
The previously printed review of *Being and Place among the Tlingit* was an earlier version and failed to include several important changes that corrected errors and clarified several topics. THIS VERSION SHOULD BE REGARDED AS CORRECT AND IS TO BE THE BASIS FOR QUOTATION AND CITATION. The previous version is to be disregarded as it fails to reflect the full range of views of the reviewer. I would like to thank the editor, Owen Mason, for printing the correct version of the review.

Stephen J. Langdon

June 4, 2009

REVIEW

BEING AND PLACE AMONG THE TLINGIT

By Thomas F. Thornton, 2008. University of Washington Press in association with Sealaska Heritage Institute, Seattle. Paperback, 247 pages, three maps, eight figures, eleven tables, one appendix, index. ISBN: 978-0-29598749-1.

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While numerous but generally limited studies of the complex place-naming practices and patterns developed by Alaska's indigenous groups have appeared over the years, Thomas F. Thornton's new volume offers a more expansive and holistic ethnographic view of how place characteristics and names are woven into the fabric of existence by the Tlingit people of southeast Alaska. *Being and Place among the Tlingit* is an outstanding contribution not only to Tlingit ethnography but also offers a powerful set of conceptual tools that other anthropologists, not only in Alaska, should find illuminating and stimulating.

The book consists of six chapters and includes a guide to the Tlingit language at the front, a preface, and a somewhat dangling appendix listing living resources used by Tlingit and their seasonality of use. In the preface, Thornton describes his fieldwork in various Tlingit village communities initially while working as a researcher for the Subsistence Division of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and then subsequently through numerous grants that enabled him to elicit and compile place names for virtually all of the Tlingit kwaans (regional groupings) from an impressive group of Tlingit-speaking elders, many of whom are now deceased. He also briefly mentions the research that was the basis for his doctoral dissertation at the University of Washington but does not inform us about the period and actual amount of time of any of his field-

work. In addition to this formal, direct elicitation of place names, Thornton has accessed and obtained numerous additional Tlingit place names from a variety of published (such as De Laguna's volumes on the Yakutat Tlingit) as well as unpublished (Thomas Waterman's manuscripts) sources and developed a database incorporating both the elicited and the manuscript-based place names. This integrated database, which has been used to prepare a fine set of GIS maps, is neither identified nor discussed in this volume but is the basis for another volume that is currently in preparation (Thornton, personal communication).

Theoretical perspectives are laid out in chapter 1 where Thornton positions his understanding of a "sense of place" as both a powerful universal dimension of human experience as well as an existential location of wide-ranging cultural construction involving language, image and power among other things. He holds the view that the experience and understanding of culturally constructed place can only be accomplished through the intersection of being on-site with a substantial degree of awareness of the cultural system. I am in full agreement with this claim. Thornton lays out four "cultural structures of emplacement" that he regards as central to the Tlingit fusion of place and being. These are social organization, language and cognitive structure, material production, and ritual processes. The next four chapters explore each

of these in turn. In the elaboration of these conceptual sites, Thornton frequently references Tlingit narratives collected in the 1940s by Walter Goldschmidt, a volume Thornton edited for its publication as *Haa Aanyí, Our Land* (Goldschmidt and Haas 1998), and Tlingit oratorical performances presented in volumes edited by Nora and Richard Dauenhauer.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the practices through which Tlingit bring their social organization (matrilineal descent, kwaan, moiety, clan and house principles) into contact with geographic locations by providing names that, among other things, illustrate critical events of the past that are viewed as creating the relationship of the people to the place. Here, as in chapter 4, Thornton draws heavily on his long-term, deep relationship with Sitka Kaagwaantaan elder Herman Kitka to demonstrate how understanding of place and past ancestral activities in places inform and dictate Kitka's sense of self. Thornton might have included discussion of petroglyphs (Figure 1) as Tlingit markers of emplacement, but this is an example of regional differences not addressed in the book; Thornton is not nearly as conversant with southern Tlingit cultural practice (where there are far more petroglyphs) as his research has primarily been with northern Tlingit.

In Chapter 3, Thornton elucidates the linguistic and cognitive foundations of Tlingit place-naming principles in answer to the query "What's in a Name." He provides a case study of Tlingit place names embedded in a version of the Salmon Boy story/myth told in Sitka that illuminates ancestral ecological conditions and provides detail useful for travel, resource timing, and locational contexts. Intriguingly, the story takes place from the vantage point of a salmon and thus demonstrates an important principle



Figure 1. Noyes Island petroglyph

of Tlingit relationality—how to see from the perspective of another. In this chapter, the syntactic structure of Tlingit language that produces an active rather than passive orientation is presented, as are the Tlingit words (for example *heen* = stream, river) that provide the basic building blocks of Tlingit place descriptions and names. Thornton shows how Tlingit provides a fine-grained terminology for locating phenomena in relation to the observer.

Material production as a "structure of emplacement" is elaborated in Chapter 4. The seasonal round of activities of "subsistence" production occur in "locales" where "projects" of "procurement" take place and thus create the impetus for landscape-making through experiences and naming. Thornton lays out and discusses the way traditional (ecological) knowledge, embedded in the names and traditions, when linked to the relational and spiritual dimensions of Tlingit resource acquisition makes for responsible, sustainable resource continuity.

