# CULTURE CONTACT ALONG THE PACIFIC RIM: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper considers the tremendous potential for collaboration among Pacific Rim scholars in the study of culture contact in the North Pacific. The establishment of pluralistic mercantile colonies by the Russian-American Company, that extended from the Kurile Islands, directly north of Japan, to California involved the extensive relocation of European, Eastern Asian, Creole (mixed blood), and Native American peoples across the north Pacific. The study of culture change in these inter-ethnic communities is being facilitated by circum-Pacific cooperation among Pacific Rim scholars who are investigating the prehistory, material culture, and lifeways of the diverse peoples integrated into the Russian-American Company's world system. Several examples of collaborative research between Russian and North American scholars are presented.

### Introduction

In developing a Pacific Rim perspective for California archaeology, a very promising direction for future research is the study of long-term culture contact between diverse groups of Pacific peoples in California. While much research has focused on the state's pluralistic population since World War II, the roots of pluralism in California are quite old, extending back several centuries when prehistoric Native Californians first began to encounter peoples from distant lands, many from homelands on the Pacific Rim. California provides an unparalleled opportunity to consider the implications of pluralism and ethnic diversity over many decades of culture change by critically examining the initial formation and growth of multi-ethnic communities where peoples of the greater Pacific had their first sustained contacts with Europeans and Africans.

California has been a significant gateway between the Pacific Rim and the rest of the world since the 16th century. Here, east and west have met since the Spanish first established the Manila galleon trade that brought Asian, Mexican, and European sailors to California -- some to explore its coast for safe harbors, others to recuperate from long voyages and still others to take refuge when ships sank off its shore (e.g., Schurz 1917; Wagner 1929:140). With Russian expansion into the North Pacific in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries, a chain of outposts was established eastward from Siberia to Alaska and California, providing a direct connection to the markets and people of Asia, and the movement of Russians, Native Siberians, Native Alaskans, and Pacific Islanders into California. With the official opening of Mexican-California's ports to international trade in the 1820s, the Gold Rush, and the beginning of mass migrations of Asian and Pacific Islander workers in the 1850s, California's population became a microcosm of the greater Pacific Rim. In the early pluralistic coastal communities of California, the peoples of the Pacific were all represented – Asians, Siberians, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, Latinos, and transplanted Europeans and Africans.

The issue I address in this paper is how to study long-term culture contact between Pacific peoples in California. The primary point I make in this paper is that we need to adopt a more broadly defined, comparative perspective that

integrates California archaeology more directly into mainstream Pacific Rim research. Furthermore, the development of a Pacific Rim perspective for California archaeology will necessitate communication and active collaboration with scholars across the Pacific Rim, an activity exemplified in this symposium.

### The Archaeological Study of Pacific Rim Peoples

Since 1988 I have been grappling with the problem of investigating archaeological remains from Russian, Native Siberian, Native Alaskan, and Native Californian peoples at the Russian colony of Fort Ross in northern California. In close collaboration with Breck Parkman and Glenn Farris of the California Department of Parks and Recreation, we have been examining the remains of residences and workplaces of native laborers located outside the Russian stockade in the Fort Ross State Historic Park. Much of our recent efforts has focused on the Native Alaskan Neighborhood, where early 19th-century census records indicate that most of the residences were inter-ethnic households composed of Native Californian and Native Alaskan peoples – primarily local Kashaya Pomo and Coast Miwok women and Koniag Eskimo men from Kodiak Island, Alaska.

While the theoretical and methodological approaches of previous archaeological studies of culture contact are of considerable interest, they have proved to be of limited use in our Fort Ross study. Most have tended to measure the degree of acculturation or assimilation of Native Californian, Asian or Latino populations based on ratios or indexes of European artifacts and food remains in contact period deposits. On one hand, it is commonly assumed that the greater the percentage of European goods in these contexts, then the greater the degree of western acculturation. On the other hand, if significant percentages of Native Californian, Asian, or Latino artifacts or dietary remains are found, then it is typically suggested that relatively little culture change has occurred. These measures have been criticized as being too simplistic and as assuming a rather passive model of acculturation (see Lightfoot 1995). Clearly, simple ratios of European, Native, Latino, and Asian artifacts and food remains are not going to tell you very much about the social relations and dynamics of change represented in the archaeological deposits of multi-cultural communities comprised of peoples from across the Pacific Rim.

