associated with matriclans within exogamous moities. Within the clans, in turn, were a series of smaller kin units identified with named community houses whose membership included a group of brothers with their families and sister's sons, who inherited through their affiliation with the house group. The children of the male members were affiliated with their mothers' (brothers') houses and returned to them.

The largest local unit was the village, minimally composed of men of one house of one clan, and their wives and children of the various

[1] This is substantially the same paper as presented at the American Anthropological Association meetings, Philadelphia, December, 1952. The fieldwork was conducted in the spring and summer of 1952.

clans and houses of the other moiety.[2] Where there were several houses and clans, and both moities, there was no one recognized overall village head. Most important ultimately was the individual house head who supervised economic activities for his brothers and nephews; all wealth and produce was disposed of by the house head, and his ceremonial distributions enhanced the prestige of his entire group. The household group of "uncles" instructed their uterine nephews in the traditions and techniques of the culture.

The economic base of the society was fishing, particularly for the salmon which came up the various streams to spawn. The winter village was thus seasonally deserted and the smaller clan or house groupings of families exploited the resources of streams, beaches, and berry patches, the produce of which was recognized as theirs to use.

Our information concerning the aboriginal kinship system comes from Swanton and Murdock primarily. Murdock points out that the system Swanton presents based upon field-work in 1902 among the Canadian Haidas)[3] is classificatory in the extreme. Murdock's information[4] (from extensive Canadian genealogies plus lists of terms gathered in a few days in Alaska in 1932) indicates that this classificatory and regular system is less pronounced in the employment of terms in the singular. The system of affinity is equally well developed and in general kept distinct from the system of consanguinity. Terms for collateral relatives in both patri- and matri-lines tend to be applied to at least two generations. Mudock considers the development of the clan to have contributed to this tendency to override generation, perhaps in other cases by analogy to the father's sister who is significant throughout crises situations in the entire life-span of the individual, and therefore would be a series of different individuals.

Murdock presents the kinship behavior, referring back to the aboriginal culture, and suggests that loss of significance of various relatives has led to changes and confusions in the application and extension of the different terms.

The data upon which I base the following analysis is founded upon a series of genealogies collected from the older inhabitants of Hydaburg and kinship usages from most of the adults of all ages, and I have used here data from those informants employing a significant amount of Haida terminology.[5] I shall attempt to relate the changes in certain

[2] DeLaguna (SWJA, 1952, p. 3) refers to northern Tlingit villages as composed of "the localized divisions of several sibs, representing both moities," and suggests a regional variation among southern Tlingit and Haida, as Murdock points out that the village is one clan, with married-in wives, and Swanton claims the same or the Haida. But actual historical evidence on this point is inconclusive; both moities form a minimal ceremonial unit, but the well-developed practice of inviting another group does away with the necessity for having both moities resident in the same manner (i.e., their own community houses) in any one village.

[3] Swanton, J. R., 1909.

[4] Murdock, G. P., 1934.

[5] I have depended here mainly upon information from some 27 genealogies; 20 of the informants being over 55. The youngest, aged 31, used an unusual amount of Haida for his age.

aspects of social organization to changes in terminological usage, and point out factors affecting the modification of terms, the adoption of new ones, and the retention of old ones, and to suggest a hypothesis which appears significant in the latter situation, which has been generally neglected in the past.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND KINSHIP STRUCTURE

Those changes in social organization which have affected the importance, functions, and form of the family will be most closely related to changes in kinship terminology and usage.

There has been a progressive dimunition in the number of Alaskan Haida villages from first contact to the present, and with mill-cut lumber, "white man's houses" were built, and the community houses eventually deserted. English came to be more and more important, and the remaining villages were more permanently occupied as the need became felt for the children to remain in school for several months of the year. As the white man's way of life spread through southeast Alaska, education for life in a white man's world came to be more important than the traditional training given by the uncles.

The conjugal family became more important in the life of its members, isolated now in single family units. The men fished as individuals for the salteries and canneries, and the women processed the fish. So the extended family, household, and especially the mother's brother lost much authority, much economic and educational significance. And as the people became Christianized, the father's sister lost her ceremonial import.

