Chapter 15
The Marginalization of the Tsimshian Cultural Ecology: The Seasonal Cycle

James Andrew McDonald

Cultural ecology examines the degree to which the environment influences social and cultural processes, and the extent to which people can control their own destinies within a given environment. A considerable amount of work has been conducted on these questions, but it has become clear that such inquiries cannot treat indigenous populations in isolation. Cultural ecology has been confronted with the history of colonialism and the impact of the global expansion of capitalism. As a result, additional propositions must be formulated to determine not only what the given environment is, but also how the environment is given; and, not only how people control their destinies within a given environment, but also which people control their destinies.

Such questions apply especially to the case of the aboriginal peoples of Canada. Where these peoples were once sovereign and dominant, able to command their lives with strategies that allowed maximal ingenuity and effective responses to their complex environments, they are now marginal, both environmentally and socially. The marginalization of Indian peoples is manifest in the abysmal decline in their living conditions, especially the terrible economic problems that they experience and that we know symptomatically as unemployment, business failures, and welfare. All these are signs of maladaptation and of a breakdown of appropriate ecological relationships.1

In *Cultural Ecology*, Bruce Cox used his introduction to grapple with the relationship between cultural ecology and political economy. In doing so, he noted that the strategy of cultural ecology was, in outline, to examine both the technical and social processes that relate people to the environmental resources. “Hence ideology and political (and social) organization are seen as part of the process by which men gain their subsistence in a particular environment”2 he identified two study topics as keys for opening an understanding of the relationship between culture and the human and material environment: the means by which people appropriate their resources, and the forms of property associated with those mean.

In many ways, I am in agreement with Cox’s general perspective at the time, although in my studies of the Tsimshian of northwestern British Columbia, I place much greater emphasis on the methods of political economy than on those of cultural ecology. This emphasis causes me to question the nature of our knowledge of the environmental relationships of the Tsimshian, especially with regard to our knowledge of the impact that capitalism has had on ecological
relationships. My opinion is that, while it is not impossible to study simply the pristine, traditional, or contemporary cultural ecology of the Tsimshian, it is difficult to do so without taking into account the redefinition of their perceived resources by foreign governments (provincial and federal) for use according to the political economy of capitalism. Whatever ecological adaptations had been in place the day before the first contact, they have long since been radically altered, along with the more general political economy of the Tsimshian society. The appropriation of colonial resources, the marginalization of the Tsimshian, and the consequent restructuring of Tsimshian society required rapid adjustments to the new socially defined environment.

In this paper I will attempt some of this accounting by examining a basic ecological pattern, that of the seasonal cycle. The Tsimshian of Kitsumkalum will serve as a specific study case because I am most familiar with that group as the result of several years association with them, and because they have not been described in the ethnographic literature until recently. I will then discuss three questions: what was the seasonal cycle as described by early ethnographers (the major components and structure), what effects did the new economic order have on the appropriation of the resources (tenures, legislation, and economic development), and what changes resulted in the seasonal cycle for Kitsumkalum.

**The Tsimshian**

The territories of the Tsimshian (sometimes referred to as the Coast tsimshian, or the Coastal and Southern Tsimshian, or the Tsimshian proper) are in what is now northwestern British Columbia, along the lower Skeena River from Kitselas Canyon down to the coast, and throughout the adjacent archipelago of islands at its mouth, south to the Estevan Group. This area was surrounded by people sharing a similar lifestyle (Haida, Haisla, Tlingit), including some who spoke closely related languages (Gitksan, Nishga).

For most of the year, the Tsimshian distributed themselves throughout their territory to harvest the abundant resources that were necessary to maintain their complex social organization. In the winter, they consolidated themselves into the residential groups which are usually referred to as winter villages, towns, or tribes. Each of these villages was associated with a particular population and territory. Of eleven such groups on the Skeena, Kitsumkalum was the tenth village up river.

In general, the territories of Kitsumkalum were the adjacent valleys of the Zimacord and Kitsumkalum Rivers. They also utilized the Skeena river valley and several marine resource sites.

Tsimshian villages were organized along matrilineal principles into lineages that lived and worked together. Of these groups, closely related lineages formed local units called houses that were led by their more important members. Each of the lineages and houses held resource property rights which were vested in the titles of their leaders. Sets of lineages and house groups that were descended from a common ancestor formed recognized clans extending beyond the villages.

There were also four matrilineal and exogamous tribal divisions or phratries: *laksgiik.*
(eagle), lagybaaw (wolf), ganhada (raven), gispawadawada (killer whale). Although these were little more than weak federations of groups of lineages and clans, the phratries did generate some sense of obligation for mutual sharing and protection among members, even among those who otherwise were strangers. This sense of obligation provided a basis for interaction between villages and neighbouring peoples that could be activated in times of practical or ceremonial need.