At Fort Ross, we are experimenting with the following theoretical approach for studying the archaeological remains of a pluralistic colonial outpost. This approach employs practice theory in a manner that is both broadly comparative in time and space. We use practice theory to investigate the organizational principles, identities, and world views of the multi-ethnic population of Fort Ross. Practice theory, which is primarily attributed to Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Anthony Giddens (1979), has been used for about 20 years in both anthropology and, to a lesser degree, archaeology. While not new, it has been rarely used in archaeological studies of culture contact. Practice theory provides a dynamic framework for studying culture change that is tailor-made for archaeologists.

A major tenet of practice theory is that the organizational principles of individuals and households are continually reproduced in day-to-day activities, and that these organizational principles may undergo transformations in new social settings. Cultural constructs (or structures) are viewed as being both the conditions and outcomes of daily practices and social relations. As Sherry Ortner (1984:154) notes, all cultural practices "are predicated upon, and embody within themselves, the fundamental notions of temporal, spatial, and social ordering that underlie and organize the system as a whole." Thus, the dialectical relationship between structure and action is perpetually in the process of reproduction as individuals constantly respond to new social settings and problems. Marshall Sahlins (1985, 1991) has demonstrated this point very nicely in his ethnohistoric studies of culture contact on Pacific Islands, showing how cultural categories that are actualized in daily practice can be

transformed during the process of social encounters with "others."

The focus of study at Fort Ross is on the practice of day-to-day living. People are constantly recreating structural principles and playing out ideological constructs in their daily activities. The focus on habitual practices is well suited to archaeological investigation. As Sherry Ortner (1984:154) aptly states, this entails the study of "little routines people enact, again and again, in working, eating, sleeping, and relaxing, as well as little scenarios of etiquette they play out again and again in social interactions."

Viewed from practice theory, material culture used in daily practice takes on special significance as it becomes active symbols in broadcasting or even negotiating ideological constructs. The social relations, world views, and political affiliations of households in Fort Ross should be observable in their day-to-day practices: how they organized space, how they conducted domestic tasks, how they disposed of refuse (e.g. Lightfoot and Martinez 1995). A key consideration in our study is the organization and use of space over time – the construction, maintenance, and abandonment of house structures, extramural space, and trash deposits across the landscape.

A critical component of our study is to examine the spatial organization of Fort Ross archaeological remains in a broadly comparative framework that considers the daily practices of pertinent Pacific Rim peoples in their native homelands and other relevant Russian outposts. This comparison requires some understanding of the spatial layout of settlements, houses, workspace, and refuse deposits in Russian, Native Siberian, Native Alaskan, and Native Californian villages. Ethnohistorical sources and archaeological studies are employed to investigate daily practices for late prehistoric and historic settlements of Kashaya Pomo, Koniag Eskimo, and Russian and Siberian peoples in their respective homelands, as well as at Russian outposts in the North Pacific. They serve as baselines for examining change and continuity in the use of space, domestic tasks, and refuse disposal practices at Fort Ross. The goal of the comparative investigation is to identify similarities and differences in the organizational principles of Fort Ross households when compared with other Pacific Rim homelands. In such a manner, we are evaluating how the unique pluralistic social setting of Fort Ross may have influenced transformations in both Native and European household identities, political affiliations, world views, and ideological constructs.

We recently completed the comparative spatial analysis of inter-ethnic households in the Native Alaskan Neighborhood at Fort Ross with other Pacific Rim homelands and Russian outposts in the Pacific. We found a very interesting pattern. At the level of the household, many of the day-to-day practices followed distinctly Kashaya Pomo conventions. These practices included: (1) Kashaya style preparation of deer, beef, mutton, seal, and sea lion meats and their roasting in Native Californian earth ovens; (2) Kashaya conventions of cleanliness and order that involve the regular sweeping and maintenance of residential space and the dumping of trash into specially prepared refuse dumps; and (3) the common occurrence of Native Californian ground stone and chipped stone tool assemblages coinciding with a paucity of Native Alaskan household equipment or furniture. However, at the broader scale of village orientation and layout, Koniag Eskimo ideals appear to have structured the location and arrangement of house structures and work space. The Native Alaskan Neighborhood at Fort Ross was laid out in a linear fashion so that the exposed locations of houses offered an excellent view of the Pacific Ocean and the skin kayaks or *baidarkas* stored below in the Fort Ross Cove. Thus, the outward appearance of the Native Alaskan Neighborhood, beyond the individual house and refuse disposal practices, resembled Koniag villages on Kodiak Island, Alaska.

