

Indigenous governments in the area are faced with a wide variety of socio-cultural and economic challenges, but they are exercising considerable autonomy in the management of educational and health institutions, have strong relations with resource companies, and have created several highly successful Indigenous economic development corporations. The non-Indigenous population in the region remains highly mobile, and the short time that many non-Indigenous doctors, nurses, and teachers stay in the region remains a challenge. Perhaps most importantly, the Government of Saskatchewan is disengaged from the northern communities, and community authorities struggle to get attention, despite some serious community-level problems that have been exacerbated by the opioid crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The graduate students whose work appears here participated in the Master of Northern Governance and Master of Governance and Entrepreneurship in Northern Indigenous Regions programs, the latter offered together with the University of Tromsø in Norway. Both programs are excellent examples of the efforts by the University of Saskatchewan and committed faculty members like Dr. Beatty to develop professional and academic expertise in northern affairs. Their work is part of the ongoing effort by the communities of Northern Saskatchewan to document their historical and current realities, knowledge, and ways of life, and to provide a literary foundation for further education on and for the Indigenous Peoples of the Provincial North. By so doing, this collection is a wonderful example of the contributions that the *Northern Review* continues to make to the understanding of the North.

**Ken Coates**

## Editorial. Indigenous Self-Determination through Mitho Pimachesowin: Perspectives from Northern Saskatchewan

**Bonita Beatty**

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This textbook explores the northern Cree concept of *mitho-pimachesowin* (making a good living, or way of life), utilizing it as a framework to better understand self-determination and its emphasis on land-based livelihood and the Indigenous way of life. The longevity of the term *pimachesowin* (Woods Cree; variant spellings include *pimacihowin* and *pimâcibisowin*) speaks to its significance, complexity, and functionality. Like an ancient tree with long roots, the term itself has many elements and is unique to people and where they live. Most Indigenous Peoples have their own equivalent concept. In this special collection, northern Indigenous scholars (Saskatchewan, Eastern Siberia) share and unpack some key elements of *mitho-pimachesowin* through their own thoughts, languages, stories, values, and experiences growing up in the North. All are professionals and graduates from the former Master of Northern Governance and Development program (MNGD) at the University of Saskatchewan. This collective scholarship blended with personal experiential knowledge of northerners makes an important contribution to the broader literature in Indigenous Knowledge, northern ways of life, and self-determination. The work here acknowledges that while it is very important to learn about things in classrooms, scholarship is also about learning through experience; if first-hand experience is not possible, then listening and learning from those who have experiential knowledge can be just as valuable.

The threads throughout the articles refer to the continuing significance of Indigenous land and its resources, the resilience of the northern traditional economy, family, kinship (*wahkootowin*, *wahkohtowin*), health and well-being, language, and traditional values. Pimachesowin is more than making a living. It also holistically embeds a spiritual, historical, economic, social, and cultural context about a way of life and identity in a particular region. It has distinct language-based concepts and local Traditional Knowledges that are passed down in families through stories and oral histories.

Growing up as Indigenous Peoples in the North has gifted some unique perspectives for the authors in this textbook. Blake Charles from Stanley Mission (Kisechewanohk), explains the importance of both storytelling and stories in reinforcing the Cree world view and ways of knowing and being. From Northeastern Siberia, Mariia Iakovleva introduces us to the Sakha (Yakut) version of *pimachesowin*, *Aiyy Yorege*, making a good life, through the epic tale of *Olonkho* with its foundational concepts for self-determination. Debra Ross, growing up Métis near Green Lake in northwestern Saskatchewan, shares some Métis perspectives of *miyo-pimatisiwin* (living a good life) through her father's stories, and by discussing how this concept's related constituent elements influenced the Métis way of life on the land and the community. The reflections by Josephine McKay from Amisk Osakihikan (Beaver Lake) shed light on modern education and childhood lessons learned from her respected grandfather (*nimosom*), including the phrase "not first time smart," which refers to the values of listening and being mindful. Métis scholar Arlene Hansen from Beauval in northwestern Saskatchewan, writes about celebrating the path of teaching *abkamimobwin* (resilience) in youth education in northern schools by working in partnership with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth, a noted Dene educator from the Hatchet Lake Denesuline First Nation, introduces Thanadelthur, the Dene heroine legend in Dene oral history and in fur trade journals, and her significance to the northern Dene people. Another educator, Gregory Seib from Deschambault Lake, discusses the importance of a blended economy training approach for Indigenous youth so they can fully participate in the economy and ensure they have skills for *mitho-pimachesowin*, a good livelihood and way of life. Continuing an innovative thread, John Desjarlais from Cumberland House, explores the concept of *Indigeneering*, engineering through Indigenous Knowledge and *mino-pimachisowin*. He suggests that related Indigenous Knowledge concepts like *wabkobotowin* (relatedness) and *tapwewin* (speaking truth) can help shape and indigenize the engineering profession for mutual benefit, including opening access for Indigenous people and advancing the field of engineering.

In conclusion, it is so important to understand and pay attention to Indigenous concepts like *mitho-pimachesowin*, not only due to the pressing need for language preservation and restoration, but also to privilege the voices of those making a living on the land and protecting it for future generations. On a broader level, it can also help inform the development of more culturally responsive approaches to the many contemporary issues facing Indigenous self-determination. Many thanks for these wonderful contributions by the northern scholars of both land and university education. Kwayask teniki (many thanks) to Deanna McLeod for her persistent hard work, to Stan Yu and Ken Coates for their support, to all the referees, and to the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching & Learning (USask) for their funding contribution toward this publication.

**Bonita Beatty**

### Exploring the Concept of Mitho Pimachesowin

## Unpacking Pimachesowin as a Framing Concept for Indigenous Self-Determination

### Eyapachitayak Pimachesowin ta Othastamasoyak Nehithaw tipethimisowin

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**Abstract:** *Pimachesowin*, the northern Cree term for making your own livelihood or charting your own way of life, is a rich, compact, and difficult term to unpack because it entails all aspects of life and its complex integrated processes (other Indigenous languages have their own equivalent terms). The concept's resilience is sustained by its very complexity and fluidity to change. While Indigenous languages are stronger in the more remote communities, all Indigenous communities are struggling to protect their languages, and essentially their ways of life, against the many external marginalizing influences. This article suggests that *pimachesowin* (variant spellings include *pimâcihisowin*, *pimâcihowin*, *pimachihowin*, *pimachisowin*) with its key elements, can serve as an effective conceptual framework for Indigenous self-determination and, as such, can help inform the development of more culturally responsive approaches to the many issues facing Indigenous self-determination. The key elements include land and resources, spirituality, autonomy (self-rule), livelihood knowledge and skills, hard work ethic, kinship bonds and networks, and cultural values (respect, responsibility, sharing, and resilience). These elements reflect findings of many studies that suggest that, despite numerous challenges, Indigenous Peoples still remain connected to land, livelihood, families and kinship, language, community, spirituality, and cultural values. This article is a chapter in the open textbook *Indigenous Self-Determination through Mitho Pimachesowin (Ability to Make a Good Living)* developed for the University of Saskatchewan course Indigenous Studies 410/810, and hosted by the *Northern Review*.