Class was the basis for other Tsimshian sodalities of importance. To the best of our knowledge, slaves and non-titled free people had little opportunity to unite on the basis of their class, but the title holders tended to exert a pan-village influence through feasting, religious ceremonies, and the associated secret societies. Their power on such occasions depended on the strength of their titles, a strength created by their own abilities, the support of their followers, and the inheritance associated with that title. A significant part of this inheritance was the productive resources of their properties.

Kinship and the communal nature of lineage property provided the title holders with their prerogatives, but at the same time it divided them and worked against their forming stronger pan-village associations. Alliances, exemplified by mutual privileges to resources, could break down in a crisis. Title holders were not a caste, although there was a set of royal lineages; nor were they a closed class, for there was a series of graded ranks. Unfortunately, these features and the effects of colonial expropriations and depopulation have confounded anthropological analysis of Tsimshian classes.

The loss of property rights to productive resources seriously eroded the basis of the matrilineages as corporate groups. Continued occupancy and use of the original resource territories safeguarded Timshian social principles and values to some extent, but there was a decreasing ability for the title holders and their lineages to maintain the order. They could not enforce their rights as they had done before. This applied especially to those resources that were being incorporated into the commodity economy and that were under the explicit scrutiny of the government agents.

**Seasonal Cycles**

**The Early Pattern**

Two important early descriptions of the seasonal cycle come to us from Franz boas and his student Viola Garfield. Boas provides the earliest reconstruction of the seasonal cycle.

- End of winter, before river ice breaks up: Oolachan fishing on the Nass
- After oolachan run: Return to Metlakatla (or other winter villages?)
- When salmon run: Move to salmon fishing villages on the Skeena
- Fall: Go to hunting grounds
Winter: Some hunting, most people at winter village

Mid-winter: Some go back to hunting ground

This information is based on a corpus of myths that were gathered mostly from 1902 to 1916, well after British Columbia’s union with Canada (1871), and two decades after the arrival of resident government officers who enforced resource legislation to aid industrialization (1885). Unfortunately, Boas did not discuss what effects the changes experienced during more than a century of contact might have had on the seasonal cycle.

Garfield provides another early description of the cycle, this time based on field-work during the 1930s, not reconstructions (the information in parentheses is found only in her 1939 work).

February March: Start of oolachan fishery

May Late June to October: Salmon fishing and gathering at fish camps

(Fall): (Hunting)

October November to February: Winter Camp

We know that by the time Garfield’s information was collected, resource laws abounded, industry and settlement were established, and some resources already were showing signs of depletion (for example, salmon stocks, halibut [??????]). What impact did these factors have on the Tsimshian cycle? To provide an answer, additional information must be incorporated into the ethnographic record. Some of these necessary data can come from archival sources, others from the people themselves. Using government archival sources, I will discuss first some of the effects the new property laws, that were introduced shortly after industrialization began, had on aboriginal activities. Then I will discuss field data concerning the resulting changes.

Effects of the New Political Economy

From the ethnographic information on the seasonal cycle, we can identify the major components of the original Tsimshian economy as being hunting, fishing, and gathering. Of course, numerous other activities were practised, Tsimshian are a very sophisticated people, and their ethnology reflects their [diversity]. Nonetheless, I will use these three activities to focus discussion, as I outline the history of contact between the industrial capitalist economy and the Tsimshian economy, on how the impact of that contact was constructed, and [some] parameters of its impact. I will concentrate on changes in the processes of [expropriation] and in associated property concepts.

Synopsis of Recent History of the Territories of the Kitsumkalum
The establishment of canneries at the mouth of the Skeena, in the 1970s [started] the industrial period and began a shift in the residential patterns of the Kitsumkalum. By the twentieth century, their attention was turning away from the Kitsumkalum Valley and fixing on the coast. The occupation of their valley lands at the turn of the century by agricultural and other foreign interests further contributed to the displacement of the original population.

After the 1936 flood of the Skeena River washed away significant portions of the main village at the confluence of the Kitsumkalum River, their use of Kitsumkalum Valley became intermittent and seasonal. Only two families remained permanently resident actively exploiting its resources. The others had moved to the cannery centres for work, and tended to use either the lower portions of the Skeena River or the coastal areas near Port Essington.

With the economic decline of the canneries and the way of life associated with fishing after World War II, the Kitsumkalum people moved back to Kitsumkalum Village. Since the 1960s, they have reconsolidated their residence in Kitsumkalum Valley and the surrounding area. Now their resource exploitation is concentrated again in Kitsumkalum Valley and in the nearby areas of the Skeena River.

The general reoccupation of the ancestral valleys has not yet meant a re-establishment of specific lineage land use patterns. Legal ownership is held by the crown or private interests, according to Canadian laws, so the people of Kitsumkalum simply locate suitable sites wherever they can, with the result that families have a continued usage (usufruct) relationship to new resource locations when they hunt, fish, or gather.

