

The Powwow Dance and My Dance with Powwows

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Abstract

This research examines powwow culture on Treaty Six Territory. On the one hand, powwow culture is traditional with historical roots in warrior societies and in Indigenous forms of dance, also informed by Wild West shows and the world wars. On the other hand, powwow dances as modern performances also express the dynamism of modern Indigenous cultures.

As a Chinese student in anthropology, I have reflected in this thesis on my position as a non-Indigenous researcher, and on the relationship between anthropology and Indigenous cultures. Therefore, another concentration of this research revolves around my own fieldwork story and personal perspective on the relationship between Indigenous cultures and anthropology.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Xiao Zheng. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Cultural Resilience: Powwow Culture in Alberta”, No. Pro00071665, May 29, 2017.

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Introduction

Since entering my field and beginning this research I have regularly witnessed people's astonishment—voiced first as, “you're from China, and you're interested in our culture?” or “you're doing research on powwows?” followed by, “why are you interested in our culture?” or “why are you interested in powwows?” To be frank, even after finishing my fieldwork there was a period of time when I could not figure out why, among so many options, I chose to step into the world of Indigenous cultures and powwows. As a Chinese anthropological student who had been in Canada for only one year, I could not have picked a more challenging focus for my research. If my own interest and curiosity is an appropriate reason, then that is the answer: but what other factors were influences?

It is beautiful: sources of my research interest.

To begin with, I must give the credit to the field of anthropology, which I have been studying for more than six years. I was enrolled in the Department of Ethnography and Anthropology at Xiamen University, which is one of best anthropology departments in China. There, in addition to learning about anthropological research on Chinese

culture, I was constantly exposed to theories originating from North American scholars such as Franz Boas and his students. That was where my knowledge of and interest in North American Indigenous cultures began.

Then, in a reading course on Indigenous cultures and museum studies in the first term of my graduate program, my supervisor Dr. Jean DeBernardi assigned me several related reading materials. Through the book, *This is Our Life: Haida Material Heritage and Changing Museum Practice*, I engaged with the concept of repatriation for the first time, and I realized the discrepancy between the western and Indigenous philosophy about objects. My anthropological education in China helped me develop a curiosity about cultures different from my own, as well as an enthusiasm for learning more about cultural diversity. Therefore, when I faced the opportunity to meet with Indigenous peoples in Alberta, I decided that I wanted to make this the focus of my MA thesis research.

My decision to conduct research on powwow culture began out of personal fascination. In the summer of 2016, I received an email from the University of Alberta that contained information about the 35th Ben Calf Robe Traditional Powwow, and I decided to go. Though I had no prior knowledge of powwows when I attended, what I witnessed was so compelling that I even stamped to the drumbeat. As with Indigenous

groups in North America, there are many ethnic groups in China,¹ and for many of them, singing and dancing are also some of their most crucial practices and hold sacred connotations. However, when I have traveled in China to minority groups' regions, all the performances of singing and dancing I have seen served the main purpose of attracting tourists. I am not indicating that traditional and authentic ceremonies and activities do not exist anymore, but neither the commercial performances nor the traditional gatherings in China enjoy the same level of popularity or influence as the powwow does in North America. Therefore, I became interested in powwow culture out of my own admiration for its success. Also, when I went to meet Dr. Kisha Supernant, a Métis archeologist in my department, to discuss my prospective research ideas, she brought up the topic of powwow and told me that it was probably a good option for getting to know the regional Indigenous cultures.

Before finally making my decision, I wrote a term paper for the course Anthropology of Modernity to discuss the resilience of Indigenous cultures, with the powwow as a main example. In the process of doing my literature review, I gained more of an understanding of powwow culture, and realized that it is not only a result of “warrior society dances, reservation-era intertribal dance, Wild West shows and other exhibitions, and postwar homecoming celebrations” (Browner 2002: 19) but also a form

¹ There is the Han group—the biggest and main ethnic group—and there are fifty-five minority groups in China.

of agency that plays a crucial part in “social, cultural, political, and material affairs” influencing “every corner of life” (Ellis 2003: 29). As a result of this—and because the powwow is open to the public—I believed that conducting research on it would be a great and relatively easy starting point for me to enter Indigenous cultures as an outside researcher.

Nevertheless, if it is not too inappropriate to speak emotionally, I would like to acknowledge that the real reason I decided to explore powwow was my deep fascination with it. When discussing the preference for objectivity as a dominant research paradigm, Eber Hampton, an Indigenous scholar, expresses his opinion by saying that

One thing I want to say about research is that there is a motive. I believe the reason is emotional because we feel. We feel because we are hungry, cold afraid, brave, loving, or hateful. We do what we do for reasons, emotional reasons. That is the engine that drives us. That is the gift of the Creator of Life. Life feels. ... Feeling is connected to our intellect and we ignore, hide from, disguise, and suppress that feeling at our peril and at the peril of those around us. Emotionless, passionless, abstract, intellectual research is a goddam lie, it does not exist. It is a lie to ourselves and a lie to other people. Humans — feelings, living, breathing, thinking humans — do research. When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous, to ourselves first, and then to the people around us. (Hampton 1995:

52)

This is the best summary I have found of my interest in Indigenous cultures and powwows.

It is confusing: anthropological methodology and Indigenous methodology.

With respect to methodologies, I adopted the methods of participant observation and qualitative interviewing from anthropology, and I simultaneously got inspired by Indigenous methodology in my study. Another important approach to collecting information on powwows and acquiring knowledge of Indigenous cultures is to use online news sources. At the beginning of my research, the website I visited most frequently was Powwows.com,² which is the most comprehensive website on powwow information and powwow culture in North America, with contents including but not limited to a powwow calendar,³ a photo gallery, and research articles as well. In addition, I made use of the online archives of the National Museum of the American Indian and the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, where I found old photographs illustrating historical writings.

Furthermore, for the purposes of education and the promotion of powwow

² <http://www.powwows.com/>

³ The calendar includes powwow information (date, location, and usually a poster) from the last five years all around North America, and it stays updated as more and more powwows are set up.

cultures, powwow participants—dancers, drummers, and powwow committee members—and relevant organizations like to post photographs and videos online. In addition to Powwow.com, there are also many videos on YouTube where powwow participants share the history of powwows and the meanings of each dance category, as well as other aspects of Indigenous knowledge. The online information is not only a convenient source for outsiders and researchers like me, but also for Indigenous peoples themselves. As a matter of fact, there were several times when I asked my informants, especially the young people, where they found the knowledge to learn the dances, and they mentioned “online,” “from YouTube,” or even “from Facebook.”

Participant observation has been one of the most important methods in anthropological research since the late 19th century. It requires anthropologists to stay with “a group of people for extended periods, often over the course of a year or more, in order to document and interpret their distinctive way of life, and the beliefs and values integral to it” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 1). Traditionally, the main purpose of anthropologists in participant observation was to study other cultures and collect objective data. In some traditional ethnographies, the authors adopted a third-person authoritative voice, and presented data regarding the objects of study while removing all traces of the observer (Tedlock 1991: 72). As a consequence, as Stephen Tyler once noted, “ethnography is a genre that discredits or discourages narrative, subjectivity, confessional, personal anecdote, or accounts of the ethnographers’ or anyone else’s

experience” (Tyler 1987: 92, cited in Tedlock 1991: 72).

However, the situation has changed with the movement of reflexive anthropology. Generally speaking, reflexivity indicates “the constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher’s own contribution/influence/shaping of intersubjectivity research and the consequent research findings” (Salzman 2002: 806). In anthropology, reflexivity suggests “the public examination of the anthropologist’s response to the field situation, the inclusion of methodology, and the participation in constructing the final report” (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982: 19). In this vein, as the “primary instrument[s] of the data generation” (Honigman 1976: 259), anthropologists started to realize the roles that their identities, such as gender, status, and cultural backgrounds, behaviors, and basic assumptions played in their fieldwork.

Under these circumstances, anthropologists are switching from being objective to “appear[ing] to be more personal, subjective, biased, involved, and culture bound,” and some even hold the opinion that “*the more scientific anthropologists try to be by revealing their methods, the less scientific they appear to be*” (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982: 26). Or in Barbara Tedlock’s word, the method of participant observation has been changing towards “observation of participation” (1991: 69) through its incorporation of researchers and their relationships with the people under study into the investigation. In ethnographic writings, it is noteworthy that reflexive anthropology does not mean putting the focus on researchers themselves. Instead, disclosing “the character and process of the

ethnographic dialogue or encounter [allows readers to] identify the consciousness which has selected and shaped the experiences within and text” (Tedlock 1991: 78).

Around the same time as the shift towards reflexive anthropology, Indigenous studies has taken off, with more and more Indigenous scholars sharply criticizing dominant western perspectives and bringing forward Indigenous perspectives as part of a greater anti-colonial project. For instance, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), in her “anti-research book” (16) *Decolonizing Methodologies*, puts forward “an agenda for Indigenous research” (115) and “ethical research protocols” (122) for research on aboriginal peoples.

According to Shawn Wilson (2008), these new research protocols “challenge western methods and western focused researchers who have studied Aboriginal people” (53). In his ground-breaking book *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Wilson (2008) explores Indigenous meanings of the terms ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, and addresses the expected paradigm of Indigenous research by linking them into a seamless circle, instead of isolating them apart (see Figure 1). Also, in the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, a number of contributors support the use of “critical Indigenous pedagogy” as a strategy to decolonize western methodologies (Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith 2008). Different from (traditional) anthropology methodology, Indigenous methodology considers more about the purposes of research and influences of research results and advocates conducting research in a

Indigenous ethical and relational way.

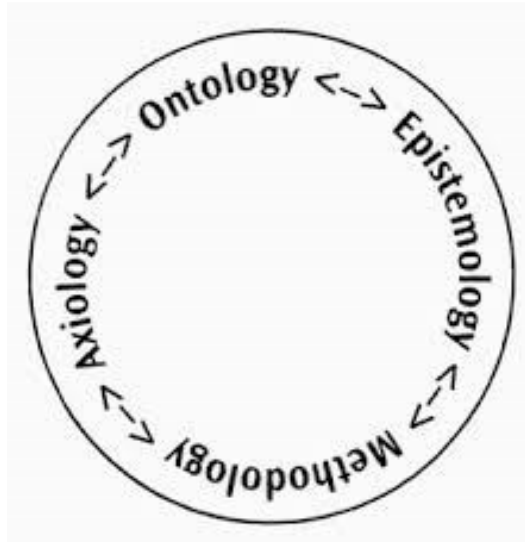


Figure 1. Indigenous research paradigm circle (Wilson 2008: 70)

In my case, reflexive anthropology encouraged me to think about how my research has been influenced by my identity as a Chinese anthropological student. First of all, unlike many anthropologists who already have connections with the people they work with, I entered my field alone and as a complete outsider. For the purpose of building relationships with powwow people and powwow communities, I went to the powwow practice and powwow fitness workshops organized by the Canadian Native Friendship Centre (CNFC) in Edmonton. There, I became a close friend with a Jingle Dancer and made some friends with whom I sometimes traveled to powwows. However, I have to acknowledge that my relationships with powwow communities were not solid enough, especially in the initial phase of my fieldwork. Therefore, in my research I spent much

more time observing than participating and interviewing in order to collect information, even though I danced the inter-tribal together with friends and occasionally acted as a water girl for the dancers.

When it came to conducting interviews, it was almost impossible to conduct formal interviews at powwows since people were busy performing and socializing. Fortunately, the presentations made by the Masters of Ceremonies and Elders at powwows, as well as the small discussions I had with spectators and dancers, were of great help to my understanding not only of powwow culture but also of Indigenous worldviews. In addition, considering the idea that “Indigenous knowledges are born of relational knowing” (Kovach 2009: 57), even in formal interviews, I, in like manner, preferred to both ask questions about powwows and other aspects of their cultures, and, if my interviewees were interested, share my own life experience as well. Also, with the acknowledgement of “principles of native oral traditions” (Kovach 2009: 124), instead of conducting formal interviews, I intended to design my interviews in a less structured way as open-ended conversations.

As a non-native English speaker, conducting interviews has been particularly challenging, especially when recording is unwanted. Occasionally I had to ask the same question in different ways or repeat my understanding of their meaning to the interviewees to make sure that I had comprehended what I was told. Worse, having to give my whole attention to communication usually meant that I did not have time to take

detailed notes. Hence, at the moment the interview was over, I usually had to run into my vehicle to start to write down everything that I recalled. Although embarrassing, I need to admit that the language barrier must damage the depth and thoroughness of information I have collected, which is probably the greatest weakness of my research.

When it comes to Indigenous methodology, it provoked me to think more about the ethical issues involved in the research. Do I have the right to study powwow? What is the Indigenously appropriate way to constructing narratives? How could my research benefit the people who I worked with? Especially, due to the complicated relationship between Indigenous peoples and anthropology, the ethics of this research has become my biggest concern that has never stopped confusing me. Before my fieldwork, I was told that it would be a strenuous and sensitive direction to take, not because I am an international student but more because I am doing anthropological research. Fortunately, and not as predicted, except for some expected ignorance, I did not encounter any hostility due to my anthropological background during my fieldwork. My hypothesis about my positive experience is that if the strain between Indigenous cultures and anthropology is true, it is highly possible that being a Chinese female student weakened my role as an anthropological researcher in my research. During my time at powwows, instead of being interested in what my research was about, people were more curious about, for instance, which part of China I come from, if I am the only child in my family, and why I came to Canada.

Nevertheless, when entering the world of literature, the situation changes. There are few, if any, references available on how a graduate student should conduct research on Indigenous cultures, and even fewer on how a Chinese student is supposed to behave. I have been “pushed” to pay all my attention to my anthropological identity, and hence the relationship between anthropology and Indigenous cultures stands out. In particular, with the development of Indigenous studies, “questions about the appropriateness of ethnographic research being conducted into Aboriginal issues by non-Indigenous researchers” (Dyck 2006: 86) have become more and more poignant.

In the writings of some Indigenous authors and even anthropologists themselves, anthropology and anthropologists are usually described as “colonial accomplices.” For instance, in the *Dictionary of Anthropology*,

Anthropology is inseparable from the history and practices of colonialism in a double sense: on the one hand, anthropologists were frequently in the employ of the colonial state itself, and on the other hand, the science of RACE and of races was in integral part of the ways in which colonial powers represented themselves and non-European Others in the nineteenth—and twentieth—century modernist project. (Watts 1997:72)

Faced with the likely statements, , I cannot help but feel guilty as an anthropological researcher, even though I have nothing to do with the colonial history of anthropology and do not comply with the public image of an anthropologist in a traditional sense. Most

importantly, however, I believe anthropology has been changing for the better.

This feeling of guilt was transformed in my research into self-doubt, uncertainty, and sometimes meticulousness. I endeavored to follow Indigenous methodology and protocols, but I never knew if I was on the right track. The consequence of this complex feeling was that conducting ethical research became extremely important and created a great pressure on me. Before I started my fieldwork, I consulted with some professors in my department who had experience with Indigenous cultures, the Elder in the Aboriginal Students Services center at the University of Alberta, and some of my Indigenous friends. During my fieldwork, I would like to let people know that I was conducting research, even though sometimes the conversations had nothing do to with powwow or Indigenous cultures in general. In addition, by following the insiders' advice, I, for instance, always brought tobacco and small gifts to people who shared their knowledge with me; I never touched the powwow regalia without permission, nor did I walk across the dancing grounds. However, I am not sure if being respectful and accepted by certain people give me the right to conduct research of a certain culture.

Moreover, how could my research benefit the people who offered me help with my research? Reciprocity, or giving back, a term used frequently in Indigenous literatures, is a significant protocol in Indigenous research. However, as a graduate student, I cannot, for example, afford to hire a local research assistant as some anthropologists usually do. Also, since my research is more concentrated on the

sociocultural aspects of Indigenous cultures, it will not directly benefit the communities and people I have worked with, at least not in the short term. Therefore, I would like to seize every opportunity to volunteer with Indigenous institutions and for Indigenous activities to contribute whatever I can, regardless of whether my activities are related to powwows. Although I believe that I have made my best effort, I am still concerned that what I have done is not enough.