The exquisite Tlingit ceremonial, the memorial potlatch (*koo'ex*) serves as the focus of chapter 5, where ritual as a site of emplacement is explored. Thornton provides excellent examples of how potlatch oratory grounds Tlingit existence in place and links generations. He also shows how Tlingit potlatch speakers use powerful emotional themes, linguistic forms, and demonstrations of deep personal effect to fuse these elements and use them as an agent of collective bonding. In the conclusion, Thornton eloquently lays out how a philosophy of place and being that emphasizes connections and care-taking promotes "biocultural health," and persuasively argues that such enormously valuable, but endangered systems need to be cherished, celebrated, and emulated.

Throughout the volume, Thornton deftly weaves in accounts of how Tlingit practices associated with place were continually challenged and eroded by white immigrants and government officials and how various Tlingit resisted and found means to sustain their cultural system, albeit somewhat altered, in the face of this onslaught. He also explores how technological adoptions, economic changes, and governmental policies have also altered and eroded the manner in which Tlingit are able to experience place. Despite these significant changes, Thornton contends that Tlingit "emplacement structures" "persist and adapt... as axes of identity, community, and place-building" providing "wellsprings of being" (2008:196).

The ethnographic approach taken by Thornton provides an insightful foundation for encountering Tlingit

cultural practice, but it is important to recognize the limitations of that approach as well. It does not provide a systematic gazetteer à la Robert Galois' (1994) impressive study of Kwakwaka'wakw settlements in British Columbia, nor is it a single-source based comprehensive approach to a region like *Shem Pete's Alaska* (Kari and Fall 2003). Thornton's approach, which might be termed a panethnic presentist perspective (he refers to it as an "idealized temporal composite"), does not pose or even countenance variability along the well-recognized linguistic (dialectical), regional (kwaan division), or social (clan and house groups) divisions that characterize Tlingit life. Nor does he explore how that variability may in fact be the basis for contested claims in Tlingit existence, a reality that continues to surface in certain Tlingit groups. Another vantage point missing from the panethnic presentist perspective is a temporal one in which place name characteristics such as distribution and construction might be used to approach significant questions about Tlingit longevity on the coast, patterns of movement identified in clan oral traditions, and other topics related to change through time. However, it should be noted that Huna Tlingit place names in Glacier Bay (Sit' Eeti Geeyi) are used in the book to demonstrate the processual (becoming rather than existing) aspects inherent in Tlingit place naming, which in turn can be used to implicate temporality as it relates to periods in the past when processes revealed by the place name could be observed. Also missing is attention to the impacts of the historical period on place naming, although, as noted above, Thornton describes the forces that have increasingly separated Tlingit from the places and language that traditionally fused to provide their template of being. Since the late 1700s, the Tlingit have been in contact with and interacted with various westerners, but Thornton does not examine how those contacts might have affected places named and place-naming practices. Finally, although Tlingit groups interacted extensively with their neighbors such as the Eyak, Haida, Nishga, and Coast Tsimshian among others, Thornton does not examine the possibility that some Tlingit names may have entered the language as loan words resulting from contact with these groups. Particularly significant in this regard is linguist Jeff Leer's observations about the apparent Eyak linguistic foundation for a number of Tlingit place names in northern southeast Alaska.

It is interesting that while it is commonly assumed (and Thornton leans in this direction as well) that western (European and American) visitors typically engaged

in place-naming colonialism by ignoring or rejecting indigenous place names, such practices were far more characteristic of the early explorers and traders due to their minimal contact with and lack of linguistic comprehension of the Tlingit than they were of at least certain American colonizers who came later. John Muir, perhaps surprisingly, eschewed elaborate place naming schemas for locations he visited in order that subsequent mapping expeditions would identify and use local Tlingit names. While place-naming colonialism is characteristic of many U.S. governmental and military personnel, some of the later map and chart makers of the Coast Survey acted upon Muir's sentiments. An example of this effort to incorporate local Tlingit place names can be seen in the vicinity of Tuxecan Island (along the west coast of the Prince of Wales Archipelago) where virtually all the cartographic names are Anglicizations of Tlingit terms elicited from Tlingit experts, perhaps those hired to guide the Americans through these waters. In this area of the Prince of Wales Archipelago, it appears that the coast surveyors memorialized one such assistant by naming a prominent peak in the vicinity, Mt. Kogish, after him. This name is a relatively discernible Anglicization of Kukeesh (now Kookesh), a prominent Raven "chief" in the area at the time (Orth 1971).

One final note of interest concerns the cover of the book. I am quite familiar with the image, as it has been a powerful iconic statement for generations of Tlingit fishermen from the village of Hoonah linking them to their traditional fishing grounds in the Inian Islands of Icy Strait. The drawn image is of a rock formation that is called the "Indian Head" by the aforementioned fishermen. In that sense the rock formation and its name are emblematic of the processes that Thornton carefully and elaborately details. However, there are ironies here in that there is no current Tlingit language term for this rock (it has only an English name) and the rock only attained its iconic significance in the early part of the twentieth century when salmon purse-seine fishing in the Inian Islands began. The Tlingit likely adopted the English term at that time and wedded it in quasi-traditional fashion to their being.

We certainly expect that there will be future publications where Thornton will follow up on this truly special volume to provide us with additional analyses drawing on the extensive database he has developed and his excellent interpretive skills to illuminate more of the complexity of place and being in Tlingit life.

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