**Hunting**

I shall use hunting as a starting point in this history and give it more detailed discussion than fishing or gathering for several reasons: the products of hunting were important to Tsimshin subsistence; this importance has often been undervalued by ethnologists because of the Tsimshian’s general reputation as fishermen; and the centre of my studies, Kitsumkalum, is (and was) one of the more land-oriented of the Tsimshian villages.

**The Resource**

The Kitsumkalum regularly hunting a variety of land animals. Apart from the fur-bearers that they trapped, I encountered specific references to the following species: deer, elk, seals, sea lions, sea otters, mountain goats, mountain sheep, bears, porcupines, raccoons, eagles, marmots or groundhogs, caribou, moose, cougars, hares, lynx, swans, geese, ducks, and waterfowl. This is, in effect, a list of all the available fauna, other than small rodents, insectivores, reptiles, and amphibians.

**Foreign Appropriation**

The interruption of Kitsumkalum’s property relationship to the faunal resources by new uses of the land began with the arrival of large numbers of miners in the neighbourhood of Lorne
Creek during the 1880s, estimated at over 200 in 1887. Next, but only shortly after, the agricultural settlers took over the hunting grounds around Kitsumkalum Lake. After the settlers, many other immigrants came to work or to set up small businesses.

These alternative land uses severely affected the original condition of Kitsumkalum’s faunal resources, often in ways that were ecologically insensitive. An early and continuing problem was that all of the newcomers attempted to supplement their diets with hunting, competing with Tsimshian hunters, and depleting every game population. Some of the worst examples include the case of a small herd of caribou that was hunted nearly to extinction by the 1930s; and the once plentiful deer population that was devastated when the army stationed a large number of soldiers in Terrace for the duration of World War II. It may only be a local folktale that the soldiers used the deer for target practice, but they were known to have put heavy pressure on the resource as sports hunters, leaving deer in the area scarce to this day. Later, intensive urban development compounded these problems, especially in the years following the war when regional population grew dramatically.

The increasing sophistication and effectiveness of hunting took its toll as well. A startling example of this, told to me by the Game Warden, is of helicopter hunting during the 1960s that seriously depleted the goat population.

Now all biological resource in the Valley may be endangered by industrial developments which have peculiar effects. New forms of pollution are being noticed, such as industrial acid rain which has hunters concerned.

On the brighter side, the massive alteration of the forest by clear-cut logging after 1950 altered ecological relationships in favour of the browsing moose which replaced deer. Deer have great difficulty in the deep snow cover that results from such logging practices. I was told moose had been rare in the Valley before the war, but that within the past few decades they had become common [even] closer to the coast. This observation was offered to me as evidence that there had been a gradual but steady westward movement by that species in the aftermath of habitat changes. Apparently the fauna of the valley and Skeena River basin have undergone significant changes since White settlement.

**Erosion of Property Rights to the Resource**

Game laws, which evolved as the provincial agricultural development expanded, and which were applied against Indian food production, had a direct effect on Tsimshian hunting. Not only did these interfere with and disrupt Kitsumkalum’s hunting, they further eroded Tsimshian control over the resources as a property item within Tsimshian society.

The legislation is organized under federal and provincial jurisdiction. Off the reserves, Indians must comply with provincial regulations and authorities; but on the reserves, which are federal lands, regulation is a federal matter. As a [Canadian] version of indirect rule, the Indian Act does not recognize the hereditary authority structure directly but instead allows the Chief Counsellor to regulate hunting activities. This elected office is defined by the Indian Act, and may or may not be filled by a hereditary leader. In Kitsumkalum, the reserve lands are too small to be used significantly for hunting, and this regulatory authority is rarely exercised, unless some safety problem (such as taking shots at small animals in the village) arises which cannot be
handled through alternative social channels.

The earliest provincial Game Protection Act of significance was passed in 1887. Since then, there have been restrictions on the killing of deer, caribou, mountain goats, mountain sheep, bears, grouse, ducks, hares, and many birds. These restrictions refer to seasons in the case of big game, the age of the animal, the sex, and bag limits. Seasonal and bag limits extend to the simple possession of parts of the animal as well as the actual hunting of them. In addition, the killing of deer for hide was prohibited as was that of mountain sheep and goats.

The further constraints that these game laws put on the hunter’s rights to dispose of the meat prohibits possession of game out of season, and makes such possession *prima facie* evidence of illegal hunting, laying a hunter open to charges of game violation even if the meat is in storage. To facilitate enforcement, processing of meat cannot destroy certain parts that indicate species sex, and age of the animal, except at the place of consumption.