It is Treaty Six Territory

Treaties are agreements between the Government of Canada and Indigenous peoples. There are two kinds of treaties: historic treaties with First Nations and modern treaties with Indigenous groups. My research area is mainly in Treaty Six Territory, with a focus on Edmonton and surrounding reserves, where the biggest Indigenous group is Cree, with some Assiniboine (including Nakota), Saulteaux, and Chipewyan people also living in the region. Therefore, I worked primarily with sixteen First Nations as listed in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Treaty Six, which was signed on August 23, 1876 at Fort Carlton in Saskatchewan, addresses the central parts of the present provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

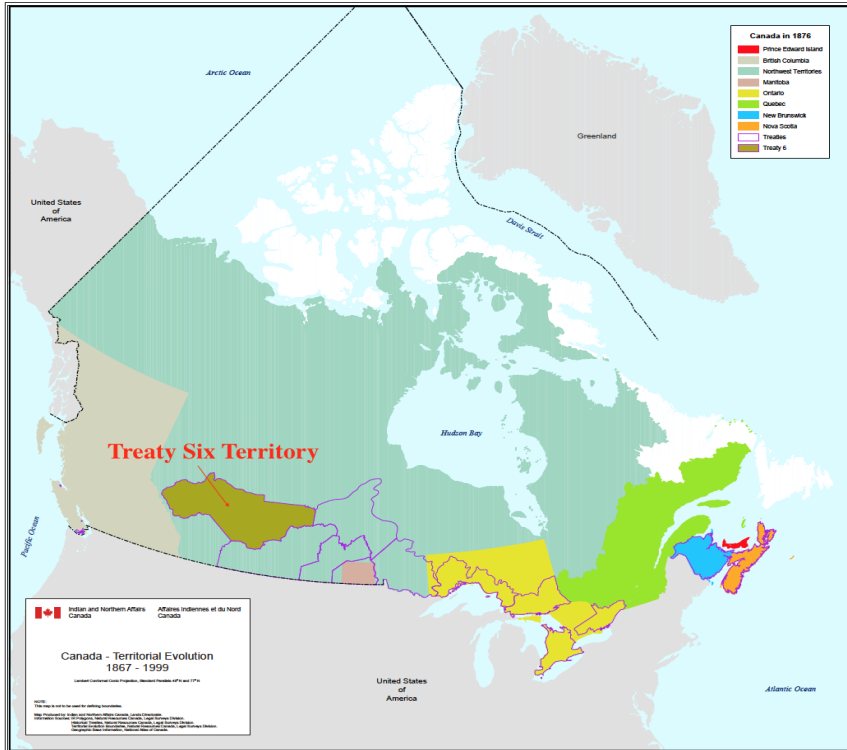


Figure 2. Historical Canada with Treaty Six Territory Highlighted. “Canada – Territorial Evolution 1867 – 1999.” Government of Canada, Accessed Jul 14, 2018, http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/hc1876trty_1100100028703_eng.pdf.

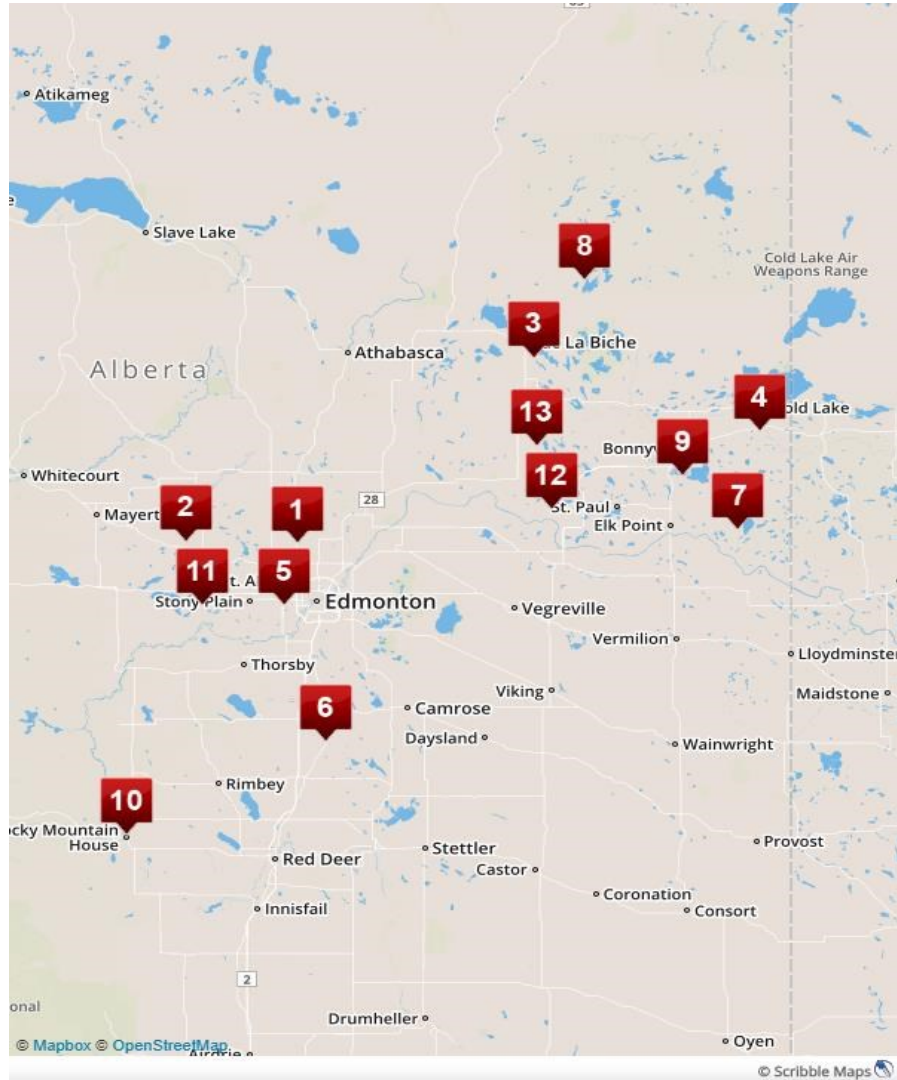


Figure 3. Map of Fieldwork Communities. Image created by author.

Notes:

1. 1. Alexander First Nation; 2. Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation; 3. Beaver Lake Cree Nation; 4. Cold Lake First Nation; 5. Enoch Cree Nation; 6. Ermineskin Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, Montana First Nation, Samson Cree Nation; 7. Frog Lake First Nation; 8. Heart Lake First Nation; 9. Kehewin Cree Nation; 10. O'Chiese First Nation; 11. Paul First Nation; 12. Saddle Lake Cree Nation; 13. Sunchild First Nation; 14. Whitefish Lake First Nation (Goodfish).
2. Ermineskin Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, Montana First Nation, Samson Cree Nation are in the Maskwacis area, which used to be called Hobbema.
3. Saddle Lake Cree Nation and Whitefish Lake (Goodfish) First Nation are administrated separately but are considered one band under the Indian Act.

For the purpose of my research, I have been to thirteen powwows in total, twelve of which were in Treaty Six Territory. The Peace River powwow was in Treaty Eight Territory, and I was invited by a couple of friends to take a one-day trip there. I have categorized the twelve powwows in Treaty Six Territory according to whether they were competition powwows or traditional powwows, and also whether they are annual powwows or mini powwows⁴.

Name	Location	Date(s) of event	Date(s) of attendance	Competition or Traditional	Annual or Mini
The 36th Annual Ben Calf Robe Traditional Powwow	Commonwealth Community Recreation Centre, Edmonton, AB.	May 13, 2017	May 13, 2017	Traditional Powwow	Annual Powwow
Bent Arrow Powwow Night Celebration	Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, Parkdale School Grounds, Edmonton, AB.	May 27, 2017	May 27, 2017	Traditional Powwow	Annual Powwow
Peace River Powwow	Peace River Agriculture Grounds.	June 2–3, 2017	June 3, 2017	Competition Powwow	Annual Powwow
National Indigenous Day Powwow	Victoria Park, Edmonton, AB	June 22, 2017	June 22, 2017	Traditional Powwow	Mini Powwow
Enoch Cultural Camp Minipowwow	Enoch Park: Cree Powwow Grounds, Enoch Cree Nation, Edmonton, AB.	June 26, 2017	June 26, 2017	Traditional Powwow	Mini Powwow
Ermineskin Cree Nation Powwow	Maskwacis Park, Maskwacis, AB.	June 30 – July 2, 2017	June 30 – July 2, 2017	Competition Powwow	Annual Powwow

⁴ The word “mini powwow” indicates powwows that are small-scale and are usually part of big events. Therefore, unlike annual powwows, mini powwows have far fewer participants and usually only take a few hours.

			2017		
Enoch Cree Nation Powwow	Enoch Park: Cree Powwow Grounds, Enoch Cree Nation, Edmonton, AB.	July 7–9, 2017	July 7–9, 2017	Competition Powwow	Annual Powwow
Alexis 40th Annual Powwow	Alexis Indian Reserve #133: Range Road 43, Glenevis, Alberta, Canada	July 14–16, 2017	July 14–16, 2017	Competition Powwow	Annual Powwow
K-Day Powwow	Hall D, Edmonton EXPO Centre, Edmonton, AB.	July 25–27, 2017	July 27, 2017	Competition Powwow	Annual Powwow
Poundmaker’s Lodge Treatment Centres Annual Powwow	Poundmaker’s Lodge Treatment Centres, Edmonton, AB.	Aug 12–13, 2017	Aug 12, 2017	Traditional Powwow	Annual Powwow
Samson Cree Nation Powwow	Maskwacis Park, Maskwacis, AB.	Aug 11–13, 2017	Aug 11 and Aug 13, 2017	Competition Powwow	Annual Powwow
Alexander First Nation Annual Traditional Powwow	Alexander First Nation: Morinville, Morinville, AB.	Aug 19–20, 2017	Aug 19–20, 2017	Traditional Powwow	Annual Powwow
Louis Bull Tribe Veterans Day Traditional Powwow	Ermineskin Panee, Maskwacis, AB.	November 12, 2017	November 12, 2017.	Traditional Powwow	Annual Powwow

Conclusion

As a Chinese, my research interest in Indigenous cultures and powwows grows out of my anthropological education and curiosity about the similarities between Indigenous cultures and Chinese cultures. In turn, my Chinese and anthropological backgrounds impact my powwow research. As one of my Indigenous friends has said, “we have lots of things in common,” and my being Chinese may make people

temporarily forget that I am an anthropological researcher. My encounters with reflexive anthropology and Indigenous studies have forced me to confront my own role in the relationship between anthropology and Indigenous cultures, producing significant confusion. Furthermore, as a student who had little previous research experience with Indigenous cultures, I have always doubted whether my research is ethically Indigenous enough and anthropologically professional enough.

I once felt lost in this powwow research, and at times I still do. I am wondering if non-Indigenous researchers are allowed and supposed to develop an interest in Indigenous cultures and be involved in Indigenous studies. Is being identified as Indigenous oneself the key for a researcher to be able to undertake Indigenous projects ethically? Is there any difference in protocol for Indigenous researchers and non-Indigenous researchers? In general, who has the right to conduct Indigenous research? I have not come up with answers, but I do hope that I am able to one day find an appropriate position for myself in Indigenous studies as a Chinese anthropological (student) researcher.

Chapter 1. Powwow Studies and Pan-Indianism

Powwow in the Indigenous world is a quite commonly seen but complicated word if you would like to explore its meanings. It is a type of Indigenous performances in the traditional sense, of course; but it is also a dynamic process, which combines Indigenous history and present together and builds toward a future:

...Indian people from all walks of life, from all kinds of communities with all kinds of interests, see the powwow as a source of renewal, joy, strength, and pride. For them the powwow has become a singularly important cultural icon in their lives. Anchored in deeply respected tradition but clearly modified over the years by the shifting tides of identity and belief that have appeared in every Indian community, the powwow has become a dynamic source of expression (Ellis and Lassiter 2005: vii).

Since the mid 20th century scholars from the fields such as anthropology, religion, and ethnomusicology, have conducted research on powwows from various perspectives.

In this chapter, I will start with the etymology of the word “Powwow” by tracking how it originated and how its meanings change. Then I will join the conversation of powwow and Pan-Indianism, which has enjoyed considerable popularity since it originated, and reveal some contradictory attitudes towards it. Finally, I will look at the

available powwow research after 1990s through the lenses of identity, communication, history, and performance.⁵

Etymology

According to the *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, the word “powwow” derived from the Narragansett word *pau wau*, which conveys several but related meanings: “a medicine man; the conjuring of a medicine-man over a patient; a dance, feast, or noisy celebration, or hunt; a council; a conference” (Hodge 1968: 303).

The meanings which relate powwow to celebration and dancing, according to David Whitehorse, were “most commonly used by the English in dealing with the Eastern tribes. It eventually became part of the colloquial language, describing any gathering of Indian people regardless of purpose” (Whitehorse 1988: 3–4).⁶

At present the word powwow, in the context of North American Indigenous cultures and for most occasions, is only used to describe events where Indigenous people get together and celebrate their cultures through the medium of music and dance

⁵ Gloria A. Young (1981) and Susan Applegate Krouse (1991) conducted thorough literature review on powwow studies in their Ph.D. dissertations.

⁶ In addition, influenced by Indigenous culture, the (Pennsylvania) Germans still use the word powwow to refer to healing practices. According to Virgil Vogel, in the westward movement Indigenous medicine and herbals started to become integral to European remedies (1970: 125), and “the combination of charms, incantation, magic, and ‘laying on of hands’ for avoiding or curing disease or injury, which survives to this day among the Pennsylvania Germans, is called ‘powwowing’ by those who use it” (Vogel 1970: 126).

(Browner 2002:1). In term of organization, there are two types of powwows, traditional and competition powwows, which I will describe in detail in the next chapter. With regard to tradition, some differences exist between the northern and southern powwow circuit: the northern circuit is centred on Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Dakotas, while the southern circuit is centred in Oklahoma (Herle 1994: 64). However, the differences are not formal, and in reality, many interactions happen between the two.⁷ At most of the powwows in the Northern Plains, there are six dance categories—Men’s Traditional Dance, Men’s Grass Dance, Men’s Fancy Dance, Women’s Traditional Dance, Women’s Jingle (Dress) Dance, and Women’s Fancy (Shawl) Dance. In Alberta, there are seven dance categories, counting the Men’s Chicken Dance, which originated in Southern Alberta.⁸

Powwow and Pan-Indianism

In the history of powwow studies, the term Pan-Indianism cannot be ignored. One of the earliest researchers to connect Pan-Indianism and powwow culture was James H. Howard, who defines Pan-Indianism as “the process by which sociocultural entities such

⁷ The difference between the Northern Powwow circuit and the Southern Powwow circuit is not one of the main points of this chapter, so I will not expand on this topic here. More information can be found in sources such as “A Window into the Indian Culture: The Powwow as Performance” (1991: 41–42) by Susan Applegate Krouse, and “Northern Style Powwow Music: Musical Features and Meanings” (2004) by Anna Hoefnagels.

⁸ I will provide further explanation of each dance category in Chapter 3.

as the Seneca, Delaware, Creek, Yuchi, Ponca, and Comanche are losing their tribal distinctiveness and in its place are developing a nontribal ‘Indian’ culture” (1955: 215). The term “Pan-Indian” or “Pan-Indianism”⁹ has been applied to many fields, such as arts, politics, social systems and identities of Indigenous peoples to create a generalized “Indian” identity, dissolving the cultural distinctions between Native groups (Hoefnagels 2000: 26). Usually, powwow is believed to be a principal representation of Pan-Indianism (e.g., Powers 1980: 223; Howard 1983: 71).

Nevertheless, even though the tendency towards so-called Pan-Indianism does exist, we need to ponder this term further if we are to use it. Many anthropologists, notes Powers, “have been quick to apply Howard’s definition to all tribes. But in emphasizing the postulated homogeneity of ‘Pan-Indianism’, they have failed to recognize tribal distinctiveness” (1990: 52). Brown and Toelken, in their powwow studies, remind the readers that “[w]e will not pretend to give a comprehensive account of the genre..., for even in the West there are large regional differences in the singing and dancing protocol” (Brown and Toelken 1987: 49). Furthermore, according to Hoefnagels, “[d]espite these assertions [of Pan-Indianism], powwows are not homogeneous celebrations; within the generalized Plains-style of music and dance performed at powwows across North America, each celebration is distinguished by the participation of different individuals,

⁹ Pan-Indigenism is the most current version of this term, but it seems Pan-Indian or Pan-Indianism is still more frequently used than Pan-Indigenism.

the contrasting aims of organizers and variations in the programming of activities” (2000: 27).

Moreover, the community-based research approach in powwow studies makes the general Pan-Indianism conclusion more paradoxical. As pointed out by Christopher A. Scales (2012), many powwow projects “are local in focus, studying unique community traditions without placing those specific powwows within the larger discourses and practices of powwows as they are performed through North America” (290).

Nevertheless, many researchers still consider powwows to be monolithic entities with little consideration of the great plurality of powwow practices that exist.