The town council became the governing agency—inspired in organization by the teachers, and the village as a result is a political unit.

In the contemporary use of Haida kinship terms (see Charts I and II), several tendencies may be noted. The loss of special importance of the mother's brother and father's sister may be noted indirectly in the confusion of terms for their children, and more directly in the extension of these special terms in several cases to replace the descriptive terms for father's sister's husband and mother's brother's wife respectively. They are so employed by individuals who speak fluent English and use the Haida language only in conversations with elderly members of the community. It appears thus to be a translation of, or analogy from, the English bilaterially extended terms.

Again, confusion is apparent with regard to the father's brother, Murdock recognizing twenty years ago that the appropriate term appeared to be losing ground in Hydaburg. Today it is not found there, and the paternal uncle is called either father (analagous to the still strictly maintained terminological identity of the mother's sister with the mother), or uncle (again, the English model), or he is descriptively identified as "father's younger brother", for example, or called by the term for father's sister's son (which is more consistant than the earlier usage, in fact, wherein there were separate terms for father and father's

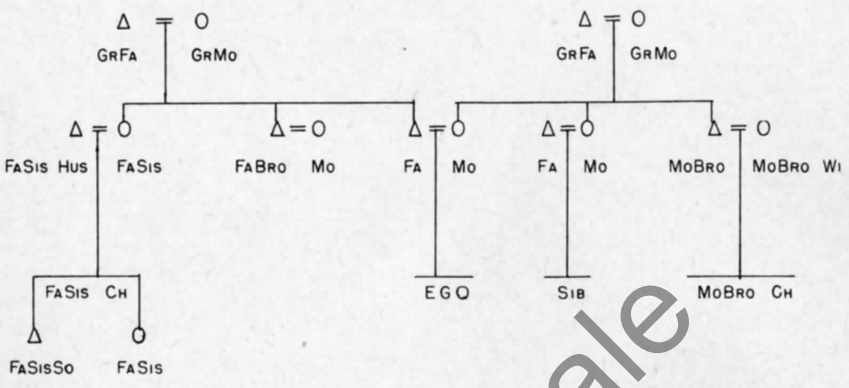
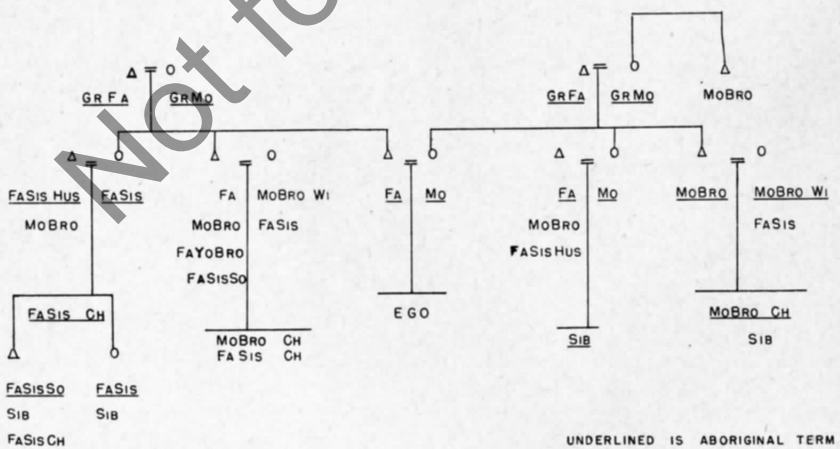


CHART I. ABORIGINAL HAIDA TERMINOLOGICAL SYSTEM

(AFTER MURDOCK)



UNDERLINED IS ABORIGINAL TERM
ALTERNATIVES IN ORDER OF USE

CHART II. CHANGING HAIDA TERMINOLOGICAL SYSTEM

sister's son, and identical terms for father's sister and father's sister's daughter).

Descriptive terms appear to be replacing the specific terms for the father's sister's children, which is to be expected in view of the diminished importance of relatives outside of the immediate family, regardless of the patrilineal orientation fostered by the English model of familial organization and surnames. This also demonstrates that there is no systematic trend toward a more descriptive or a more classificatory system.