In 1917, the Dominion government approved a convention signed with the government of the United States to regulate the hunting of migratory birds. Through this Migratory Birds Convention Acts, closed seasons and bag limits were placed on game and non-game birds. By article III, migratory game birds were under a closed season from March 10 to September 1, and it was prohibited to hunt them or even to possess them during that time. Migratory non-game birds (e.g., gulls, terns, herons, loons, grebes) were closed all year, except to Indians who could use their eggs for food or their skins for clothing, provided that no trafficking in these items occurred. Article III established a closed season on swans, shorebirds, and the whooping and sandhill cranes, without exception. This Act is still in force, keeping hunters in the double jeopardy of simultaneously violating provincial and federal laws on game birds.

Other relevant restrictions prevented hunting on enclosed land (which was defined to include any land identified for enclosetment by natural or artificial landmarks), without the permission of the owners or leasees, this was to protect alternative land uses, such as farming.

In the case of deer, Indians had special exemptions which allowed them to kill deer to feed their immediate families, although this was curtailed by season, sexual, and age limitations. The sale of such kills and the clause governing killing for hides was not exempted.

Exceptions to the game laws protect aboriginal rights to a degree, but the have also been the source of frustration to Indians who resent being put into a position *vis-à-vis* the regional population, of being permitted to break a (foreign) law. As a point of principle and justice, they would prefer a law that recognizes their aboriginal rights directly.

Thus access to Tsimshian faunal resources was curtailed very early in the Confederation period, and was just another part of the process of loss.

**Maintenance of Relationships to Territory**

Under the threat of police, and even military enforcement, the Skeena River Indians found it necessary to incorporate the new legal system of Canada, but they resisted the total purge of their property relationships. A good example is the association, under provincial law, of hunting areas with trapline registrations. This twentieth century innovation transformed the ownership of certain types of territories form the corporate lineages or villages to “trapping companies,” which under the Game or Wildlife Act are corporate individuals that can hold and
manage a registered trapping area. Insofar as this was the understanding of trappers and field officers alike, these Indian traplines tended to be viewed in terms of the larger category of “tribal hunting grounds” and were treated accordingly, with vague deference being paid by the provincial authorities to Indian ways of organizing the use and transferal of the lines. These arrangements preserved a remnant of economic ownership over the hunting grounds and protected a small measure of the aboriginal relationships.

Before the 1960s, when trapping was still viable, the legal exclusiveness of a registration could be used to prevent or control trespass by hunters. Generally, other Indians respected this form and interpretation of ownership, but trapline registrations, being foreign, were not an effective means of internal control. Early disputes, as are reported in the archival records of the Terrace Fish and Wildlife office, which involved non-registered Indians utilizing the trapping areas registered to someone else, indicate that issues could not be resolved properly either by the defunct aboriginal system or by the fledgling provincial administration.25 Now, as a result of the recent decline in trapping, line ownership rarely becomes a critical economic issue. Nonetheless, such lines represent aboriginal patterns critical to land claims.

Fishing

The Resource

The Tsimshian lived in an environment that was exceptionally rich in aquatic resource, and their abilities as fishermen exploiting fish stocks provided a critical economic and symbolic base for their social formation.

The Kitsumkalum fished a variety of fresh and salt water, and anadromous fish. These included the five species of Pacific salmon, steelhead trout, oolachan, cod, halibut, herring, cuttlefish, dogfish, porpoise, bullheads, devilfish, eels, flounders, red snappers, shrimp, pilchard, occasional drift whales, trout, whitefish, suckers, chubs, and sturgeon. These resources were widespread, but [????????] (for example: salmon, oolachan, and trout) were exploited at specific productive sites to which were attached certain property rights. Kitsumkalum concentrated its fisheries in the Kitsumkalum Valley and adjacent areas of the Skeena drainage, but the families also had property claims at maritime locations and oolachan grounds.

Redefining the Resource

A century ago, the first government Fish Guardian set up an office in residence among the Tsimshian. Under the terms of Union, the fishery laws of the Dominion were to be applied to British Columbia. This legislation was a major factor in changing seasonal patterns by outlawing many Indian fishing methods and by applying industrial standards to control the exploitation of resources.26 The Guardian’s arrival in 1885 represented the increasing pressure to redefine the Skeena fisheries and to guarantee the resource to capitalist production.

The official extension of the Dominion’s Fisher Act into British Columbia, in 1874, contained the following restrictions: salmon spearing (used at Kitsumkalum Canyon) was banned except with special licence for food fishing; dip nets for oolachan required licences, but were
banned for salmon\(^{27}\) and trout (fished on the Zimagotitz);\(^{28}\) ice-fishing bags for salmon (used on Kitsumkalum Lake) were banned;\(^{29}\) traps and wiers on small streams were restricted\(^{31}\) and licensed;\(^{32}\) angling trout was placed under season; and nets were required for cod. In addition, an Order-in-Council (O/C) of 26 November 1888 had banned food fishing of salmon using nets and spears, while the Provincial Fisheries Act prohibited the use of nets, shining, dragnets, and other similar devices for fishing in fresh water.\(^{34}\)