In addition, in early powwow studies, Pan-Indianism and tribalism were placed on opposite sides, and Pan-Indianism and intertribalism were taken for granted as interchangeable, a system which has been criticized as too all-or-nothing. For instance, Powers, as early as 1970, suggested that Pan-Indianism and tribalism do not conflict with each other:

Powers’ prediction that Pan-Indianism might also promote tribalism appears to be confirmed by the number of traditional Native dances and ceremonies which are being retained and revived within the context of specific tribal groups. Many of these dances and ceremonies are not likely to be seen in the context of powwow as tribalism is reinforced by maintaining a distinction between public and private, for example Kiva dancing among the Pueblo tribes. It is not just the dance itself

but the knowledge of what the dance means that strengthens tribe identity. (Herle 1994: 77)

In a similar vein, Sanchez states that the “powwow is an amazingly complex and successful working model for intracultural and intercultural communication. In an effort to increase common understanding of contemporary Native America, powwow stresses American Indian commonalities in relation to mainstream American culture while also stressing tribal individuality within the American Indian community” (Sanchez 2001: 51-52).

Last but not least, we should be aware that Pan-Indianism, in addition to being a social reality, also results from social changes. As highlighted by Herle (1994) it is “a strategic response to historical disruptions and the dilemma of Fourth World populations within nation-states” and “the content and form of that response has largely been determined by the selective interaction between Indigenous groups in North America” (81). Therefore, when noticing the gradual tendency towards Pan-Indianism, we should also realize that the ideas of Pan-Indianism, intertribalism, and tribalism are not incompatible. In the same way, powwow culture, although it supersedes distinctive tribal characteristics, has simultaneously facilitated the revitalization of “traditional” tribal characteristics by reinforcing a strong sense of cultural pride (Herle 1994: 81). In Ellis and Lassiter’s words, “[p]owwows can reflect ‘a powerful synthesis of related traditions’, but... they also simultaneously encourage tribally specific and community-specific

senses of identity” (2005: ix). As a result, instead of jumping to a generalized conclusion, we need to be thorough and critical.

Several approaches to powwow culture.

Powwow as an identity maker.

Examining powwows as an Indigenous identity maker is one of the most frequent approaches researchers have taken. For instance, in a study of powwow celebrations in Saskatchewan in the 1970s, Dyck argued that taking part in a powwow was “to declare one’s identity as an Indian by joining with other Indians in celebrating the values of Indianness.” He also observed that by “hosting their own powwow and by hooking into the circuit of powwows in Saskatchewan they have demonstrated themselves to be Indians who know and respect this prestigious cultural activity” (Dyck 1979: 96).

However, while playing an important role in asserting Indigenous identity in a positive way, the powwow, believes Dyck, “emphasizes the social and cultural boundaries which separate Indians from non-Indians” (1979: 93). In my opinion, Dyck’s concern was valuable at that time but no longer, as powwows are now open to all people and thus

encourage more contact between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people.¹⁰

Daniel J. Gelo (1999) focuses on a specific group of persons—Masters of Ceremonies or Emcees—to explore how they construct and negotiate Indigenous power and identity through their “formal announcements and jovial patter” (Gelo 1999: 40). For example, Gelo argues that “[e]ven with the onus of running on schedule, the emcee appreciates and sometimes encourages [a] disregard for clock time,” (1999: 49) and the reason for their behavior is actually to express ethnic identity. Likely, the constant joking at powwows is also “a means of broaching Indian identity: first, because it is axiomatic among powwow-goers that Indians have a distinct and particularly well-developed sense of humor; second, the remarks and canned jokes often refer explicitly or implicitly to issues of Indian identity” (Gelo 1999: 50). I personally have a strong awareness of this situation. Often, during my fieldwork when the Masters of Ceremonies made jokes at powwows, the people sitting around me were cheering and laughing, but I felt totally lost and embarrassed.

Of course, there are some other perspectives. Also paying attention to the connection between Indigenous identity and powwow culture, Abigail Wightman (2012)

¹⁰ Before around 1970s, some powwows charged admission fee from non-Indigenous visitors, which has been mentioned by many scholars, such as Arndt (2005), Corrigan (1970), and Dyck (1979). Now I believe most of the powwows are open to the public, both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people, for free, and I have never been charged in my fieldwork. However, in order to attend the powwows at K-Days or Calgary Stampede, the general admission fee is required.

approaches the topic in a different way and embraces the marginal groups of people who never or rarely attend or participate in powwows in Plains Apache culture. According to Wightman, the purpose of her research is not to deny the social and cultural importance of powwows but to “broaden understandings of contemporary indigeneity and indigenous identities in a more inclusive way” (Wightman 2012: 71). From Wightman’s perspective, not attending powwows does not necessarily mean cultural loss or the rejection of Indigenous identities. Firstly, participating in powwows requires tremendous capital, both financial and kinship-based, which may not be affordable for some people. Moreover, kinship obligations and behaviors, which are paramount as an index for cultural continuity for the Plains Apache people, can be expressed in various ways (Wightman 2012: 69–71). Therefore, participating in powwows or not is indeed a personal choice and is not supposed to be excessively linked with Indigenous identities.

Christopher Scales (2012) also seems hesitant about the assertion that the powwow is an expression of Indigenous identity. For Scales, on the one hand, there are certainly many instances in which both the performers and the audience members are able to reaffirm Indigenous identity through powwow music. However, on the other hand, it is never guaranteed, because “[p]articular elements of Native identity must be articulated to particular elements of powwow musical or choreographic or social style” (Scales 2012: 9). In this case, I believe that it is more reasonable and prudent to regard the powwow as a communication media instead of as an identity maker, even though

there is some overlapping between these two perspectives.

Powwow as a communication media.

Studying the communicative role of powwows is in some ways similar to the identity approach, but it lays more emphases on the interaction between different groups, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. According to Victoria E. Sanchez (2001), a powwow carries out communicative functions at various levels. First, Sanchez suggests that a powwow is a kind of “intertribal negotiation” (2001: 57) that enables communication and interaction between Indigenous tribes and communities. In addition, a powwow is simultaneously an expression of “intercultural negotiation” between Native Americans and the rest of American society and has the ability to make a difference in the “revision of the many misunderstandings and knowledge gaps of the surrounding non-Indian community” (Sanchez 2001: 60).

Focused on Southern Ontario, Kathleen Buddle (2004) proposes that powwows have become a critically important contact zone where “Aboriginal interest groups gather with multi-ethnic audiences to negotiate, to perform and to exchange ideas about contemporary Aboriginality” (30). Powwows also act as communicative media. Both in the period of Wild West shows and at present, powwows were and are expressions of Indigenous peoples and cultures. At the same time, powwows create a contact platform for various groups of peoples within and between Indigenous communities to come

together to share dance, music, and beyond. Moreover, powwows, argues Buddle, “provide the context for participants to mediate their relationships to land, myth, and ritual, and to other elements of their contemporary environs” (2004: 53).

The historical, cultural, and social consequences of the powwow.

Essentially every researcher studying powwow culture, no matter their research perspectives and preferences, would agree that the powwow is the outcome of traditional ceremonies, cultural changes, and current social realities. However, it is necessary to be aware that even though there are many similarities across all the powwows in North America, we still need to understand them “in local contexts and as products of local histories” (Fowler 2005: 68). For example, Jason Baird Jackson engages with the relationship between the stomp dance and powwow in his research working with the Native Americans in the Southeastern and Northeastern Woodlands regions of Oklahoma (2003). According to Jackson, in the northeastern area, stomp dances were gradually combined with powwow performances, while in the southeastern area, stomp dances developed differently and are now connected with powwows in a distinctive way.

Stephen Warren (2009) also conducted a case study and traced the history of Meskwaki powwows mainly through examining “the connection between 1901 fire that destroyed the central village of the Meskwaki people and the ‘process’ spectacle of

1916¹¹” (3). Meskwaki powwow grew out of the corn harvest and functioned in several ways. First of all, it “severed popular audiences interested in static reminders of a masculine and patriotic frontier past.” More importantly, the powwow played a role in the fight for the tribal sovereignty (20). In addition, faced with the economic transition in the early twentieth century, the powwow along with other public performances not only alleviated Meskwaki people’s economic pressure, but also became a way of “maintaining the relevance of the green corn ceremony” when farming and hunting were not a stable means of livelihood any more (21).

As an ethnomusicologist, Anna Hoefnagel’s studies on powwow started from her doctoral program, where she developed a distinct interest in Southern Ontario (2001). Based on Hoefnagel’s research, contemporary powwows in this region share many features with powwows all around North America; nevertheless, they are also shaped by local history and society. In her exploration of the powwows in Southwestern Ontario, Hoefnagel points out that even the powwows at the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, Walpole Island First Nation, and Sarnia First Nation, which are held within one-and-a-half-hour drive from one another, have some differences in origin (Hoefnagel 2007: 109, 122–127). Additionally, “specific individuals played [roles in] in the acceptance, promotion and organization of powwows in this region, fostering [their] acceptance and

¹¹ The” ‘process’ spectacle in 1916” suggests the Fort Armstrong Centennial Celebration which was held in Rock Island, Illinois from June 18th to 24th, 1916.

development” in local powwow history (Hoefnagel 2007: 109).

In addition, *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-wow* written by Tara Browner, a well-known scholar in powwow studies, is a basic introductory work for people who have interest in powwow culture but have not delved into it in detail. In addition to giving a comprehensive historical introduction to powwows and analyzing the meanings of the dance and music, Browner includes case studies on two groups of Indigenous peoples—the Lakota people (including the Nakota and Dakota) and the Anishnaabeg Tree Fires Confederacy—to demonstrate the distinctive regional conventions.

In 2016, Grant Arndt, an Associate Professor in both Anthropology and American Indian Studies at Iowa State University, published his first book, called *Ho-Chunk Powwows and the Politics of Tradition*. As a historical ethnography of the powwow tradition, this book investigates the dynamics of the Ho-Chunk powwow and its precursors over the past two centuries and demonstrates how the transformations that happened aligned with the changes in the rest of Ho-Chunk society, such as the warrior ceremony, drum religion, development of American culture industries, and the world wars in the twentieth century. In conclusion, powwows, according to Arndt, are supposed to be considered the crystallization of both tradition and modernity, and through participating in them, Ho-Chunk people are able to preserve and produce cultural practices embodying values different from those of the surrounding world while

maintaining the balance of tradition and innovation as they confront the ever-shifting challenges settler colonialism has created for their survival.

Powwow and performance

Comparatively speaking, even though the powwow is a kind of Indigenous performance, research conducted on powwows from the perspective of performance and performativity is not as rich as the literature emerging from the perspectives described above. In “A window into the Indian Culture, the powwow as performance,” Krouse points out that “previous studies failed to examine the performance aspects of the powwow and to relate it to other types of cultural performance” (Krouse 1991: 18). He analyzes powwows as “a reversal of everyday life and social order” (1991: 89) which is represented in four ways:

1. Indian people, who are usually a minority, form a majority in the powwow, either in numbers or in visibility;
2. Indian culture, which is often ignored or rejected, is placed at the forefront and honored by the focus on it;
3. Non-Indian people, who are usually the majority, form a minority in the powwow, either in numbers or in visibility. Their presence may be ignored or acknowledged, excluding them from the powwow or including them as participants in an Indian event;
4. Non-Indian culture, which usually dominates, is relegated to a position of low status or no status. Its presence may be ignored or acknowledged, excluding it from the powwow context or

including it as part of Indian culture. (Krouse 1991: 89–90)

As an independent scholar, Ann Axtmann's research is concentrated on motion, such as body, movement, and dance studies. By drawing on the works of authors such as Paula Gunn Allen, M Annette Jaimes, Judith Butler, Michel de Certeau, and Michel Foucault, Axtmann (2001) looks into "how physical, social, and spiritual power is produced by the moving bodies of Native American powwow dancers as they execute specific choreographic styles" (7). She takes the Men's Grass Dance, the Tiny Tot category, and the Women's Jingle Dress Dance as examples of her statement. In Axtmann's article, the inclusion of historical narratives, description of dance steps, and presentation of social environment as a kind of power are all taken into consideration in the choreography of powwow dancing. Axtmann intends to, on the one hand, "complicate our knowledge about Native American dance – too often viewed as simplistic, easily executed, and isolated from its historical and sociopolitical contexts," (2001: 8) and, on the other hand, to "examine how powwow choreographic styles generate power through the performativity of moving bodies" (2001: 8). In the monograph *Indians and Wannabes: Native American Powwow Dancing in the Northeast and Beyond*, Axtmann (2013) furthers her discussion on the body's performance in powwow dancing along with the historical and political aspects of the powwow located in the New York City tri-state area.

Chapter 2. The History of Powwow Culture

Generally speaking, many factors have exerted an influence on the origin and development of powwow culture in North America, but three agents have played dominant roles in this process: the pre-contact war dance tradition; Indigenous entertainment exhibitions, with the most well-known examples being the Wild West show and Banff Indian Day; and the participation of Indigenous people in the world wars. It is worth mentioning that it is necessary to keep in mind the powwow's community-based nature, which means that any powwow is influenced by its local political, social, and economic landscape; simultaneously, the big picture of general powwow culture in North America is traceable. Moreover, many people whom I interviewed informed me that Canadian powwow culture was initially imported from the United States and has been impacted by the American powwows every now and then. For these two reasons, I will temporarily ignore the national border between Canada and the United States while discussing powwow history in the context of North America.

War dance and warrior society

Dancing and singing, no matter whether in the pre-contact period or now, is one of the most significant practices in the Indigenous world. Previously, dancing practices

carried strong religious meanings; for example, Doolittle and Elton (2001) commented that “the Indians believed that the Great Spirit taught them to dance so that they could express thoughts and feelings to him. No other form of communication with the spirit world was as adequate or complete” (114). Contemporary powwows are more likely to be considered as social events and opportunities for dancing; at least, in other words, not as sacred as before. Nevertheless, dancing is still an integral part of Indigenous cultures, and Indigenous people often described dancing to me as a way to heal themselves spiritually. For example, in the event Running Thunder: First Nations Dance¹² organized at the Edmonton Public Library in Sprucewood, Andrian LaChance¹³ mentioned that “prayer is always attached to dance,” and that “dancing and singing is an outlet for us. This is what helps us to heal our spirit.” Also, basically at every powwow I attended, I had heard the Masters of Ceremonies emphasized that “dancing is how we heal ourselves and our communities.”

Regarding the powwow dances, many researchers have proposed that the War Dance, as “an amalgamation of many tribal styles of the Northern and Southern Plains,” (Powers 1990: 29) is the precursor of current tribal and inter-tribal powwows.

¹² In the summer of 2017, Andrian LaChance organized this event at several locations of the Edmonton Public Library. The one I went to was in the Sprucewood location on Aug 2nd, 2017, where Mr. LaChance gave a general introduction of powwow dances and music, and he, together with his sons, also showed the audience some steps of men’s dancing categories.

¹³ Mr. LaChance is a Men’s Traditional Dancer as well as a Master of Ceremonies at powwows, and the first time I met him was at the Enoch Cree Nation Powwow in 2017.

Interestingly, though, as a consequence of intertribal communication, the connotations of ‘War Dance’ are community-based as well and can be interpreted in various ways.

At intertribal celebrations, the term “War Dance” suffices, but on reservations and in other Indian communities, we find that War Dance is known by other names.

Among the Lakota on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, it is called “Omaha dance”, because the dance was historically learned from the Omaha tribes; among the Shoshoni and Arapaho it is known as the “Wolf dance”, the Wolf being associated with the warrior or scout; the Lakota of Standing Rock as well as the Blackfeet, Cree, Assinibonie, and Three Affiliated Tribes call it “Grass dance”, a term used by many of the Northern Plains tribes. (Powers 1990: 29–30)

In Powers’s statement, the Grass Dance, which indeed is “an ancestral version of what is known as the Men’s Northern Traditional Dance” (Browner 2002: 20), is different from the Men’s Grass Dance category at current powwows. In order to avoid confusion, I will use “Modern Grass Dance” (as a category) in the following to describe the Grass Dance performed at the powwows that I observed in summer 2017 in Alberta.

