

## 1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: **Gitxsan**

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): **git**

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): **middle Skeena River in west central British Columbia**

1.4 Brief history: **“git” means “people of”, “xsan” means “the river of mist”, river community, at one point they were known as the “interior tsimshian, which included both them and their neighbors the Nisga’a. Have fought centuries to have jurisdiction over their land.**

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: **The legal action taken by the Gitxsan to the Supreme Court of Canada is the most recent in a long list of attempts to seek recognition of - and assert - its ownership, jurisdiction, and aboriginal title over 33,000 square kilometres of traditional territory in northwestern BC, and its right to self-government. One of the first public acts asserting ownership occurred in 1872. At that time, the chiefs from the Gitxsan community of Gitsegukla blockaded the Skeena River to all trading and supply boats to protest the actions of miners on their territories. Further protests against mining exploration took place in the late 1800's and in the early part of this century these protests expanded to cover activities such as road building and surveying within Gitxsan territory. In 1908, a Gitxsan delegation met with Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier in Ottawa to discuss European incursions on their territories. In other protests at this time, Gitxsan chiefs quoted from the Royal Proclamation of 1763 as a basis for their ownership of the land.**

1.6 Ecology:

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: **population – 15,000; ave. clan size – 100-500**

## 2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: **fish, mainly salmon**

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: **fishing poles, nets**

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

2.6 Land tenure:

2.7 Ceramics: **They are noted for their traditional arts, ranging from weaving complex chilkat blankets, to intricately carving mountain-sheep horn spoons, to carving the totem poles that the heirs of chiefs were obligated to raise as memorials. women as well as men carve wood, design silkscreen prints, make jewellery, and weave.**

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

## 3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

## 4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: **The chief's wife is as important as the chief himself, and marriages were for a long time carefully arranged to ensure the well-being of the entire community.**

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

4.9 Inheritance patterns: **Marriages were used to manage succession and inheritance.**

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: **do not marry within clan, must marry someone from a different clan**
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) **Marriages must be with members from other clans.**
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? **Marriages were originally arranged by tribal groups. Once they were phased out, the management of relations with outsiders was sometimes handled by clan adoptions, in which people are given status in a clan so that they can participate in events in a community.**
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

### **Warfare/homicide**

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):
- 4.18 Cannibalism?

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): **An economic pattern developed in each community involving a mix of seasonal trapping and hunting, salmon harvest and preservation, spring and fall trade, and winter ceremonies. Many families combined this pattern with annual moves to the commercial canneries on the coast to work in the fishing industry.**
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): **paired single-clan villages composed of several housegroups, each led by a head chief and other lesser chiefs. The primary responsibility of the chief or matriarch is to manage the territory of the house, to provide for each of its members, and to meet the social and ceremonial obligations of the housegroup as a whole. While the position of chief and matriarch is inherited, a number of individuals may be eligible for any one position; a rigorous education system ensures that the one chosen will have the needed qualities of leadership and service**
- 5.4 Post marital residence:
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): **The housegroups are the landowners in these societies, each owning discrete watersheds, mountains, and other contiguous geographical territories, both on the mainland and on the coastal islands**
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: **All members of a clan consider each other brothers and sisters, and marriages must be with members of other clans**
- 5.8 Village and house organization: **Housegroups, or houses, are extended matrilineal family groups which each belong to one of the four clans. The members of a housegroup share the same history of origin and the crests derived from that history**
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): **Each housegroup has a series of names that are associated with territories, and these are ranked in importance. The most powerful houses and chiefs of each clan are the leading chiefs of the village, and, of these, the most powerful is considered the leading house and chief**
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: **in all of the communities decision making is by consensus and involves all the chiefs and the matriarchs, who bring the other people into the discussion at various points in the process through clan meetings and informal consultations.**
- 5.12 Trade:
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?: **The four clans represented among the Coast and Southern Gitksan are the eagle, wolf, raven, and the fireweed.**

### **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

- 6 Time allocation to RCR:
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): **There were many types of shamans, including healing shamans and divining shamans as well as specialists who watched the sun and stars to predict the timing and bounty of the coming seasons.**
- 6.2 Stimulants:
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): **Reciprocal exchanges of services and feasting to mark rites of passage and other ceremonial events also linked opposite clans.**
- 6.4 Other rituals: **Specific rituals were used for making contact with supernatural powers for healing and also for winter ceremonial dancing, life-cycle rituals, and in preparation for hunting. Chiefs controlled some forms of spiritual powers, while shamans had access to others.**
- 6.5 Myths (Creation):
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): **Elders perform traditional songs, drumming, and dances both at ceremonial events within the community and in cross-community events ranging from theatrical performances to elders' gatherings.**

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect: When missionaries entered the area it was often at the invitation of the communities to provide access to education, economic opportunities, and health reasons. Christian beliefs were chosen, adapted, and included in various ways in cultural practices.

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: The Gitksan are noted for burning the bodies of their dead, similarly to their Carrier neighbors but not their Nisga'a neighbors.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) The *adawx*, together with totem-pole carvings and sacred songs, commemorate historic events and are akin to the classic epic poetry of the ancient peoples in other regions of the world. Gitksan do not separate religion from other aspects of their lives. The spiritual vitality and interconnectedness of creation – humans, animals, plant life, and the spirit world – are acknowledged in every aspect of life. Attitudes and practices that manifest respect for all living beings are instilled through education and extolled in the *adawx*.

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## 8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: All members of a clan consider each other brothers and sisters, and marriages must be with members of other clans

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): Many maintained an attachment to their specific housegroup and village identity through periodic visits, frequent contributions to feasts via local relatives, gathering, preparation, and eating of traditional foods such as seaweed, smoked fish, and oolican grease, and use of traditional art in home decor and of distinctive items of ceremonial regalia and clothing, as well as by retaining the links of kinship and friendship with other members of their group.

## 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

### Numbered references

1. [http://www.native-languages.org/gitksan\\_culture.htm](http://www.native-languages.org/gitksan_culture.htm)
2. <http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/Encyclopedia/A-Z/a12/3>
3. <http://www.gitksan.com/our-history/recent-history.html>
- 4.