During the ensuing years, salmon drag seines were prohibited,\(^{35}\) as were purse seines.\(^{36}\) nets, weirs, fascine (fish weirs or traps) fisheries, and other devices which obstruct passage were prohibited in 1894; drift nets were required for tidal fishing of salmon, and explosives were banned.\(^{37}\) In 1897, trout were protected in fresh water rivers and lakes under 50 square miles from explosives, poisons, seines, dragnets, and other similar devices, but hooks and lines were permitted.\(^{38}\) The Provincial Fisheries Act of 1911 re-enforced the right of passage of fisheries and allowed for the instant capture and destruction of illegal seines, nets, and other such devices;\(^{39}\) O/C 2 May 1904 defined the size of nets, trap locations, and prohibited their use within three miles of navigable rivers and one-half mile from salmon streams.

All these laws defined fishing technology and hindered the development of Tsimshian methods and modes of organizing fishing. Although policy toward Indians was supposedly lenient,\(^{40}\) there is no documentation to demonstrate how lenient, and the general oral history in Kitsumkalum reports is that it certainly was not.

In recognition of the continuing importance of fish to Indian survival, the government developed exemptions that allowed Indians to fish for their own consumption according to permitted aboriginal methods. This so-called food fishing required permission from the Inspector and could not be conducted with spears, traps, or pens on spawning grounds, lease, areas, or propagation areas.\(^ {41}\) The same Order-in-Council prohibited ice fishing, the use of artificial lights, spears, or snares for trout, and restricted the herring and pilchard fishery to drift or gill nets of specified size, and only within harbours.

The Inspector also controlled food fishing with regard to where it occurred,\(^ {42}\) how and when,\(^ {43}\) which is essentially the condition of the food fishery now.

These regulations created a legal distinction between fishing for food and fishing for capital. In so doing the legislation came to restrict, in absolute amounts, the number of fish controlled by Indians relative to the canners.

**Other Interferences**

Another serious disruption to fishing came directly from the canners who held in contempt the established aboriginal tenure system. Immediately after the opening of the first cannery, in 1877, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs was reporting on the complaints from Tsimshian that their hereditary rights to fisheries were being encroached on by the capitalist fishery.\(^ {44}\) For example, the Kitkatla troubles of 1878, which led to policing by an imperial gunboat, stemmed from the invasion of fishing grounds belonging to the Kitkatla people.\(^ {45}\) Other problems were caused by the establishment of cannery plants on top of Tsimshian shore stations or village sites.\(^ {46}\) Such encroachments were protected under S.C. 31V, C60. s.3.

To reduce the tensions, and ostensibly to protect Indian rights, the Fishery Inspector
suggested that the reserve system be established. The government’s response was to commission an investigation in 1881, and ten years later, to allot reserves to the Tsimshian on the Skeena.

**Gathering**

**The Resource**

The diversity of the land use area of Kitsumkalum provided the villagers with a rich storehouse of raw materials. The full range of biological resources that the Tsimshian gathered and used for food, medicines, manufactures, etc., before European contact is probably more extensive than we will ever be able to reconstruct. An indicative list includes: land flora (e.g., berries, roots, sap, crabapples, berries, mushrooms, wood), marine flora (e.g., seaweeds, kelp), aquatic fauna (e.g., fish eggs, shellfish, china slippers, sea cucumbers, sea [prunes]), and land fauna (e.g., bird’s eggs).

The fauna are included in gathering activities because that association is made by the Kitsumkalum people. All the gathered species have the common property of being relatively immobile, unlike the species pursued in the hunt. This immobility provides a cultural characteristic important to the distinctions between the harvest activities of adult males and females.

**Question of Ownership**

The establishment of the three reserves for the Kitsumkalum people, in 1891, emphatically demonstrated the legal loss of their ownership of resource sites, but the loss was not felt immediately, or practically, until the non-reserves were occupied by foreign peoples and industries.

In allotting the reserves, the commissioner promised that the people of Kitsumkalum could “go on the mountain to hunt and gather berries as you have always done.” This was a simple statement, but misleading in what it assumed. The Tsimshian had a carefully organized system of tenure and use that included their gatherable resources. The details are still not systematically documented, but Garfield noted that there were “no unclaimed land or sea food resources of a kind important to the Indian’s economy.” According to informants, such properties generally had names to identify the area and the associated packages of ownership rights. Nonetheless, the Commissioner was convinced that berry grounds could not be protected by reserves because “an Indian goes where he will to hunt, or to gather berries. No survey could be made...”