In his article “General Discussion of Shamanistic and Dancing Societies,” Clark Wissler explores the history of the War Dance. According to Wissler, the current Men’s Traditional Dance —previously the Grass Dance — has its historical roots in the “iruska” ceremony, which is a shamanistic performance of the Pawnee people:

Now it should be noted that we have two forms of this iruska ceremony: the older

represented by the Pawnee iruska, the Arikara, Hidatsa and Mandan hot dance, and the Iowa fire dance, in all of which the fire tricks occur; the more modern forms are generally known as grass dances which have practically all the other features of the older ceremony. (Wissler 1916: 860)

Drawing on Wissler, Browner sums up the history of the spread of these dances through the plains:

During the 1830s, the Pawnee gave (or sold) the Iruska to the Omaha/Ponca Nation, which referred to their version of the dance/ritual as the Heluska (Man Dance). In the early 1840s, the Omaha sold the right to perform the dance and its songs to the Yanktonai Dakota, who soon after gave performance rights to the Teton Lakota. Both nations called the ceremony “Omaha Dance” in honor of the people from whom they had bought it. From the Lakota, Omaha dancing “diffused” over the Northern Plains, where most tribes that performed it began to call it the Grass Dance. (Browner 2002: 21)

In the meantime, even though she does not directly point out that Wissler misunderstood the diffusion routes, Browner reminds people that “it is difficult to trace the dispersion of a warrior society around the Great Plains through the study of the spread of regalia and a few linguist similarities” (Browner 2002: 22).

Wild West shows

In 1883, Buffalo Bill Cody, along with his partners, organized the first Wild West show, and in the following half century many imitators of him appeared and disappeared. As a matter of fact, Wild West shows represent a time period during which other agencies and/or activities with a similar or directly identical nature, such as pageants, fairs, stock shows, and powwows¹⁴ also existed (Moses 1996: 256). For instance, George Catlin, an American painter, author, and traveler, organized several exhibitions and tours both in the United States and Europe, and held the belief that “just as Indians should be educated over time in the ways of civilization, so also should American citizens be instructed in ways of nature and nature’s noblemen” (cited in Moses 1996: 15). The Wild West shows reached its heyday between 1900–1917, but after that, the outdoor show business, including the Wild West show, started to decline due to the death of Buffalo Bill Cody and, on the other hand, the United States’ entry into World War I (Moses 1996: 252).

¹⁴ I am not sure if the “powwows” mentioned here are similar to modern powwows.



Figure 4. Wild West Show. "Pawnee Bill Wild West Show, ca. 1928. Horace Poolaw (Kiowa). Pawnee, Oklahoma." National Museum of the American Indian, Accessed Jul 27 2018, <http://nmai.si.edu/static/exhibitions/horsenation/wildwest.html>.

In the summer of 1885, the Wild West shows visited Canada, which turned out to be “a sensational public success” (Bara 1996: 153), and the protagonist Sitting Bull gained great popularity:

Such spectacles, as well as the regular shows, were highly praised in the local press. The “reality” of the scenes was emphasized above all other qualities... In Canada, Sitting Bull was applauded wherever he appeared, and his historical importance was exaggerated out of all proportion. The reception given to Sitting Bull in Montreal was comparable to that accorded visiting royalty. (Bara 1996: 153)

Banff Indian Days “could be considered the Canadian equivalent of Buffalo’s Wild West Show” (Drees 1993: 7–28). Originating around the beginning of the 20th century, this

event was initially organized as “a way to entertain tourists trapped in Banff spring flooding that destroyed the railway tracks” (Rocky Mountain Outlook 2014). As a tourist attraction fair, Banff Indian Days consisted of many activities, including the Grand Parade, sport competitions, and some other novelty events.

The Indigenous entertainment performances around the end of the 19th century such as the Wild West show and the Banff Indian Days played a controversial role. On the one hand, they “reproduced marketable images of Indianness as romantic, exotic, exciting, and savage” (Arndt 2016: 24–45) which was built upon the assumption that the Indigenous people would disappear and contributed to the stereotypical images of Indigenous cultures as static, barbaric, and childlike. Also, this kind of Indigenous performance had the potential to “[undermine] the value of cultural performance as a form of self-production and self-determination” (Arndt 2016: 46). However, on the other hand, they also play several positive roles. Firstly, participation in these performances “gave performers a measure of independence” (Arndt 2016: 47), especially considering that it was a difficult time in Indigenous history. Moreover, to some extent, these performances protected Indigenous knowledge and practices in a period when both the American and Canadian authorities had outlawed and banned most Indigenous ceremonies and dances.

In Canada, since 1876 the *Indian Act* had outlawed some traditions of the Indigenous peoples. For instance, under Section 3 of *An Act Further to Amend “The*

Indian Act, 1880”, certain practices, such as the potlatch, were made criminal.¹⁵ The suppression of Indigenous cultural and ceremonial practices was broadened under Section 114 of *An Act to Amend the Indian Act*, and more Indigenous celebrations were banned or confined. However, the ban did not include agricultural shows and entertainment exhibitions for non-Indigenous people.¹⁶ A further provision with the purpose of prohibiting all the Indigenous dances off-reserve was enacted under Section 149 of *An Act to Amend the Indian Act* in 1914.¹⁷ The situation did not change until 1951 when

¹⁵ “3. Every Indian or other person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as “Potlatch” or in the Indian dance known as the “Tamanawas” is guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than six nor less than two months in any goal or other place of confinement; and any Indian or other person who encourages, either directly or indirectly, an Indian or Indians to get up such a festival or dance, or to celebrate the same, or who shall assist in the celebration of the same is guilty of a like offense, and shall be liable to the same punishment.”(1884, C.27, S.3)

¹⁶ “114. Every Indian and other person who engaged in, or assist in celebrating or encourages either directly or indirectly another to celebrate, any Indian festival, dance, or other ceremony, goods or articles of any sort forms a part, or is a feature, whether such gift of money, goods or articles, takes place before, at, or after the celebration of the same, and every Indian or other person who engages or assists in any celebration or dance of which the wounding or mutilation of the dead or living body of any human being or animal forms a part or is a feature, is guilty of an indictable offense and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months; but nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent the holding of any agricultural show or exhibition or the giving or prizes for exhibits thereat.” (1895, C. 35, S.114)

¹⁷ “2. Any Indian in the province of Manitoba, British Columbia, Saskatchewan or Alberta, or in the Territories who participates in any Indian dance outside the bounds of his own reserve, or who participates in any show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant in aboriginal costume without the consent of the Superintendent general of Indian Affairs or his authorized Agent, and any person who induces or employs any Indian for such a purpose, whether the dance, show, exhibition, stampede or pageant has taken place or not, shall on summary conviction be liable to a penalty not exceeding twenty-five dollars, or to imprisonment for one month, or to both penalty and imprisonment.”(1914, C.35, S.149)

Indian cultural expression was again permitted (Hoefnagel 2007: 118).

In this period of time, only activities with similar natures to the Wild West show and Banff Indian Days were allowed to be performed occasionally, and even though they were different from Indigenous traditional and “authentic” practices, they protected the Indigenous cultures from fading away and laid the foundations for the current dance categories at powwows by spreading the Plains-style music and dances. As Anna Hoefnagels explains:

The proliferation of Plains cultural practices and ideals into other areas of North America resulted not only from intertribal sharing with other Native groups, but also the influence of non-Native fascination with Plains-style images that were promoted in tourist shows and Hollywood films. Traveling productions such as Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show showcased Plains-style music and dance, and fostered an image of the “typical Indian.” Indeed, Plains music and images came to be associated with a generalized “Indian” for some Native people as well.

(Hoefnagels 2007: 118)

Simultaneously, performances at venues such as Wild West shows and Banff Indian Days also led to many changes in dancing steps and regalia.

For instance, when discussing the Modern Grass Dance and the Northern Traditional Dance, Belle suggests that “[t]he institution of the Wild West shows is considered responsible for continuing the separation that existed between the Grass

Dance and the Northern Traditional dance, despite the Bureau of Indian Affairs ban of these dances,”¹⁸ and also that “the Wild West shows were able to help (and in a way, force) these two styles of dance to develop independently of each other” (2004: 46). Additionally, the regalia became more colourful and flamboyant, partly because the organizers rewarded participants for wearing costumes that are more elaborate to attract more audience members. For instance, at Banff Indian Days,

Indians were paid at departure according to their costumes. Those dressed in feathers or beadwork costumes were give more money than those “of less colour”; however, every participant was “paid costumes...” Costuming was given a great deal of attention by the Indians, who spent the months before the Days carefully preparing their dress in anticipation of the contests and parades. (Drees 1993: 11)

The contemporary situation is the same. Powwow performers usually spend significant time and money on their regalia with the belief that “[n]obody will look at you if you have a shabby costume” (Doolittle and Elton 2001: 120). For example, a senior Jingle Dancer I met at the Ermineskin Powwow told me that she bought her regalia, not including moccasins, from a person she knew at a discount price of 1200 Canadian dollars (the original price of the regalia would have been around 1800 Canadian dollars). If dancers cannot afford to purchase their regalia or they do not want to, they will make them by themselves. This requires significant skill and time, and people usually do this

¹⁸ Bureau of Indian Affairs is an American government agency.

during the winter and together with their family and friends.

Therefore, we are supposed to approach the Indigenous performance in the era of Banff Indian Days with a holistic viewpoint, and “seek to understand both the economic incentives and drawbacks of show dancing as complicated negotiations and decisions in which Indians and whites alike played pivotal roles” (Ellis 2003: 100). Additionally, this form of Indigenous performance was also the consequence of that age when the social structure of the Indigenous world was changing with more and more encounters between Indigenous cultures and white culture. According to Arndt, Indigenous performances “preserved the expectations of tradition in forms suited to the new situation of American Indian peoples by attaching them to new cultural roles and to expressions of value that made it possible to produce meaningful identities while also reproducing important relationships in a world that had changed radically” (2016: 55).



Figure 5. Banff Indian Days Parade, ca.1930-1940. Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Accessed Jul 27 2018.

World Wars and beyond

Also playing a significant role in the renaissance of Indigenous dancing, and, accordingly, the development of powwows, were the world wars. Warfare, states Arndt (2016), “was integrated into precolonial life as an opportunity for the production of value and reproduction of values at the most fundamental levels of indigenous life” (126). Dancing, as an inseparable part of the Indigenous life, was closely connected with Indigenous warfare, and that was where the War Dance came from, as mentioned above.

However, when the Indigenous traditional war-related lifestyle came to an abrupt halt, the status and spirit of the warrior gradually faded away from people's memories, as did the dances. This situation did not change until Indigenous people started to be enlisted in the army:

America's involvement in World War I provided a new outlet for the warrior traditions of Plain Indians. Many young men joined the armed forces, and with their participation came a brief revival of warrior musical traditions. (Gooding 2001: 443)

With the same logic, World War II also played a part in "renew[ing] interest in early warrior society music and dance forms from pre-reservation days and from World War I" (Gooding 2001: 443).

In Canada, approximately 4000 status Indians volunteered for service during World War I (Dickason 2002: 307) and the number increased to around 6000 during World War II (Dickason 2002: 310). With participation in the world wars, the Indigenous warrior spirit was rekindled, and in the words of Arndt:

That the veteran as warrior and soldier became iconic of tradition was due, in part, to the importance of the role of warriors in indigenous life in the past, but it became relevant in the twentieth century because of developments in the global structures of modern life: had the twentieth century not turned out to be a "century of war", warrior ceremonialism might have remained an anachronism or been

transmuted into purely symbolic forms, perhaps to be subsumed in other symbols of tradition more relevant to the conditions of modern life. (Arndt 2016: 154)

Simultaneously, just as when the warriors went for battles and hunting in the pre-contact period, Indigenous communities danced to encourage and bless their soldiers before they left for wars and also welcomed them back with dances. Therefore, in addition to giving rise to the resurgence of warrior culture, “Native involvement in Canada’s military encouraged the revival and performance of significant cultural ceremonies and traditions through the reinstatement of warrior status and prestige, which ultimately impacted on the development and spread of powwows through the resultant cultural reawakening” (Powers 1990: 50–51, cited in Hoefnagels 2009: 235).

Moreover, due to Indigenous people’s contributions to countries involved in the world wars, many governments’ attitudes towards Indigenous issues also started to change. On the one hand, during the wars, the traditional dances “previously banned were allowed to be performed on many reservations, often in order to raise funds for the war effort” (Gooding 2001: 443). On the other hand, with Indigenous self-awareness, the international Indigenous movement, and other political shifts, some policies were issued that relieved the oppression on Indigenous peoples and their cultures:

By the second third of the twentieth century changes in Canadian Indian policy were inevitable. Missionary organizations and Ottawa bureaucrats had come to recognize that directed change and economic development were not occurring as

they wanted.....The failure of the nineteenth-century policies and a rise in the numbers of Indians made attempts to redefine Indian policy unavoidable. And, as that process began on the governmental side of the relationship, coincidentally among the native population there was a growing restlessness and a desire to control their own affair. (Miller 1991: 211)

The ever increasing popularity of powwow is a phenomenal result, which is “an expression of cultural pride and nationalism”, “a place to learn about their [Indigenous] heritage”, as well as “a symbolic representation of the pan-Indian movement” (Hoefnagels 2000: 27).

Chapter 3. The New Era: Competition Powwows

In the article “The Plains Indian Powwow: Cultural Integration in Manitoba and Saskatchewan,” Corrigan (1970) distinguished three categories of powwows in the region: first, “private powwows on reserves or in towns near reserves,” second, powwows “sponsored by some outside body... [and] designed to demonstrate Indian dancing to a largely non-Indian audience,” and third, the annual summer powwow. However, this classification method is already dated. Due to more and more frequent inter-tribal interactions, the private powwows, which, based on Corrigan’s description, (1970: 254-5) were similar to tribal celebrations, are rare. Today, with the interactions between a wide variety of tribes and between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people increasing, most if not all powwows have become intertribal. In my fieldwork, instead of tribal or intertribal, people much more frequently used the words “traditional” and “competition” (or contest) to describe a certain powwow. Compared with the traditional powwow, the competition powwow is a modern phenomenon and has brought many changes and discussions to powwow culture. . In this chapter, with the focus of my ethnographic research in Edmonton, Alberta, I am going to trace the history of the competition powwows, examine their influences, and discuss people’s opinions about the growing number of them.

Competition is new.

Different from the traditional powwows where remuneration is equally distributed among dancers in the same dancing category and drummers, the competition powwows feature participants' engagement in contests for rankings and prize money, and the competition did not emerge on powwow culture until around the 1950s:

1955 seems a reasonable historical marker. Since 1955, Oklahoma regulations for war dance competition—with minor modifications—have been adopted in the north... The rules that originally governed Oklahoma war dance competitions (e.g., dancing in time with the song and drum, and ending on the last beat of the drum) hold for the Northern Plains. (Powers 1980: 223)

However, the competition powwow appeared in Canada much later than it did in the United States. According to Elder BearHead,¹⁹ the competition powwow did not show up in Alberta until the 1980s when dancers went to America for powwows and started to be influenced by the idea of having contests.

It is noteworthy that the original competition was between drummers and dancers, which is different from the current agenda where dancers are grouped and compete based on their gender, age, and dance categories. At the Louis Bull Tribe Veterans Day

¹⁹ Mr. Walker, The Executive Director of CNFC in Edmonton introduced Elder Bearhead to me, telling me that he should be of great help with my research. Therefore, I phoned Elder BearHead and asked for an interview.

Traditional Powwow, Mr. Eagletail,²⁰ one of the powwow Masters of Ceremonies, told me that the competition is from Oklahoma, and in its early days the purpose was for the drummers to try and trick the dancers into stopping earlier than they were supposed to. In contemporary competitions, ending on the last beat of the drum is still an essential part of powwow dancing and one of the most crucial criteria taken into consideration by the judges, and sometimes the drummers also pretend to stop when they actually are not finished.²¹ In addition, the criteria also include, but are not limited to, the footwork, regalia²² and spot-check in the sections of Grand Entry and intertribal dances.

As a vital group of people in the competition powwow, judges, including the head judge(s), are selected by the powwow committee beforehand, and they take the responsibilities of creating the point system and appraising dancers and drummers. Ideally speaking, every single person can be designated as a judge, but people who come from the host community, who are or used to be good dancers, who are believed knowledgeable, and/or sometimes who are invited to the powwow as honourable guests

²⁰ I know Mr. Eagletail through Ms. Knight, who is the assistant curator in the Indigenous Studies Department at the Royal Alberta Museum. After knowing I would like to interview him about powwow culture, Mr. Eagletail asked me to go to the Louis Bull Tribe Veterans Day Traditional powwow and sit on stadium platform with him, so that I could ask any question while watching the powwow.

²¹ This action is called a tricky ending, and it most often happens in the Men's Fancy and Women's Fancy categories.

²² On the one hand, judges take the regalia into consideration because the dancers usually design and make the regalia, or at least some component of the regalia, by themselves. Also, judges believe that the heavier the regalia and beadwork are, the more difficult it is for the contestants to dance quickly.

are more likely to get the positions. Also, in order to be as fair as possible, relatives of the contestants are not supposed to act as judges for the categories their family members compete in. In the some of the big-scale competition powwows, the powwow committee will hire a professional tabulation team, who will also take part in creating a point system and sometimes even judging the contestants.