We feel the use of practice theory in a broadly comparative Pacific Rim framework allows us to make interpretations about the affiliations and social relations of the people living in inter-

ethnic households. We believe the Native Alaskan men and Native Californian women in Ross households lived their lives largely according to separate and distinct organizational principles. My purpose here is not to detail our results that are presented elsewhere in a volume edited with Ann Schiff and Tom Wake (Lightfoot, Schiff and Wake in press). Rather I will conclude by noting the implications of employing a more broadly comparative approach to Pacific Rim archaeology. The approach makes one appreciate California archaeology in a new light and facilitates collaboration with other Pacific Rim scholars.

## Collaborative Research Among Pacific Rim Scholars

By viewing California archaeology as part of that of the broader Pacific Rim, one immediately becomes exposed to the rich heritage and diverse archaeological remains of Pacific peoples. I think this is very healthy, as it leads to better appreciation and understanding of both prehistoric and historical material culture in the state. While becoming familiar with the archaeology of the Pacific is overwhelming at first glance, by focusing on homelands within the Pacific Rim that are most pertinent to one's study, the task becomes somewhat more manageable. In employing practice theory, we also found that one does not need to reinvent the wheel for different areas of the Pacific. Scholars have probably already worked out the daily practices of any group you may want to include in a comparative analysis.

We have now worked with a wide range of Pacific Rim scholars on issues relating to archaeological features, the arrangement of space, and refuse disposal practices found at Ross. Our collaboration includes Kashaya Pomo tribal scholars, Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA) historians and archaeologists, and Russian scholars in the North Pacific.

Specifically, the comparative analysis of the Native Alaskan Neighborhood has involved the study of the spatial layout of prehistoric and historic Kashaya Pomo sites in the hinterland of Fort Ross, as well as extensive consultation with such Kashaya Pomo elders as Violet Parrish Chappell and Otis Parrish. The comparative analysis has also involved meetings with Kodiak Area Native Association scholars, and participation in excavations on Kodiak Island, Alaska. Questions have been answered about Koniag Eskimo cooking and refuse disposal practices by Koniag specialists and KANA scholars, including Aron Crowell, Rick Knecht and Donald Clark. We also collaborate with a number of Russian scholars. Oleg Bychkov of the Ethnographic Bureau in Irkutsk has been most helpful in examining the spatial organization of the *sloboda* or residences of Russian workers and their families at Ross. Alexei Istomin of the Russian Academy of Sciences has assisted in translations of primary Russian sources. Valery Shubin of the Sakhalin Regional Museum has outlined in considerable detail the archaeology of Russian and Koniag Eskimo residences and workplaces in Russian-American Company outposts in the Kurile Islands.

An unanticipated development of opening direct communication with a number of Pacific Rim scholars is that history would repeat itself at Fort Ross. Representatives of the Pacific peoples who were once stationed at Ross have now returned for a new round of encounters. Culture contact continues today as Russian, Koniag Eskimo, and Kashaya Pomo scholars meet again at the historic outpost. Culture contact has continued at my home, where various scholars have stayed for extended visits. Since we can usually only speak a few words of each other's language, I have a better appreciation of initial contact situations where people probably ate and drank together and communicated by pointing, making expressive eye movements, and unintelligible noises.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I think by integrating California archaeology into the broader research arena of the Pacific Rim, we are in a much better position to investigate the roots of pluralism and ethnic diversity in our own state. However, a Pacific Rim

perspective goes beyond the study of pluralism, as it also provides a comparative framework for better understanding complex hunter-gatherers in California. For those of you primarily concerned with the prehistory of our fair state, the Pacific Rim affords the opportunity to examine a diverse array of hunter-gatherers who exploited similar kinds of foods and resources in small-scale communities, such as in the Northwest Coast, Alaska, Siberia, and Japan. Interestingly, Japanese archaeologists studying the Jomon peoples - prehistoric fisher-gatherers dependent on acorns, deer, and maritime resources -- have been using models of California hunter-gatherers proposed by some of you in their own work (Junko Habu n.d.; see also Akazawa and Aikens 1986). I think the time is right for us to enter into this dialogue and to develop a more broadly comparative Pacific Rim perspective.

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