The enactment of resource legislation such as the Forestry Act, the Fisheries Act, the Game Act, and the Migratory Bird Convention, made the Commissioner’s promise a lie: the Tsimshian could not do as they always had done. In 1887, a delegation of chiefs had been told by the Premier of the province that timber on Crown lands was protected by timber lease and that people cutting trees for house construction or storage boxes could be stopped by anyone who held a lease. Although legally the Tsimshian might have been able to take out provincial leases and thereby protect an aspect of the aboriginal use rights, the complicated requirements for
Massive Environmental Destruction

Besides the legal constrictions, a different kind of loss occurred: that of the destruction of resource sites by alternative land uses, especially by homesteading and forestry. Homesteading began almost immediately after the reserves were established. Within twenty years, a fair sized community existed where Terrace now is. New farms spread out across the Valley corridor from Kitimat Channel in the south, to the Nass River in the north. These farms and settlements were established strictly according to provincial, not Tsimshian, laws and tenures.

Homesteading caused considerable losses to what the government once described as the Indians’ “fruit-gathering preserves” (berry bushes and fruit trees) and timber lands. One woman, nearly a hundred years old, tried to explain to me where her family’s berry properties had been, but she was sure I would not be able to locate the once important sites because they were overgrown with “flowers” (i.e., agricultural production). She could remember the time of their destruction at the turn of the century.

This is a sentiment I heard expressed many times and it should be emphasized:
agriculture, settlement, and more recently forestry, obliterated large sections of the Tsimshian environment. Hunters, trappers, gatherers, all felt like strangers on their own territory because they could no longer find the old familiar natural landmarks, or the ancient resource sites that their lineages had groomed over the centuries.

Of course, not all the land was so changed by farming, apparently because parts were unsuitable. As a result, the children of some families could remember collecting food, even after World War II, on areas that corresponded with the hereditary properties of their phratry as listed in archives and as recognized by certain elders. Farming went into a decline in the 1940s, and was replaced by logging as the major modifier of the environment.

The enactment of new forestry laws, in 1946, lead to clear cutting by multinational companies from Terrace north, a process that is continuing today. Where this has occurred, the specific old locations for harvesting different resources are obliterated. The result is that most of the aboriginal harvest now occurs along the logging roads, where the secondary growth often takes the form of berry bushes.

**Tsimshian Patterns**

The preceding sections outlines the drastic changes, motivated by industrial development and defined by legislation, that transformed the Tsimshian economy. Resources, technology, and even labour power were removed form Tsimshian control by the new forms of property and of resource exploitation that were established. The original Tsimshian economic order disintegrated, and the people of Kitsumkalum had to reorganize to meet the changing conditions. In this final section, I will discuss their reorganization by describing their seasonal cycles in the twentieth century. The data is based on interviews with the Kitsumkalum.

Figure 15-1 provides a summary of the early period described by Boas and Garfield, the traditional period described by the elders of the Kitsumkalum, and the current period in which I have participated.

**The Traditional Pattern of the Tsimshian**

When the Tsimshian lost control over their economy in the nineteenth century, they were forced to exploit the resources of their territories in whatever manner and way was allowed them by the new social order. Thus, they participated in several types of economic activities, including aboriginal ones, forms of simple commodity production (notably commercial fishing, logging and trapping), small businesses, and wage labour. Capitalist development and the evolution of the conditions that allowed these economic practices, took the Kitsumkalum through many transitions that, from their point of view, were viable adaptations to the new and changing political economy.

During the early part of the twentieth century, these changes were structured to a significant extent by simple commodity production. The oral history I collected in the 1980s suggests that, by the 1930s, a pattern with a very definite seasonal cycle, was emerging based on the use of the commercial fishing boat.

Boats gave people access to their country homes (or camps) which ideally were located
where the family had its hunting territory, registered trapline, and registered logging area (for example, a timber lease). In such an ideal situation, the Indian fishing boats could be used for many purposes, if the fisherman had the gear for fishing halibut, trolling salmon, gill-netting salmon, logging, trapping, hunting, or various camp activities. These different types of gear could be placed on the boat, according to the natural or commercial season, to allow the fisherman to take advantage of a range of resources throughout the year.

Base residence in spring was the camp home where the men could shelter their boats. Typically, these were marine camps, where the family would gather seaweed, herring eggs, and shellfish, but some were along the Skeena River. In the case of the river locations, the harvest of marine resources was replaced by the planting of gardens, usually some time in May.

In the early spring, when halibut season opened (March/April to June), people who were able to do so, and who were so inclined, began commercial fishing. Of course, not everyboat owner on the coast fished halibut. Some simply continued their spring logging along the coast, or beachcombing if the camps were on the Skeena River.

The end of the halibut or planting season turned attention to the June salmon fishery when whole families would move to the Port Essington area to participate. This move was important to allow the women to be near the canneries for work.

When the successive salmon seasons were over in the early fall (usually September), people dispersed back to their residences (the fall camps) until freeze-up in order to dry food/fish, hunt what they could, and harvest gardens. At this time, the boat could be converted from fishing and used for logging until spring. Beachcombers on the Skeena used their fishing boats to retrieve logs that they tied together and towed to market. On the coast legislation allowed loggers to mount a pulley system on a float and to pull the logs off the steeply sloping shores. As the fall progressed, trapping took on greater importance at the camps.