Another substantial component of the competition powwow is the group of dancers. In order to compete and be judged,²³ the dancers in the competition powwow are required to register in a certain category. Then, they are given an assigned number (see Figure 5 and Figure 6) that needs to be attached to their regalia when they dance so that the judges are able to note the rankings under their numbers. Each ranking represents a number of points, and there is no agreement on the point or tabulation system. Usually odd numbers of judges and total points are preferred in order to reduce the occurrence of ties, and there is also a trend to increase the points for joining the Grand Entry to encourage dancers not to skip it. Instead of using scorecards, contemporary tabulators prefer to computerize the system by putting barcodes on dancers' numbers and offering electronic equipment for the judges.

²³ Dancers sometimes do not want to compete, because, for example, they cannot stay through the whole event, or they would like to dance another category in addition to the one they register in for competition.



Figure 6. Enoch Cree Nation Powwow 2017. Photo by author.



Figure 7. Ermineskin Cree Nation Powwow 2017. Photo by author.

Things are changing.

Following the first appearance of the competition powwow, many changes have occurred in the powwow circuit. First, the idea of competition encourages more participation and interest in powwows, and “the expertise of dancers vying for prize money contributes to the overall excellence of the event” (Whitehorse 1988: 63). In the article “Powwow, Intertribalism, and the Value of Competition,” Scales (2007) states that by the 1970s more and more large powwows were organized as annual celebrations, and by the 1980s and 1990s, “mega-powwows,” such as the Gathering of Nations in Albuquerque, the Denver March Powwow, the Mashantucket Pequot’s Schemitzun, and Coeur D’ Alene’s Julyamsh, emerged (2). Today, both the traditional powwow and the competition powwow are welcome and popular, but based on my fieldwork,²⁴ more communities prefer to hold competition powwows during the summer²⁵ so that they can attract more participants and therefore more audience members.

In addition, the competition powwow is indebted to the evolution of dancing footwork. Even though the fundamental judging standards remain, fast and complicated footwork is more and more preferable, regardless of the category. For the purpose of

²⁴ As listed in Table 1, among the eleven annual powwows I have been to, there were six competition powwows. But in fact, based on the powwow posters uploaded on the powwow website (<http://www.powwows.com/>), there are many more competition powwows than traditional powwows, especially during the summer.

²⁵ Most powwows are held in the powwow season, in summer. However, some communities or certain families might organize powwows for special reasons outside of the powwow season, and in that case the powwow is more likely to be community-based and traditional.

impressing the judges and audience, the dancers, especially the fancy dancers who participate in the most vigorous categories, usually commit to a regular workout schedule out of the powwow season, so that they can build up their physical strength and increase their vital capacity. In big powwows, the committee may organize a special called “iron man and iron woman” in which dancers from a certain category commit themselves to a competition where they endeavor to dance while including as many push-ups as possible. Some well-trained dancers are able to dance for twenty minutes in a row, and the reward for winning is quite substantial.²⁶

More than that, competition powwows produce some full-time dancers. Due to their notable performances and reputations, some dancers are always able to get satisfactory rankings and prize money in competitions, which can be substantial enough to cover their powwow travel. In some cases, for example, a dancer wins both her/his category as well as a special competition, and the prize money he/she earns in total is enough to cover the main costs of a whole family during the powwow season.²⁷ These dancers travel all over North America, and at times even around the whole world, to

²⁶ The reward is given based on the financial abilities of the powwow committee. Usually the reward is more substantial than the first place in the exhibition dance competition. Sometimes the powwow committee also provides in-kind rewards, such as vehicles, which happened at the Poundmaker’s Lodge Treatment Centre Annual Powwow in 2017.

²⁷ During the winter time, they might earn money by receiving orders to make regalia and offering gig performances. In some cases, a dancer might also play the role of Master of Ceremonies for round dances and/or provide service by organizing workshops to make a living during the winter, but the precondition is that the person is believed knowledgeable and influential.

attend powwows and give performances. For example, some of the dancers I know in Edmonton went to the United States after October²⁸ for several powwows last year. Also, I have been told twice by dancers that they had been to China for competitions and performances.

Even though powwow regalia has been through many changes since the Wild West show period, with the introduction of competition, powwow regalia has begun to be more and more flamboyant. On the one hand, due to the fact that more options are available for the materials to make regalia, such as cloth, people are able to use bright colours or the colours they believe they are connected with to make their regalia. This was not achievable when hide was the only available material for regalia. In addition, the softness of the cloth also makes it much easier for beadwork. Sometimes dancers do not want their regalia to be photographed because they consider their designs and beadwork to be special and personal, and they do not want them to be copied by other people. Since dancers have higher and higher requirements for their regalia and some of them or their families are not proficient in making regalia, there comes a relatively new phenomenon—making and selling regalia (see Figure 7). Unlike people who design and make regalia only for themselves and their family members,²⁹ people who receive orders, sometimes

²⁸ The powwow season in Treaty Six Territory is from early May to late September.

²⁹ Individual regalia-makers may also buy materials or regalia accessories online, and they also purchase at powwows and/or from people they know. People have networks both online and in reality to exchange information.

even from all across North America, prefer to purchase raw materials (such as turkey feathers, yarn, and beads) in large quantities online at lower prices.



Figure 8. Men's Fancy Regalia made by Eric Mentuck. Photograph by Eric Mentuck.

It is not all about money.

In reference to Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, Arndt argues that the development of a market-focused society during the nineteenth century created the conditions for the separation of home and family from the market and state and, furthermore, helped make money inherently unclean and inappropriate as an expression

of intimate kinship and relationship (Arndt 2016: 73–74). Similarly, money is considered antithetical to culture’s protection and tradition’s preservation. Therefore, after money started to be involved in powwows, some people began to doubt the purpose of participating in powwows and criticize competition powwows for their commercialization. In my fieldwork, I was told that in big-scale competition powwows with particularly appealing prize money, it happens that dancers, in order to win, will use black witchcraft to attack competitors or lie about their ages to register in inappropriate categories. Moreover, the judging process is also dissatisfactory and may lack fairness. Judges are likely to “bring to their job their personal aesthetic standards and relationships with those who they will assess” (Browner 2002: 89). One day, when I took on the responsibility of being the water girl for a senior Jingle dancer, she told me, “I don’t think I can win because I don’t know any of the judges. I don’t have any reputation. Nobody in my family dances.” In some cases, people can even predict the rankings as they assume “the winners are always the same,” a sentiment I heard several times during fieldwork.

Conversely, supportive and positive opinions about competition powwows and prize money are also not uncommon. For instance, an Elder from Red Lake Anishinaabe groups the merits of competition powwows at three different levels:

Yet, the contest powwow certainly has positive attributes. For the individual dancer, competition dancing helps build confidence, character, stamina, and balance. And competition dancing allows the spectator the opportunity to see the

best dancers within their respective categories, great champion dancers like Ben Lovejoy, Nathen Smith, Terry Fiddler, and Jonathan Windy Boy. Lastly, one of the most significant contributions of the contest powwow is the dance music. The songs that we dance to today represent a renaissance in powwow music that embodies a vast repertoire of older traditional songs, many revised, and newly composed songs. Indeed, without contest dancing our dance circle would be incomplete. (DesJarlait 1997: 126)

Contestants in particular believe that prize money provides encouragement for their laborious training, compensation for their long-distant traveling, and respect for their sincere dancing. In addition, some scholars suggest that the changes happening in the transformation from traditional powwows to the popularity of competition powwows have been mainly displayed in the social and cultural connotations:

Competition powwows, by their nature, encourage a greater degree of emphasis on pan-tribal and intertribal ideologies. These powwows feature a much greater degree of intertribal participation and as such have become fertile sites for the negotiation of standardized intertribally agreed upon behavior and meanings — intertribally shared cultural norms that become widespread and shared among many tribal communities. (Scales 2012: 61–62)

Therefore, it is arbitrary to label the increase in competition powwows as beneficial or detrimental. In the meanwhile, similar with the commodification of Indigenous cultures

in general, the involvement of money does not necessarily lead to the corrosiveness of powwow culture, and on the contrary, competition powwows could be a new way of inserting traditional Indigenous practices and values into modern life as well (Scale 2007: 24).

Chapter 4. Powwow as Performance

As I mentioned in Chapter One, the available research on powwow culture does not give enough attention to the performance theories, which, in fact, could be a valuable approach. Traditionally, performance, according to Mary Frances HopKins, “referred to an event somehow set apart from everyday actions, an event that might be separated, or bracketed, from what audience perceived as ‘everyday life’” (HopKins 1995: 229).

Today, the concept of performance can be so extensive that it is not easy to define and locate:

...the concept and structure has spread all over the place. It is ethnic and intercultural, historical and ahistorical, aesthetic and ritual, sociological and political. Performance is a mode of behavior, an approach to experience; it is play, sport, aesthetics, popular entertainments, experimental theatre, and more.

(McNamara and Schechner, cited in Pelias and VanOosting 1987: 219)

That is to say, performance is not only limited to the stage; instead, it is involved in our everyday life, which is just the case of powwow. It is a type of Indigenous performances consisting of dancing, singing, and some other activities, and in the meanwhile, it takes in the Indigenous history and current social information while demonstrating the dynamic process of the Indigenous cultures. Therefore, in this chapter, I will first give a brief

review of the definition of performance, and then analyze powwow by adopting performance theories.

The Definition of Performance

In the performance textbook *Theories of Performance*, Elizabeth Bell (2008) classifies the concepts of performance coined by other scholars into three perspectives. To begin with, performance is both process and product, and theorists holding this viewpoint “try to account for performance as something that happens, emerges, and grows in and through a process, a set of activities or specific behaviors” (Bell 2008:16). For example, Elin Diamond (1996) argues that “performance is always a doing and a thing done. On the one hand, performance describes certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self). On the other hand, it is the thing done, the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted, and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field” (1). Secondly, performance is productive and purposeful (Bell 2008: 16). Mary Strine, Beverly Long, and Mary Frances HopKins (1990) list eight purposes of performance, namely, aesthetic enjoyment, intellectual inquiry, affective play, cultural memory, participatory ritual, social commentary, political action, and psychological probe (186–189). Finally, performance is traditional and transformative, which means that

“performances always make reference to former ways of doing, acting, seeing, and believing” (Bell 2008: 17), while simultaneously (re)building the present and creating the future.

Historically speaking, Bell (2008) suggests that performance studies have experienced a transformation from the “study of man” (115) to “the study of performance” (115) and “the study of culture” (116), which is usually labelled as “the performance turn” (116). Briefly put, the performance turn, highlights Bell, “rejects the view of performances as fixed objects to be studied in the science of positivism and embraces performance as a paradigm for understanding how culture makes and remakes itself” (2008: 116). In anthropology, it is Victor Turner, who “is credited for ushering this performance turn in the study of culture” (Bell 2008: 116), which is built upon one of his most well-known theories—that of social dramas.

Turner developed the theory of “social drama” initially through his fieldwork with the Ndembu of Northwest Zambia and defines it as “units of aharmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict situations” (1986: 74). Also, according to Turner, there are four main phases involved in social dramas, namely breach, crisis, redressive action, and finally reintegration, and a social system operates through repetitions of the whole process (Turner 1986: 74–75). Social drama theory underlines two aspects that are part of the social performances and the raw material of the cultural performances. Firstly, as “the basic stuff of social life is performance” (Turner 1986: 81), and all selves and societies

are going through ever-changing processes, studying performance as a method requires scholars to realize the dynamics of culture. Also, cultural performance and social drama, or a society's structure, are interactive (Turner 1986: 81–94). To put it in another way, performances as a subject are “*constitutive of culture*, not something added to culture; performances are *epistemic*, the way cultural members ‘know’ and enact the possibilities in their worlds; and performances are *critical lenses* for looking at and reshaping cultural forms” (Bell 2008: 116).

Another anthropologist who is well-recognized for work demonstrating the relationship between cultural performance and culture is Milton Singer. As early as 1958, Singer proposed that cultural performances “could be regarded as the most concrete observable units of Indian culture,” (351) and the analysis of cultural performance makes it possible to get a glimpse of the “more abstract structures within a comprehensive cultural system” (351). In his most influential work *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*, Singer (1972) constantly repeats the notion of a cultural performance as a unit for field observation, and then argues that through “the ladder of abstraction” (65) anthropologists can reach “holistic constructs,” or what we refer as culture. Cultural performances, according to Singer, include events such as plays, concerts, and lectures; prayers, ritual readings, and recitations; rites and ceremonies; festivals; and all these things which could be classified under religion and ritual from a western perspective (1972: 71). No matter what, a performance consists of a

definitely limited time span, or at least a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance (Singer 1972: 71). In the following section, I will adopt Singer's frame to draw a picture of a powwow while presenting how it is intertwined with Indigenous culture, local community and the main society as well.

Powwow as a Performance

A limited time span: It begins when it is ready to begin.

At present, even though almost everything in society is measured based on the Western calendar, Indigenous people still value their own concept of time and live their traditional lifestyle based on it. During my conversation with Elder BearHead, he told me that "January is not our new year, and our new year starts in spring." In the Indigenous worldview, spring and summer is the time period for gathering, celebration, and ceremonies, and that is the reason why the powwow season begins in early May and lasts until late September—regional differences are primarily based on the weather.³⁰ In

³⁰ In some areas, powwows are also organized in the fall and winter. For example, the 31st Annual Red Mountain Powwow in Scottsdale, Arizona in 2017 was held on November 4th and 5th, and the 13th Annual Powwow in Durant, Oklahoma on December 1st to 3rd. However, the number of powwows in fall and winter is obviously much lesser than during the summer, and on a smaller scale. Throughout Treaty Six Territory, and as far as I know basically in all of the province of Alberta, the most frequently held Indigenous gathering is the Round Dance, which is an indoor activity.

Edmonton and the surrounding areas, it has been a tradition for decades, according to Elder Betty Letendre, for the Ben Calf Robe Traditional Powwow to be the first one of the season. However, I do not intend to draw the conclusion that Indigenous people have a completely different notion of time. Instead, based on my fieldwork experience, I agree with the statement that “[i]n spite of the careful planning... the powwow unfolds more according to ancient Native American attitudes toward time and ritual than with regard to modern calendars and clocks” (Brown and Toelken 1987: 49).

Unlike traditional Indigenous community activities, which would last for a whole week or even longer, at present, most of the powwows are two-day or three-day gatherings. Among all the powwows I attended, the competition powwows were all three-day events, beginning on Friday evenings and going through the whole weekends. On Friday, the Grand Entry usually begins at 7:00 or 7:30 pm. As many of the performers have stable jobs to attend and their time schedule is relatively fixed, they have to make some adjustments in order to travel to the powwows. For example, Dustin, a Men’s Fancy dancer, once told me that from Tuesday to Thursday he usually needed to work late to make up for his missed Fridays and Mondays.³¹ The situation of the traditional powwow is occasionally different. I have been to four traditional powwows for my fieldwork—the

³¹ Dustin also organizes a powwow practice workshop on Monday evening, which begins at 6:00pm.

Ben Calf Robe Traditional Powwow, the Alexander First Nation Traditional Powwow,³² the Poundmaker's Lodge Treatment Centres Annual Powwow, and the Louis Bull Tribe Veterans Day Traditional Powwow. The Ben Calf Robe Traditional Powwow and the Louis Bull Tribe Veterans Day Traditional Powwow were one-day powwows, starting from midday and coming to an end around 10:00 pm. Both the Alexander powwow and the Poundmaker powwow were weekend events that started on the Saturday at noon and ran through the weekend.

When going to a powwow, one of the most important protocols is to “[s]top asking ‘When is the Grand Entry going to start?’—it’s going to start when it’s going to start.” (Hernandez 2017) At the beginning, the fact that the Grand Entry was never “on time,” to be frank, was a big cultural shock for me, and I was also surprised to realize that it seemed that people were all okay with it. For them, it is just how Jones and Jones explained:

Grand Entry begins when it is ready to begin. Indian Time is circular. Past, present and future are cycles of reality, with no beginning and no end. Time is indivisible. You cannot cut liquid water with a knife and you cannot separate time with a second hand. Time is fluid. You are never late nor early within Indian Time, because you cannot divide it. Things begin when things are ready to begin.

³² All the mini powwows I have been to are also traditional. However, since they have all been part of mega-activities, and their purposes and schedules are somewhat different from the annual powwows, I will focus on the annual powwows, which are more typical.