The mother's brother is still recognized as the family head, but this is in general lip service.[6] The older people are aware of clansmen to whom they extend kinship terms, but there is little evidence of actual clan solidarity either in working together or special friendship. The older people still note the father's clan, and there is a special feeling between the "children of the same clan," i.e., those whose fathers were clansmen. In the old days this took the form of joking relationship, and today people profess hurt feelings if those standing in this relation to them are not friendly.

Membership in the same moiety seems to be of little importance today; it is not exclusive enough to give special we-feelings with no reinforcing functions left. The divisions of the members of the community today, beyond those based on age, sex or interests, refer mostly to disputes among older women, expressed in terms of relative status according to earlier customs.

The young people are not interested in clan affiliation, frequently are unaware of their own, and there are a few examples today of marriage within moiety and even clan.

Even today there is a form of matrilocal residence, though not avunculocal; i.e., the daughters' houses frequently are close to those of their mother, or they live in the same house. Women may call their own mothers or mothers-in-law by the term for grandmother when speaking to their own children, and the grandparental terms are those most frequently heard on the lips even of exclusive speakers of English, and even from pre-school children.

FACTORS AFFECTING CONTEMPORARY KINSHIP USAGES

There has not been an orderly or harmonious change in the kinship system. With the breakdown in the matrilineal and avunculocal house-clan-moiety system which operated with the terminological structure, several models have been followed, all contributing to the confusion in the terminology—analogies to other parts of the Haida kinship system,

[6] In talking with me, some of the people suggested first interviewing their uncle—"he can tell all about our family, because he is head of it" his knowledge in fact was, of course, not equal to this position.

and the growing influence of the English language and family model are especially to be noted.

Education and opportunities for assimilation into white communities, growing ease of travel to schools and elsewhere, and increased marriage outside the community, tribe and race have all contributed to making the younger people dependent upon the English language and a new familial model.

The eagerness to become a "progressive, Christian community" has made the older folks as well, glad to adapt themselves to the new ways, and the community folk-lore stresses the voluntary choice of the new and rejection of the old.

Despite all this, and the appearance of a typical American rural community, one is struck by the degree of retention of something approaching the aboriginal kinship system even among individuals very much Christianized and very progressive. To the understanding of this aspect of current Haida practice, which is also of general theoretical interest but quite neglected, a recent comment by Raymond Firth appears significant: "It may be put forward as a hypothesis indeed that as culture changes the technological, economic and religious system becomes intensified, there is a strong tendency to adhere more consciously to the system of kinship grouping, *in part as a symbolic* representation of cultural individuation."[7]

Among the Alaskan Haidas, the maintenance and application of knowledge of clan and kinship appears to satisfy the desires of the elders for prestige. Certain features of the old status system, i.e., slavery and slave-holding, may no longer be employed to rank one among contemporaries. The "Americanized" younger generation has other models, and is not interested in the prestige of their uncles in the past. But this knowledge is kept by the older ones—both men and women—and sooner or later is made known when they are talking about other members of the community and tribe. The prestige of the family, and of the Haida tribe, is pointed out in this manner, and one's envy or disapproval of the ways of others is expressed by recounting the skeletons in their family closets and their ignorance of, or indifference to, the proper terms and behaviors after the old style.

Because the community's picture of itself is one of freely choosing the new ways and rejecting the old, the elders are placed in the position of pioneers in this process of conscious acculturation. Thus they may not really permit themselves to be guardians of the earlier traditions. Only the realm of kinship is left in any systematic fashion and its lone position may indeed lead the older people to emphasize it the more strongly, because it encounters no competing interest in other traditions. It is the symbolic representation of the Indian ways, and it is allowed to be retained because it does not actively interfere with the present acculturation that the whole community values.

[7] Firth, Raymond. "Notes on the Social Structure of Some South-Eastern New Guinea Communities. Part II: Koita." **Man,** June, 1952, Vol. LII, Art. 123, Pp. 86-88.

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