Winter caused a change in pace but it was not a slack season: trapping, hunting, and some handlogging kept many of the men busily occupied while others found part-time work in towns. Port Essington was the main winter residence to which most of the families returned, at least for short periods of a few weeks, in order to participate in Christian celebrations (notably Christmas and New Year’s), and to send their children to school. If the weather conditions were poor, the men would leave their families there for slightly longer periods, and return to the traplines with their adult male partners, but these separations from the family were not popular arrangements.

The arrival of the first oolachan in March traditionally signalled the end of the winter period.

In the minds of many, this pattern is considered to be the closest to an ideal or traditional one for the Tsimshian, even though it belongs to the 20th century. There are two reasons for this perception. First, it was the way of life followed by three or four generations, with the current set of elders constituting the last generation to have participated. Second, people remember it as a life style that permitted the maintenance of Tsimshian values, albeit in a highly syncretic manner. I emphasize that it is an ideal pattern because it has been romanticized somewhat as the “good old day” when the old values still applied, and because it is remembered now as the preferred way of life although not everyone could follow it. Even then there were a number of people who were so involved with wage labour, that they could not fully use the camp system. Still others did not have their own boat to engage in simple commodity production independently and, as a consequence, relied on others. Both types vacillated between camp life and wage labour.
The number of people unable to use the camp/boat system increased as people constantly were forced out of the traditional pattern by the changing capitalist economy. One change was the restructuring of the logging industry. The result of this process, which started in the 1940s, was the undermining of the abilities of handloggers to operate economically. The steep economic decline in trapping, which reached a critical point in the mid-1950s, hurt another source of income. Finally, many Indian boat owners found it impossible to keep pace with the expensive technological changes that were constantly occurring in the fishing industry. When very strict equipment standards were developed, “marginal” boats were forced out of their year round use in the complex traditional economy.

It was the economic mixture that made their traditional way of life viable for the Kitsumkalum. Thus, the pressures on each aspect of it served to weaken and eventually, in combination, to destroy the pattern. By the 1960s the Port Essington families returned to Kitsumkalum Valley, marking the beginning of a new period in their history and in their relationship to the environment.

The Current Pattern

In the second half of this century, the present economy and seasonal cycle emerged, dominated by wage labour. Indian access to resources had been defined by new property laws. Now their time also was being defined by wage jobs, and their ability to utilize resources was sharply curtailed. The seasonal cycle that resulted, and that exists today, is simple.

Berry-collecting occurs as berries ripen from late spring into the fall. Throughout the late spring and summer, families with access to coastal sites gather seaweeds and seafood as they become available. Other families that stay inland trade with friends or relatives on the coast for marine resources.

The hunting of small game and fowl occurs as the regulated seasons permit, or, in the case of non-regulated species, as available throughout the year. Food fishing commences with the spring oolachan runs, continues with the first salmon run in June, and ends when the people have sufficient supplies, often as early as the end of July. Some minor fishing activity always continues until the last runs of September, as people take the occasional fresh fish or coho salmon if they preferred this late running species. (Different salmon species run in different months.)

The very simplicity of the current pattern is revealing of the impact capitalist development has had, and of the many other changes that have transformed Tsimshian society. Now that the people of Kitsumkalum look to wage labour for their livelihood, the seasonal cycle that they follow stands as a monument to their determination to resist the complete transformation of their Tsimshian values.

Conclusions

Originally hunting, fishing, and gathering were the major components of the Tsimshian’s system of production. These sectors provided the material basis of broader social relationships
and guided the seasonality of Tsimshian life. Confederation, industrialization, and the legislation of the capitalist political economy ushered in a new era that undermined Tsimshian sovereignty, disintegrated the older order, and left Indians marginal to twentieth century development.

The transformation of the once independent and successful people of Kitsumkalum was accomplished through the various means that involved the appropriation of resources from Tsimshian production, legal attacks on their technology, and even constraints on the application of their labour. Government legislation, which redefined the property rights associated with all economic processes, restricted how, when, and where people could engage in the Tsimshian economy. The effect of all this on the seasonal cycle was the erosion of the Tsimshian ability to develop floral and faunal resources on their own terms. The seasonal cycle was on structured by the framework of the new political economy.

Partially in response to these attacks, and partially to take advantage of new opportunities, the Tsimshian added commercial activities to their seasonal rounds. In this manner, they developed new relationships to the environment that were exemplified by the simple commodity production of the fishing boat. All the forms of production, both old and new, in which the Kitsumkalum engaged, and the reorganization of their economy that was necessary to integrate each form throughout the annual cycle, eventually trapped the Kitsumkalum in capitalist production. By the twentieth century, these people, like other coastal Indians, had become dependent on the global capitalist economic formation and on the conditions that enabled that system to function.