(Jones and Jones 1996: 38)

By the same logic, even though the whole agenda of a powwow is set in advance, it is also changeable. Unlike in most western activities, the Master(s) of Ceremonies may tell lots of stories with or without previous plans, the performers may dance one more time according to audience requests, and some special activities may be added or canceled if necessary. Therefore, it is hard to estimate when the powwow is going to end.

An organized program of activity: It is our celebration.

In my fieldwork, there were one-day powwows, two-day powwows, and three-day powwows, and all the one-day and two-day powwows were traditional powwows. The three-day powwows, rather than going through three whole days, in fact start on Friday evening and then go through the whole weekend. Today, the general powwows' agendas are similar and already standardized in different regions. Usually, there are two sections to each day, each of which is led with a Grand Entry—since powwows start on Friday evening, there is only one section and hence one Grand Entry on the first day (as shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9).^{33 34}

³³ There is one Grand Entry on Friday evening and two that occur separately on Saturday at noon and Saturday evening; on Sunday there can be only one Grand Entry which is at noon, or sometimes two as well, and one at noon and the other in the evening. It depends on the powwow committees.

³⁴ The powwow committee did not post the powwow agenda for Sunday. But in most circumstances, the general agendas on Saturday and Sunday are similar, and the only difference is that the specials interleaved vary.

7:00PM Powwow Grand Entry #1
(Bear Park - Maskwacis, Alberta)
Honor Willy Littlechild
Honor Terry Buffalo
Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women
Intertribal
Women's Jingle Special
(Sponsor: Peace Hills Insurance PHI)
Men's Chicken Dance Special
(Sponsor: Peace Hills Insurance PHI)
Regular Category Competition

Figure 9. Friday powwow agenda of the 2016 Samson Competition Powwow. Screenshot from Samson powwow Facebook page. Accessed Aug 06, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/samsoncreenation/>.

1:00PM Grand Entry #2
Honoring Curtis Ziplock
Tiny Tots Category
Honoring Tiny Tots (Cletis Louis)
Intertribal
Men's Grass Special
(Sponsor: Peace Hills Trust PHT)
Category Competition
Supper Break
Women's Traditional Special
(Sponsor: Peace Hills Trust PHT)
7:00PM Grand Entry #3
Intertribal
Men's Traditional Special
(Sponsored by Peace Hills Insurance PHI)
Women's Fancy Special
(Sponsored by Peace Hills Insurance PHI)
Men's Fancy Spotlight Special (Powwow Committee)
Category Competition

Figure 10. Friday powwow agenda of the 2016 Samson Competition Powwow. Screenshot from the Samson powwow Facebook page.³⁵ Accessed Aug 06, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/samsoncreenation/>.

³⁵ The powwow committee did not post the powwow agenda for Sunday. But in most circumstances, the general agendas on Saturday and Sunday are similar, and the only difference is that the specials interleaved vary.

The Grand Entry is a similar event to the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games. For the dancers, participation in the Grand Entry is compulsory, and they are encouraged to put on full regalia. Especially at the competition powwows, absence from the Grand Entry will be penalized. The spectators are required to stand up and take off their hats to show their respect.



Figure 11. K-Day Powwow 2017. Photograph by author.



Figure 12. Ben Calf Robe Traditional Powwow 2017. Accessed Aug 06 2018, https://www.facebook.com/BenCalfRobeAnnualTratioanlPowWow/?ref=br_rs.

Leading the Grand Entry are the Eagle Staff, the Canadian flag (sometimes an American flag as well), the Treaty Six flag, and the host community flag. The Eagle Staff is the traditional flag of Indigenous nations, and according to Mr. Eagletail, it used to be straight, which indicates wartime, as opposed to its current curved form (see Figure 10 and Figure 11). The flag bearers are usually male dancers from other communities, and for them it is a big honour to hold a flag. After the leading procession, a predetermined Elder will be invited to give a prayer, which is presented in both Indigenous languages—in Treaty Six Territory, usually Cree³⁶—and in English. Then the Victory song, or the veteran song as it is called occasionally, is presented for the purpose of commemorating the warrior tradition as well as to honour the people who served in the world wars.

³⁶ The Alexis powwow is organized in the Nakota language.

Finally, the royalty is introduced, which includes the chiefs and visitors from other communities, princesses³⁷ and warriors, political figures, and powwow committee members and volunteers.

After the Grand Entry, the Master of Ceremonies will invite everyone to the arena to dance the intertribal dances,³⁸ which are simply called intertribals. The dancers usually tone down some of their regalia accessories for this, especially the Men's Traditional, Men's Fancy, and Women's Fancy dancers whose regalia is quite heavy; neither do they perform the real dancing movements as they do in the competition. Rather, they prefer to dance the warmup steps or just walk. Additionally, the intertribals are great opportunities for dancers to communicate. They might catch up with friends and family members that they have not seen for a long time, or make some new friends. Therefore, it is common to hear greetings and compliments and see smiles and hugs at intertribals.

For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience members, since the intertribal

³⁷ “The concept of a princess is not part of traditional culture for the Plains Indian people, who did not have royalty systems of kings and princesses. Early European travelers and traders created the myth of Indian royalty based on their European style of government. The intent of the Indian communities is to encourage young girls in their Indian ways so that as mothers they will continue to practice (sic) an Indian way of life” (Deiter-McArthur 1994: 35).

³⁸ Intertribals or Inter-tribals are “non-competitive dances in which all categories of dancers, and often members of the audience, are invited into the arena” (Herle 1994: 69). Also, regalia is not required in intertribals. For researchers, such as Toelken (1991), Toelken and Brown (1987), and Parfit (1994), intertribal dances are central to the traditional powwows, and Arndt argues that “[a]t most contest powwows intertribals serve as warm-up for the contest dancing and fill time between other events” (Arndt 2016: 212).

does not require experience or regalia, it enables them to learn, participate, and share their own understanding and dancing steps. Therefore, the intertribals indeed emphasize “inclusivity and diversity” (Axtmann 2013: 96). Usually, there are as many songs as there are different groups, and therefore “a ‘drum order’ is established as the various drum groups each perform a song in a predetermined order” (Scales 2007: 7). For this reason, almost one hour is spent on intertribals at big powwows where dozens of drum groups register. Intertribals are sometimes organized between dance categories as well. Additionally, if there are not many dancers present, and even there is no dancer for some categories, intertribals are organized in order to encourage the audience to participate and make the event more interesting, which is more likely to happen at small-scale traditional powwows.

In both competition and traditional powwows, dancers are grouped based on ages, genders, and dance categories. There are seven dance categories at powwows in Alberta, namely Men’s Traditional Dance, Men’s Grass Dance, Men’s Chicken Dance, Men’s Fancy Dance, Women’s Traditional Dance, Women’s Jingle Dance, and Women’s Fancy Dance. Children under seven years old are grouped into the Tiny Tot category, and they are not grouped further based on gender or dance category. Dancers between 7 and 11 years old belong to the Youth category, dancers between 12 and 17 years old to the Teen category, there is an Adult category between 17 and 59 years, and dancers older than 60 years old are in the Senior category. Sometimes, especially at big powwows, the Adult

category will be further divided into a Junior Adult category and a Senior Adult category.

As I have mentioned, the powwow is community-based, which not only means that the history and development of a certain powwow is closely related to local culture and history, but also suggests that the organizations or formats of powwows differ. According to Browner (2002), dance events at Northern competition powwows are generally broken into three sessions, namely intertribals, competitions, and specials, and the distinctions between powwows are manifested in the organization of the competition and specials. On the one hand, the competition (sometimes called the “exhibition performance” or “dance competition”) proceeds in the following order —Tiny Tot, Women’s Golden Age (Traditional, Jingle, Fancy), Men’s Golden Age (Traditional, Grass, Chicken, Fancy), Junior Girl (Traditional, Jingle, Fancy), Junior Boy (Traditional, Grass, Chicken, Fancy), Teen Girl (Traditional, Jingle, Fancy), Teen Boy (Traditional, Grass, Chicken, Fancy), Adult Women (Traditional, Jingle, Fancy), Adult Men (Traditional, Grass, Chicken, Fancy)³⁹—but it is not completely fixed. For example, at the 40th Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation Annual Powwow, because the iron man and woman event for the Junior Adult Fancy dancers would be held after all the competitions, the Men’s Fancy style was brought forward to be the first one of the adult men’s categories

³⁹ All these categories need to be finished each day. On Saturday and Sunday, after the second Grand Entry, the performances pick up where they were left. On Friday evening, due to the time limits, there are no Tiny Tot or Golden Age categories; sometimes, as shown in Figure 9, only adults perform.

so that the dancers would have some time to take a rest and prepare for the iron man competition after the exhibition performance. As the specific agenda of each powwow is nuanced, this may be why there are usually only powwow posters (see Figure 12) that contain information about time, location, and prize, instead of pamphlets which are expected to list a detailed activity order and time organization as many western performances do. In fact, powwow participants, based on my observations, are not concerned with this information, and just follow what the Masters of Ceremonies tell them to do.

40TH ANNUAL CELEBRATION
Honouring our Knowledge Keepers

ALEXIS NAKOTA SIOUX NATION
POWOW
 HOST DRUM CRAZY CREEK JULY 14-16, 2017

MC'S FRANCIS ALEXIS & EUGENE ALEXIS
 ARENA DIRECTOR DALE ALEXIS

DRUM CONTEST
 1ST \$10,000 | 2ND \$5,000 | 3RD \$3,000 | 4TH \$2,000 | 5TH \$1,000
 DRUM SPLIT \$5,000

HAND DRUM CONTEST
 1ST \$800 | 2ND \$600 | 3RD \$400 | 4TH \$200

MALE DANCE CATEGORY (TRADITIONAL, FANCY, GRASS, CHICKEN)				FEMALE DANCE CATEGORY (TRADITIONAL, FANCY, SHAWL, JINGLE)			
JUNIORS (AGES 6-12)	TEEN (AGES 13-17)	ADULT (AGES 18-54)	GOLDEN AGE MIXED (55+)	JUNIORS (AGES 6-12)	TEEN (AGES 13-17)	ADULT (AGES 18-54)	GOLDEN AGE MIXED (55+)
1 ST \$300	1 ST \$300	1 ST \$1,000	1 ST \$600	1 ST \$300	1 ST \$300	1 ST \$1,000	1 ST \$600
2 ND \$200	2 ND \$300	2 ND \$800	2 ND \$600	2 ND \$200	2 ND \$300	2 ND \$800	2 ND \$600
3 RD \$100	3 RD \$200	3 RD \$600	3 RD \$400	3 RD \$100	3 RD \$200	3 RD \$600	3 RD \$400
		4 TH \$400				4 TH \$400	

SPECIALS:
 TEAM DANCE SPECIAL | ADULT FEMALE RED DRESS JINGLE DRESS SPECIAL
 JUNIOR FANCY FREEZE FRAME SPECIAL | INITIATION JINGLE SPECIAL | IRON MAN SPECIAL

FASTBALL TOURNAMENT
 CONTACT MELINDA POTTS
 AT (780) 977-6001

VENDORS WELCOME!
 FOR ALL INQUIRIES CONTACT ALEXIS POWWOW COMMITTEE C/O PATRICIA ALEXIS
 AT POWWOW@ANSN.CA OR (780) 983-7395 | (780) 967-2225
 Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation is not responsible for theft, damage, or any valuables left in vehicles on premises.

Figure 13. 2017 Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation Powwow poster. Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation Powwow Facebook page. Accessed Aug 06 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/AlexisAnnualPowWowCelebrations/>.

“Specials,” suggests Christopher Scales (2007), “refer to any number of dance events that are held apart from either intertribals or contests and many feature ‘memorial’ dance competitions or exhibitions of any of the six major dance categories⁴⁰ (where the memory of a particular dancer is celebrated through the sponsoring of a special competition dance) ... A special may also refer to a non-dance event such as a ‘giveaway’” (8).⁴¹ Another frequently seen special is called the “initiation” or “ignition ceremony,” the purpose of which is to initiate the dancing journey and make blessings for new dancers. The people, both children and adults, who participate in the initiation ceremony need to prepare tobacco and gifts for the Elders who pray for them, and sometimes for the audience as well. According to traditional beliefs, only after the initiation ceremony is an individual supposed to dance at powwows or other formal gatherings, otherwise s/he will easily get hurt. Additionally, the powwow committees or the Master(s) of Ceremonies may be creative and try to add entertainment to the powwow. At the Alexander powwow, the Master of Ceremonies asked every drum group to pick two persons and grouped them into several dancing groups. Of course, the

⁴⁰ In Scales’ statement, he does not include the Chicken Dance in the major dance categories, because it is exclusively performed at powwows in Alberta. In other words, powwows in Alberta hold seven dance categories.

⁴¹ The event in the memory of a particular dancer can vary. In most cases, however, the sponsor is a family member of the memorable dancer, or a whole community sponsors the event if the memorable dance was highly respected during his or her lifetime. Another similar event is that a family member or a community may sponsor a special dance category for a particular person who has made some achievement, such as finishing a PhD program. It is noteworthy that for both memorial and celebration purposes, dancing may or may not be involved, depending on the sponsors.

drummers' dancing groups were not expected to perform the same dances as the dancers did; instead, they were required to dance as specially and delightfully as possible to the songs that the Master of Ceremonies selected from his phone music list randomly, mostly cheerful pop music, and the audience picked their favorite group by making noise.

A set of performers: they are performers and activists.

In “A paradigm for performance studies,” Ronald J. Pelias and James VanOosting examine performers not only as artists but also within additional frameworks. These include studying the performer as a social actor, reading them like a text, or understanding them as a social activist. They describe some performers as “not only articulating [their] own views or representing institutional perspectives, but especially giving voice to the culturally silenced” (Pelias and VanOosting 1987: 4); a performer may deepen ethnographic research (224–225).

In Indigenous cultures, powwow dancers often enjoy honour and respect. The first reason is that because dancing is one of the most fundamental activities and lifestyles of Indigenous cultures, a good dancer is believed to be traditional and excellent in personality. On the other hand, and more importantly, dancing is how the Indigenous people heal themselves, and when Indigenous people dance, they are not only dancing for and healing themselves, but also their families and communities through talking to the Creator. For instance, Mr. LaChance once shared that when he started to dance, Elders

told him that “don’t dance for yourself; dance for the people who cannot. Think about those ones who are blind, sick, or dead. Think about those ones in hospitals, in armchairs...” Especially the Women’s Jingle Dance, people usually describe it as the healing dance (see Figure 13).



Figure 14. Women’s Jingle Dance Event. “2017 Gathering of Nations.” Paul Gowder, Accessed Aug 06 2018, <http://photos.powwows.com/2017-gathering-of-nations-91/>.

In my interview with Elder BearHead, he told me that it was an Ojibwe woman named Maggie who created the Jingle Dress dance. Browner (2002) also narrates a similar story:

A young girl was sick and gave no signs of recovering, so her father sought a vision. In that vision he was shown how to make a dress and perform a dance. He set about making the dress and then put it on his daughter and instructed her in the

dance. In spite of her illness, she somehow was able to dance, and when she did she was miraculously cured. Afterward, the same girl sought out three other girls and directed each to make a dress in one of the four sacred colors (red, yellow, white, and blue), with four rows of jingles rolled from snuff cans. The girl was Maggie White, and she and the other three girls became the nucleus of the Jingle Dress Dance Society. (54)

According to Elder BearHead, the Jingle Dress dance was brought to Alberta around the 1970s or 1980s by dancers who learned it when they went to the powwows in Eastern Canada. Due to its origin stories, people I met in my fieldwork described Women's Jingle Dance as healing dance as well. When something tragic happens (especially things that are female related), the powwow committee may decide to hold a Jingle Dance Special to spread healing energy. For example, at the Alexis 40th Annual Powwow I had been to, the committee hosted a Red Dance Jingle Special to pray, honor, and bring attention to the missing and murdered Indigenous women in Alexis First Nation Reserve.

Furthermore, compared with the western way of passing down knowledge in written materials, the Indigenous people rely more on oral history telling and ceremony performance. In other words, much traditional knowledge, including but not limited to languages, beliefs, and life skills, is involved in, for instance, the dancing steps, songs, and everyday stories. Once an elder told me that in the residential school period, since the Indigenous languages were outlawed, grandparents would pretend to sing lullabies for

their grandchildren but instead intended to teach them the Indigenous languages.

Therefore, the various kinds of performance in the Indigenous world is comparable with written text in western culture. At some powwows, storytelling events are arranged with a specific aim at children before the first Grand Entry on Saturday and Sunday. Also, Masters of Ceremonies, as unique kinds of performers, always share many histories and stories, which is a manner of disseminating Indigenous knowledge and educating the powwow participants.