These changes were not simply adaptations to their given environment, but accommodations to the socially defined environment that was being created under the new political economy emerging in the region. The people of Kitsumkalum no longer cut trees for trade, they work as loggers. Their fish runs have been turned into “food” and “commercial” fisheries. As capitalist production became dominant, the aboriginal Tsimshian economy was transformed into its current radically reduced state, marginal to regional economic development. Thus the basic property arrangements governing the social economy were redefined to suit the needs of capital, and a new “cultural ecology” was founded.

Despite these pressures and changes, the Tsimshian have struggled long and hard to control and preserve their way of life, and to take their rightful position in their own development. In this struggle, Tsimshian forms of production, including those which are derived from aboriginal economic activities, have been of ultimate importance to the survival of Tsimshian society. Today the existence of aboriginal rights protects these activities, assists the survival of aboriginal culture and society, and maintains values that could provide alternatives to those which govern capitalist societies. It is to be hoped that the future legal entrenchment of aboriginal rights in the Canadian constitution will allow aboriginal peoples the opportunity to strengthen their societies, overcome their dependency, and move out of their marginal position in Canadian society.
### Figure 15.1

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#### Kitsumkalum

**Version A**
- Winter Residence: Pt. Essington
- Winter Residence
- Plant Gardens Canneries
- Hunt Fish

**Version B**
- Log on Coast
- Halibut
- Gather on Coast
- Commercial Fish
- Dry Fish
- Port Esslington
- Freeze Up
- End
- Closed Salmon
- Freeze Up

#### Abstract Female

**Male**
- Log and Trap
- Gardens
- Fish
- Garden
- Hunt
- Town

**Male**
- Oolachan
- Salmon
- Hunt in Seasons

#### Kitsumkalum

**Tradicional**

**Current**

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*Figure 15.1 The Seasonal Cycles of Kitsumkalum*
Notes


4. James Andrew McDonald, “A History of the Traplines that have once been Registered by the Kitsumkalums,” Kitsumkalum Social History Research Project, Report #4 (1982).


8. McDonald, “Trying to Make a Life.”

9. Important data still can come from elders. For example, Garfield’s interpretation can still be augmented by informants who were young adults or children at the time she did her work; James Andrew McDonald, “An Historic Event in the Political Economy of the Tsimshian: Information on the Ownership of the Zimacord District,” *British Columbia Studies* 57 (1983). The opportunity to expand similarly on Boas’ description is probably lost now, although I have spoken with an elder who was a child in a Tsimshian village Boas visited on his first field-trips to the Northwest Coast and to the Tsimshian. There are other useful bits of information in ethnographic archives, such as the unpublished Beynon/Barbeau field-notes from the Skeena; John J. cove, A Detailed Inventory of the Barbeau Northwest Coast Files, National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, 54 (1985).


12. See the Northwestern Development Conference Archives, Northwest Community College, Terrace, British Columbia.

13. Usually no immature animals less than one year old, since Revised Statues of British
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Columbia (hereinafter R.S.B.C.), 1897, C88, S.3.

15. Two hundred and fifty ducks per person per season, R.S.B.C. 1897, C88, S.3; one moose, two goats, three deer of one species or four altogether, two sheep, R.S.B.C. 1924, C94, S.10.
23. R.S.B.C. 1911, C95, S.3.
24. McDonald, “Historic Event.”
26. Fishery Act, 1874, C57, s.13.7.
27. Ibid., S.8.
28. Ibid., S.13.7.
29. Ibid.
31. Ibid., S.13.17.
32. Ibid., S.3.8, clarified with regard to open season for Indian food fishing by 1889 regulations.
33. R.S.B.C. 1888, C52, S.13
34. Order-in-Council (hereinafter O/C) 7 November 1890.
35. S.C. 1891, C44.
38. R.S.B.C. 1911, C89, S.17, S.45, these being a part of the 1901 legislation, S.B.C., C25, S.41.
39. See Hawthorne et al., Indians of British Columbia, 98.
41. By O/C 12 May 1910, which required food fish licences.
42. O/C 11 September 1917.
43. DIA, Annual Report (Ottawa: Government Printer, 1878).
44. Department of Fisheries, Annual Narrative (Ottawa: Government Printer 1878), 296.
45. For example, DIAND, Annual Reports (Ottawa: Government Printer), 1881, 154; 1884, 277 78; 1886; 1890.
46. DIA, Annual Report, 1879, 134.
47. DIA, Annual Report, 1881, 154.
50. For example, see McDonald, “Historic Event.”
51. Ibid.
Among the Haisla” (PH.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1977).

56. R.S.C. 1917, C130, Article IV.
57. R.S.C. 1917, C130, Article III.
58. S.C. 1874, C60, S.15.
60. R.S.B.C. 1911, C89, S.38.
63. McDonald, “Trying to Make a Life.”
64. Ibid., 263 66.
65. Ibid., 268.

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