*Figure 15. Men's Traditional Dance at Samson Cree Nation Powwow 2017.
Photo by author.*



Figure 16. Enoch Cree Nation Powwow 2018, by Bert Crowfoot. Access Aug 06 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/bert.crowfoot>.

Men's Traditional dancers (see Figure 14 and Figure 15) perform the most traditional dance category at powwows. People usually call them storytellers and believe that the dance evolves from the warrior dance. When dancing, the performers are imitating the movement of animals, or telling their own war and hunting stories:

Traditional dance styles are also highly individualistic, often reflecting the movement of birds and animals, or of hunters and warriors. The dancers often bend forward at the waist, with bent arm and legs, moving slowly and rhythmically to the beat of the drum. They may imitate the cries of birds and animals, or call out with loud yells. Men traditional dancers are both dignified and fierce. (Krouse 1991: 51)

Therefore, at powwows people usually use the description “he is a really good story teller” to indicate a good traditional dancer. Also, “tell your stories” is a good slogan to encourage the traditional dancers.

In addition to being healers, educators, role models, and the knowledge keepers, the performers at powwows are also social activists, who resist oppression from surrounding societies and decide when to fight for their traditional cultures and when to promote changes. Due to the *Indian Act*, most Indigenous activities, including the powwow and other dancing activities, were outlawed, and this situation did not change until 1951 when Indigenous cultural expression was permitted (Hoefnagel 2007: 118). However, even though traditional knowledge and many ceremonies were damaged, some Indigenous activities continued to be organized underground. For example, the Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation and Thunderchild First Nation in Saskatchewan continued their powwows for 75 years during the restrictive period, so that even today, some powwow organizers still refer to and honour these two nations.⁴² In my interviews, people also mentioned some similar stories. For instance, Sherly, who works at the CNFC in Edmonton, once told me that after Treaty Six was signed, although Indigenous people’s activities on reserves were under strict surveillance and some ceremonies were also outlawed, people sometimes continued their ceremonies but claimed that they were

⁴² For a discussion and overview of this history, see <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/history-of-powwows/>

praying to God in the Christian traditions.

In events such as the Wild West shows and Banff Indian Days, even though performers had to present their culture in a non-traditional venue as a public performance for a largely non-Indigenous audience, it is reasonable to say that participation in these events was a preservation and development strategy. At least it provided an opportunity where they could dance, and for the audience their performance might be nothing but entertainment, but for the performers themselves it was still spiritual and sacred:

A central problem with the neat divide between inauthentic public performances and authentic private ceremonies is that they assume that local powwows and other public displays of indigenous identity hold little value for tribal members. Popular encounters between American Indians and non-Indian audiences thus seem insincere; they are popular fictions created for a mass market. But more often, Indian participants attach a host of meanings to such events. They are commodities intended for mass consumption, to be sure. But they are also social arenas in which cultural transmission takes place, unbeknownst to be popular audiences who attend these events (Warren 2009: 23).

Similarly, when I discussed Wild West shows with Mr. LaChance, he remarked that even though the main purpose of performing in Wild West shows was probably economic, the Indigenous people still took their dancing and singings quite seriously, through which they prayed and talked to the Creator. In terms of powwow, Young asserted, “I was told

by Indian participants, however, that for them powwows were much more than a recreation. Powwows seemed to be a complicated mixture of show, ceremony and family reunion with undertones both religious and historical” (1981: 47)⁴³.

In the meantime, new influences were brought in. For example, it is stated that both the Men’s Fancy dance (see Figure 16) and Women’s Fancy dance (see Figures 17, 18, and 19) are the consequence of “the intersections between Traditional warrior society dances and Wild West Shows” (Browner 2002: 58). In order to attract and impress the non-Indigenous spectators who had limited knowledge of, but were simultaneously curious about, Indigenous cultures, the dancers designed their regalia in a more and more flamboyant way, such as by wearing more feathers and using more colours, and moved as fast as possible.

⁴³ I have asked people whether powwow was sacred or social in formal interviews and small talk during my fieldwork. Different people have different opinions. It seems that the older the people I asked, the more likely they considered powwow as social events, and it was certain that nobody thought powwow and ceremonies were comparable. One Elder I met in the Enoch Cultural Camp told me that, “Powwow was created for tourism.” However, there were also people who told me that, “it is both.” The only thing that all people I had talked with agreed with was that dancing and singing was how the Indigenous people healed themselves no matter where it happened.



Figure 17. Men's Fancy Dancers, by Eric Mentuck. Accessed Aug 06 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/treatyzwarrior>.



Figure 18. Women's Fancy Dance. "2016 Gathering of Nations Pow Wow." Paul Gowder, Accessed Aug 06 2018, <http://photos.powwows.com/2016-gathering-of-nations-pow-wow-gathering-of-nations-pow-wow-81/>.



Figure 19. Cotemporary Women's Fancy Regalia. "2018 Manito Ahbee Powwow." Paul Gowber, Accessed Aug 06 2018, <http://photos.powwows.com/2018-mantio-ahbee-pow-wow-44/>.



Figure 20. Old-style Women's Fancy Regalia. "2017 Manito Ahbee." Paul Gowder, Accessed Aug 06 2018, <http://photos.powwows.com/2017-manito-ahbee-17/>.

Based on the well-accepted origin story of the Women's Fancy Dance, it is not

only an adaptation to changes in society as the Men's Fancy Dance was, but also a representation of the feminist movement and awareness. According to Judy Half,⁴⁴ a Fancy dancer, women's interest in the male fancy footwork led them to start imitating the men's dance quickly. At that time, however, there was no specific Women's Fancy Dance regalia, so dancers wore traditional outfits without putting on the plates, which were so long that they could hinder fast movements. Some women even put on men's fancy regalia and competed with men. Somewhat surprisingly, women were able to beat men occasionally, and the category of Women's Fancy Dance emerged. A similar story is given by Browner (2002), who says that the girls who first dressed in men's regalia and danced at a South Dakota powwow aimed to challenge convention (59).

Together with the changes in the dance categories at powwows, modifications have also happened in the regalia and overall steps. On the one hand, because dancers have more varied materials to use to make regalia and prefer to use bright colours, the dancers' regalia in all the categories has become more and more flashy. Also, because of the frequent communications among tribes and between the Indigenous world and the rest of society, the designs of the regalia are not as personalized. In the past, people might have been able to recognize which tribe or family a dancer was from based on his or her regalia. Today, we regularly find dancers using designs from popular culture, including

⁴⁴ Judy Half worked as a community liaison when I conducted the interview with her, and now she is doing her PhD in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Calgary.

beaded cartoon figures and sport teams' logos. In terms of the footwork, the general and primary change is that the dancers move more quickly and in a complicated way by adopting difficult moves, such as high kicks and splits. In most of the dance categories there is a distinction between old-school style and contemporary style. For example, in contemporary Women's Fancy style, the dancers spin and twirl more often and more quickly, and they also do lots of high kicks, which is not frequently seen in old-school style. Moreover, contemporary fancy dancers are required to quickly move their arms, open and closed, with ups and downs, along with their footwork.

Considering that powwow culture is changing in accordance with changes in both Indigenous cultures and North American society, we may perceive performance as a social process (Langellier 1986). Simultaneously, man as a performing animal has a reflexive ability, which, according to Turner, is reflected in two aspects:

[T]he actor may come to know himself better through acting or enactment; or one set of human beings may come to know themselves better through observing and/or participating in performances generated and presented by another set of human beings. In the first instance, reflexivity is singular though enactment may be in a social context; in the second case, reflexivity is plural and is based on the assumption that though, for most purposes, we humans may divide ourselves between Us and Them, or Ego and Alter, Us and Them share substance, and Ego and Alter mirror each other pretty well—Alter alters Ego not too much but tells

Ego what both are! (Turner 1986: 81)

Through participating in powwows, as both performers and spectators, people are in essence trying to get closer to their traditional life, or in some people's words, "standing together with my people, ancestors, and Creator." A Métis friend shared with me that the first time (when she was 16 years old) she heard the Indigenous drumbeats, she cried through the whole event for reasons she did not know; since she grew up in a white family she had little chance to get to know Indigenous culture, but the moment she heard the drumbeat, she knew where she belonged.

At the same time, for both the Indigenous people themselves and the rest of the society, the powwow is the most important symbol of Indigenous cultures. For Indigenous people, the powwow is one of the most important methods for building their identities; for non-Indigenous people, the powwow is the most convenient way to get a glimpse of Indigenous cultures in real life. Therefore, on holidays such as National Indigenous Days, many mini powwows are organized all around cities. For instance, for the 2017 National Indigenous Days, there were at least three powwows in Edmonton as far as I know: one in Victoria Park, one in the Edmonton International Airport, and another one in Kingsway Mall. Some powwow dancers were also invited to perform in activities organized by the government. In addition to celebrating the Indigenous cultures, performers at powwows are communicating with society, to tell them and educate them on "who we are."

An audience: from performing for non-Indigenous people to dancing for themselves.

Changes in powwows are not only reflected in performances, but can also be noticed in the characteristics of the audience present at powwows as well as in the relationship between the performers and audience. As “a constitutive part of performance” (Bell 2008: 32), the audience is a significant lens through which to view powwows and the status of Indigenous cultures. Previously, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Indigenous people performing at the Wild West shows, Banff Indian Days, and other events with similar natures were called showmen or Indian boys, which suggests an unequal relationship between the Indigenous performers and the audience members, who were Euro-American. Furthermore, since the essence of the performance at that time was the consumption of the Indigenous culture, the audience had a strong voice. In other words, in order to attract more spectators, the Indigenous performers had to modify their performance to cater to the Euro-American images of Indigenous cultures and peoples, as well as to make it more ornamental. For instance, the eagle feather headdress, which is probably the most representative emblem of the Indigenous people, was traditionally only worn by a few groups in the Northern Plains. However, according to Herle, “[t]he association of the feather headdress with Indianness was promoted by early still photography and later by cinema, television, and advertisements... [t]his powerful symbol has now been re-appropriated by many Native groups, who traditionally did not

wear the feather headdress” (Herle 1994: 74). Therefore, if performance is considered to be “a site of struggle where competing interests intersect, and different viewpoints and voices get articulated” (Conquergood 1989: 84), the Wild-West era outside influence was, if not in charge, strong.

Furthermore, the relationship between the performers and the audience at current powwows has a new look. On the one hand, the main purpose of current powwows is different from the former performances aimed at non-Indigenous people, and people get together in order to demonstrate their Indigenous identity and to celebrate Indigenous cultures. On the other hand, even though non-Indigenous people still go to powwows for various reasons, the Indigenous audience members, who have much better understandings of their own cultures, are in the majority. Some audience members I know do not dance, and they may have difficulty traveling to powwows due to not having access to a vehicle, but they always show enthusiasm. For example, Indigenous organizations, such as the CNFC and the Ben Calf Robe society sometimes offer shuttle buses from powwow to powwow, and people who do not have powwow family members or vehicles can travel with them. For them, the powwow is not only a performance or celebration, it is also a lifestyle and a sense of belonging. On the ground, the Indigenous community takes charge of the powwow, Indigenous performers and audience members from all around North American meet at the powwow, and Indigenous people speak for themselves at powwows.

Pelias and VanOosting (1987) classify audiences into four different levels based on their involvement in the performance and their interactions with the performers. These four categories are the inactive audience, the active audience, the interactive audience, and the proactive audience:

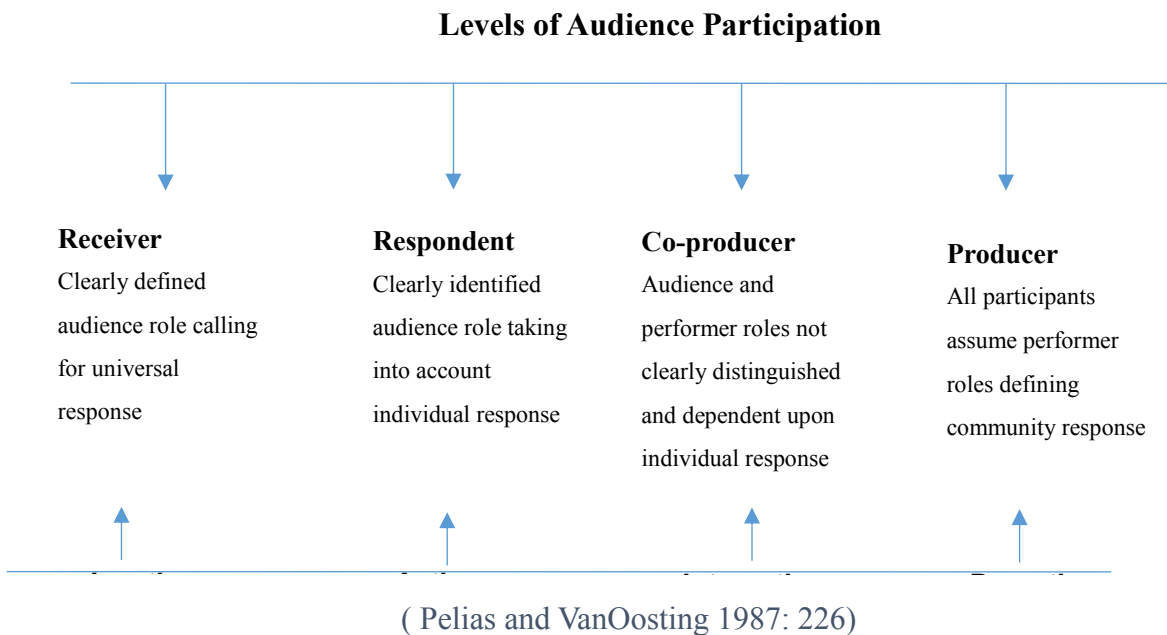
When defined as “inactive,” the audience’s role tends to be set, bound by conventions that encourage the passive reception of performance stimuli. The audience’s task is simply to receive what is given; an ideal audience (given this inactive model) is schooled in the theatrical code presented by performing artists. “Active” audience members, by contrast, might be seen as respondents within the theatrical event. This level of engagement invites an audience to complete the cues offered by performers. These cues trigger participatory behavior in which an audience member’s imagination fleshes out the skeletal suggestions of a performer. Audience response, however, is still determined by the performance cues provided in an artistic event. Interpretive leeway, while acknowledged, falls within parameters prescribed by the performer’s authority. The next level of participation might be described as “interactive.” At this point, both performers and audience are seen as coproducers, each contributing to the artistic event. The distinction between performer and audience becomes less distinct. While performers maintain the authority to initiate interaction and to select particular subjects, the audience is invited to create within an established framework.

Performer and audience codetermine possible directions for the theatrical event.

At the far end of the continuum, the audience might be identified as “proactive.”

Given this maximum participation, the status of performer is conferred on all participants. The question of who is the performer and who is the audience is moot; any distinction between performance event and “real life” would be meaningless, without referent. All participants become performers within a speech community, governed by prevailing social, political, and ethical norms (Pelias and VanOosting 1987: 226–227).

Typically, the audience at powwows are interactive, and some may be proactive from time-to-time.



To begin with, unlike theatrical performances in which the relationship between the performers and the audience is being admired and admiring, respectively, the performers and audiences at powwows indeed take individual roles in their mutual celebrations. It is quite common during the performance for the audience to cheer, applaud, or stand up at any point. If the audience wants to watch the performance one more time, they will shout to the dancers, “one more, one more...”, and for the dancers this is a great honour. Furthermore, the boundary between the audience and performers at powwows is permeable. In many circumstances, dancers start their powwow journey by being audience members and watching other people performing, where they get inspired and learn their first steps. Also, for example, a Grass dancer becomes a spectator when the Fancy dancers perform, and vice versa. Women are not allowed to drum according to the tradition in many Indigenous nations,⁴⁵ but they sometimes like to join the drum groups and perform as back-up singers, especially at the traditional powwows.⁴⁶

As a spectator as well, I identify myself as an “intense spectator,” which, according to Kristin Valentine (2002), implies a non-local viewer who nevertheless has a strong interest in the local culture:

Intense spectators do not pretend to understand the ceremony as they think a

⁴⁵ In Alberta, women are forbidden from touching the drums in principle, but in reality there are some women’s drum groups. In other regions, such as some communities in British Columbia, women’s drum groups are acceptable.

⁴⁶ At competition powwows, random participation in the drum groups is rare, because the drum groups are competing with each other and the members are accordingly fixed.

member of that culture might. Rather, intense spectators try to make sense of what *they* experience as audience members, basing their comments on extensive background research and careful observation of the *public* parts of the ceremonies. Knowing that ethical codes of conduct are not fixed, intense spectators necessarily live with ambiguity. (281)

As a matter of fact, every anthropologist is an intense spectator. S/he may be a keen observer and gain extensive knowledge of the people with whom s/he is conducting research. Nevertheless, s/he is not an insider and can never become an insider. Even when the anthropologist achieves the transformation from spectator to a performer, the consequence would, frustratingly, be that s/he will be more aware that “he or she will never be that other” (Conquergood 1983: 154).

In my case, I share many of the Indigenous beliefs and much of the worldview, and I have participated in several Indigenous events, not only powwows. At powwows, I applauded for the great performances from the bottom of my heart, I made noise as crazily as the local people did, and I danced the intertribals if I was accompanied with friends (I felt embarrassed about dancing in the arena without knowing anyone else). Sometimes even the local people would be surprised by how fascinated I am with powwow culture, saying, “You’re hardcore.” However, I truly know that for powwow communities and for the Indigenous people I am a student, a visitor, and a hobbyist, not a group member. Correspondingly, I presume that no matter how hard I try to learn about

powwow culture and other aspects of Indigenous cultures, even though I may be able to gain significant knowledge and understand Indigenous logic, it will remain impossible for me to behave, think, and feel entirely in the Indigenous way. Consequently, I have to hover between Indigenous cultures and my own culture, reflecting my own culture in the Indigenous values, vice versa, and dealing with the ambiguity.

A place and occasion of performance: It is a circle.

Before coming to the topic of the physical organization of the powwow, a term that needs to be explored is “circle,” which is important in understanding the Indigenous concepts of time, space, and many other aspects of reality. Therefore, many things in Indigenous cultures are illustrated with reference to the notion of circle. As Black Elk explained it:

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round... The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our teepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, and nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children. (Black Elk and Neihardt, cited in Axtmann 2013: 55)

In addition, the concept of the circle, according to Axtmann (2013), is not “flat or one-

dimensional,” (56) and instead, it demonstrates the “four cardinal directions of east, west, north, and south... [which also include] the sky, the earth, and the heart” (56).

At powwows, the physical space is arranged in “concentric circles” (described in Young 1981: 315; Schweitzer 1983: 158–159; Gelo 1999: 45–46; Theisz 2005: 87; Arndt 2016: 190) (see Figure 20), and the dancers move in circles as well. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that even though the idea of concentric circles is displayed at all powwows, the tangible organization of space can vary. For example, in an examination of the powwows in southwest Oklahoma, Abigail Wightman observes,

While male singers and dancers are at the innermost circle and occupy the attention of spectators, many participants work outside of the arena and are nevertheless necessary for the success of the powwow. These include the master of the ceremonies (emcee or MC), the arena director, and women who work to sell raffle tickets that go to support the cost of the event. (2012: 61)

In other cases, a big drum (including the drum and the singers) is located at the center of the innermost circle (Gelo 1999: 45). However, in my fieldwork, all the powwows were organized as in the following description.



Figure 21. Berkeley Indigenous Peoples Day Powwow 2017. Crazy Cow Trading Post, Accessed Aug 06 2018, <http://www.crazycrow.com/site/venue/ml-king-civic-center-park/>.

The dance arena is located at the center of the concentric circles, where the Grand Entry, performances, and other special activities take place. The next circle is where all the drum groups set up their spaces. Usually, a drum group puts their drum on a piece of blanket (and a drum stand), which is considered to be a proper way to treat the drum. Surrounding the drummers is the audience area. In some cases, elders, dancers, and relatives of dancers and singers are given the privilege to sit closer to the dance arena, while the general audience members pick their seats from rows of stadium-style wooden benches. Often, the spectators will bring their own blankets and put them on the benches; when darkness falls and the weather gets colder, people may wrap themselves in these

blankets. In other cases, all the audience members will find their spots on the wooden benches, but the elders will be assigned to a specific area, which is placed facing to the west.

Behind these circles is the non-performance related area, which consists of a vendor's circle and a camping circle. In the vendor's circle, people sell and purchase food and crafts, and sometimes nearby Indigenous institutions and the Edmonton Public Library also put up booths to publicize their activities. It is usually cash only for the food vendors, where coffees, soft drinks, bannock, etc. are sold; for the craft vendors, where people buy items such as regalia accessories, jewelry, and other design products, cards are usually accepted since the prices sometimes can reach hundreds of dollars. Barter may also happen, and once my friend exchanged a pack of cigarettes for a braid of sweet sage. Finally, there is the camping area where teepees and tents are set up. The powwow committees prepare enough area, water, and wood for the performers and visitors to do their camping. People who frequently travel the powwow circuit always bring their motor homes, trailers, and/or enough camping gear, such as tents, sleeping bags, and portable gas grills. During the breaks, and when the dancers and drum groups do not need to perform, they will rest there. For the performers and visitors coming from the host community, some of them may also set up their tents or teepees and use them to take breaks during the daytime. For them, camping is not a required necessity, but they like to seize the opportunity to get closer to what their ancestors did at powwows. Generally

speaking, therefore, the powwow grounds demonstrate the movement “from the outside to the inside, from the world of business to that of culture, from the everyday toward a space that has been set apart” (Arndt 2016: 190–191).

Conclusion

I remember that in my first anthropology class, I was told that anthropology as a discipline was a result of western colonial expansion to some degree and hence it, for a long time, had been complicit in European colonial and imperial governance. In my four-year undergraduate education, this tune was repeatedly mentioned, so much so that I felt guilty for the evil history of the discipline I was studying. However, with regard to both the past and the present of the field, there will always be a difference between what I feel by myself and what I read in books (or what I am sometimes told in classes). For me, anthropology is discipline from which I not only learn knowledge but also, and more importantly, build my worldview—I develop awareness that the world is diverse, acknowledge the importance of learning and showing respect to other cultures, and realize the necessity to fight for human rights. Therefore, I am confronted with confusion about why this “colonial accomplice” teaches me about love, concern, and respect.

Just as I mentioned in the first chapter, I believe that my position as a Chinese student weakened my anthropological background, and hence I was not influenced by the so-called sensitive relationship between anthropology and Indigenous cultures in my fieldwork as imagined. It is worth mentioning that I am not implying that “being Chinese” or “being a student” is a free pass. What I really believe is that, no matter where

you are from and no matter who you are, as long as you behave properly and ethically, you will be welcome. On the contrary, if you do not follow the local rules or respect the local traditions, you will definitely encounter many problems. In other words, speaking from my own experience, even though how a researcher conducts fieldwork, how s/he perceives information, and how the local people perceive the researcher are closely related with the researcher's position, the success of the fieldwork does not depend on the researcher's position; rather, success has more to do with the researcher's purposes and behaviors. A question emerges from this: why are the descriptions of the relationships between anthropology and Indigenous cultures in writing and imagination so different from my reality? Or, more generally speaking, why is anthropology usually believed to be complicit with colonialism?

One reason might be that people such as missionaries, government officials, etc., who were probably implicated in colonialism, are assumed to be anthropology-related. Furthermore, the origin of anthropology is relevant to colonial expansion to a certain degree.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it is of great significance to “distinguish between the Bad Old Days when there were no professional anthropologists but only amateur enthusiasts and

⁴⁷ I am not saying that anthropology is the result of colonialism or vice versa. The waxing and waning of many ideologies and other changes were happening during the colonial period, and anthropology as a discipline was one of those shifting fields. This topic is well-addressed by Vermeulen in his research (see Vermeulen 1995, 1996, 2006, 2008), and according to him, “anthropology was not born out of imperialism or colonialism... but developed within its contexts. As far as I can see, anthropology has had a symbiotic relation with colonialism but did not stem from it” (1999: 18).

observers (missionaries, government officials, adventurers, folklore observers, and pioneer scientific observers and speculators) and the later professional period that might have been quite different” (Lewis 2014: 74). Later, when anthropology as a discipline did appear, it, notes Lewis, “came into being too late to be of much use for the rule of natives under colonialism—a process that began several thousand years before Boas, Malinowski, and Radcliffe-Brown” (Lewis 2014: 102).

In the dialogue on anthropology and colonialism, Evans-Pritchard’s research on Nuer, which was conducted under the request of the Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and the staff of the American Mission at Nasser, is probably the most widely cited example. However, the reality is more likely Evans-Pritchard’s research was involved in the colonial project in a trivial way, if at all. In his well-known article “Applied Anthropology,” Evans-Pritchard claimed that neither he nor Professor Seligman had been consulted with suggestions on research questions (Evans-Pritchard 1946: 97). With reference to Wendy James and Douglas Johnson, Herbert S. Lewis makes the statement that “[d]espite the general notion that Evans-Pritchard had a hand in the ruling of the Nuer, even had he wanted to, the results of his work as an anthropologist were much too scholarly (“scientific”), theoretical, irrelevant, and far too belated to be of any use for governing” (Lewis 2014: 94, cited in James 1973; Johnson 1982, 2007).

Frequently, contrary to being colonial accomplices, there have always been some anthropologists who are keen on the preservation and development of Indigenous

cultures. As early as 1908, anthropologist James Teit vigorously and substantially devoted himself to advocacy activities on behalf of British Columbia Aboriginal organizations (Dyck 2006: 80). Moreover, Franz Boas was dedicated to “opposition to the banning of the potlatch by the Canadian government... [and objected] to the refusal to teach Indian languages and cultures in the government boarding schools” (Lewis 2014: 79). In “Anthropology, Colonialism and the Reflexive Turn: Finding a Place to Stand,” Michael Asch suggests that even before the reflexive moment, there were anthropologists who worked with Indigenous communities to fight against the colonial project, and the development of anthropology also disqualifies the rationales of the colonial project through theories such as historical particularism and structural functionalism (Asch 2015: 482–484).

Historical particularism, suggests Asch, challenged “two assertions of cultural evolution fundamental to the justification of colonialism: (1) the human race was governed by a universal law in which what comes later is superior to what comes before; and (2) the comparative method (Boas 1896) scientifically confirmed that Western culture was superior to all others” (2015: 485). Long before, Caulfield expressed a similar idea by saying that,

[i]n fact, the emergence of anthropology as an academic discipline in America was ushered in with a concerted attack on theories of racial and cultural superiority... The Grand Scheme of unilinear cultural evolution as it was

developed in the nineteenth century, placing Western European and American civilization at the pinnacle of humanity, was vigorously attacked by the Boasian school, and the theory of cultural relativism was forged in the heat of many long theoretical battles within the discipline. (1974: 183)

In the same vein, the development of the approach of structural functionalism also argued against the so-called scientific foundation of colonialism from two perspectives. On the one hand, it demonstrated that “all ways of life were capable of handling their own affairs,” (Asch 2015: 486) thus making intervention from settlers unreasonable. On the other hand, structural functionalism, instead of placing focus on the general laws governing the history of social life, paid much more attention to the rules governing current social life (Asch 2015: 486). Therefore, even though some structural-functionalist anthropologists worked for colonial authorities, such as in the well-known case of Evans-Pritchard, their ultimate goal was not to promote colonialism but to collect detailed ethnographic information, and even to ameliorate or weaken the colonial project.

Furthermore, it is important to learn from the past, but it is more important to focus on the present moment. With the movement of reflexive anthropology, more and more anthropologists are realizing the inappropriate theories and research methods they have engaged with and devoting themselves to a career of decolonizing anthropology, together with Indigenous scholars. For this reason, I assume it is necessary to point out that the “dated and stereotypical depiction of who anthropologists are, what they are

eager to study, and how they conduct their studies needs to be reconsidered and brought into line with actual current practice” (Dyck 2006: 89). However, in addition to getting rid of the stereotypical image of anthropology, another issue also requires urgent attention—the rhetorical and epistemological gap between academic and public dialogues.

Take the terms “invention” or “authenticity” as examples. According to Eric Hobsbawm, “invented tradition” suggests “both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed, and formally instituted, and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and datable period—a matter of a few years perhaps—and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (1983: 1). Therefore, invented traditions do not, as some people presume, imply that these traditions are rootless or made-up. “Symbolically constructed traditions are therefore not inauthentic; rather, all traditions—Western and Indigenous—are invented, in that they are symbolically constructed in the present and reflect contemporary concerns and purposes rather than a passively inherited legacy” (Linnekin 1991: 447). In “The Making of the Maori: Cultural Invention and Its Logic,” Alland Hanson (1989) draws the conclusion that “inventions are common components in the ongoing development of authentic culture, and that producers of inventions are often outsiders (including anthropologists) as well as insiders,” (899) and that “invention is an ordinary event in the development of all discourse, which therefore never rests on a permanent foundation” (899). However, in an article published in a Wellington and

Auckland newspaper in response to Hanson's comments, the correspondent used the title "US Expert Says Maori Culture Invented." Undoubtedly and understandably, Hanson suffered many attacks, especially from Maori scholars. That is to say, anthropologists sometimes have little control over the tone with which their work is publicly represented (Linnekin 1991: 447).

If you think that I am simply taking the side of anthropology and defending it, I have to say that you are wrong. On the one hand, I believe anthropology did and probably still does bring some negative impacts through, for example, disrespectful performance in fieldwork, malicious usage of research result, and misrepresentation in writing, intentionally and unintentionally. Therefore, criticism and reflection is valuable in the journey to developing a clearer understanding of anthropology and building a better discipline. On the other hand, as an individual confronted with the intensity of this topic, although frustrating and confusing, I am also gaining knowledge and inspiration about how to behave as an anthropological student/researcher and how to conduct research with Indigenous cultures. For some Indigenous scholars, such as Vilsoni Hereniko, one of the biggest problems in anthropology, and history as well, is that authors hide their biases and limitations so that they appear to contain "the truth, and nothing but the truth" (2000: 89). Instead, as stated by Wendt, anthropologists "must not pretend they can write from inside us" (Wendt 1987: 89). Going back the question I asked in Introduction—what is the Indigenously appropriate way to constructing narratives, I believe if researchers cannot

approach the culture we are studying from the local perspectives, we at least should admit our limits and unveil where we come from in the writings. Only in this way is it possible for us to avoid misrepresentations and return the discourse back to the local people and even readers. That is why, instead of trying to present “authentic” powwow culture, I prefer to share more of my own stories about my research on the powwow, and my own feelings arising out of my research experience.

In addition, considering the rhetorical and epistemological discrepancy between academic and public dialogues, sometimes it is necessary to produce writing in a sort of plain and more detailed way so that it will not be misunderstood. Simultaneously, it is equally important to “fight back” to avoid situations wherein “many [anthropologists] seem taken aback when they are unable to control the circulation of their discourse, that is, when lay persons in academia read their works in ways that the authors deem illegitimate or mistaken” (Linnekin 1991: 447). As a possible solution, in order to bridge the gap between what Indigenous people suggest and what anthropologists comprehend, a commitment to dialogues with and the well-being of those being researched is significant and, furthermore, reading Indigenous scholars can be an effective strategy to see how they elaborate on similar topics.

This discrepancy also emerges from stereotypes. From my fieldwork and throughout my whole research project on powwow culture, the strongest impression I have formed is that there are countless stereotypes about both Indigenous cultures and

anthropology. Furthermore, I get the strong impression that many stereotypes are also attached to Indigenous people and that the public, based on my own experience, generally lack knowledge of Indigenous cultures, which for me was a bit surprising initially. For example, when people around me learn that I am conducting research on Indigenous cultures and powwows, they usually exhibit curiosity and ask me many questions. When people become interested I really appreciate it, as I believe this beautiful culture needs more exposure. However, I occasionally feel disappointed when being asked questions such as, “Really? Are there still lots of Indigenous people?”, “What do they wear? Do they wear lots of feathers every day?”, or “What do they do for living?” If these questions are asked by Chinese people, in addition to providing detailed explanations, I usually tell them that Indigenous people living in Canada are a sort of parallel to the minority groups in China. If these questions are asked by Canadians, I feel surprised by their lack of knowledge about their own people.

That is my story, as a Chinese anthropology student who is interested in Indigenous cultures and conducting research on powwows. I am writing my thesis for the purpose of completing my degree, to thank the people who have generously offered their help, and most importantly, to share my experience. In speaking of the knowledge that I have learned, I am reasonably certain that even after another several years of learning, I will still have negligible experience compared with insiders. However, I believe that what I have produced is “another perspective, another view, another spiritual expression...

[and] the issue is one of my integrity and intent” (Rose 1992: 416). In addition, even though I am going to finish my thesis and my program I, frankly speaking, still have lots of questions in mind concerning the relationships between anthropology and Indigenous cultures, the stereotypes about both parties, and most confusingly, the rationale for my research and ethical ways for me, as a Chinese anthropological student, to study Indigenous cultures.

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