Some Common Characteristics of California Indian World View

- Intimate knowledge of local environment and tribal territory
- Animism: Life, intelligence, and supernatural power attributable to all things
- Supernatural nature of the landscape
- Animals lived on earth before people – creating the earth for humans, giving them fire, food, etc., even bestowing death.
- Owls were special, often regarded as speaking from the supernatural world or being harbingers of death.
- Taboo to mention personal names, especially of recently deceased relatives.

Aspects of California Indian Religious Life

1. Customary Observances by Individuals
   - Death (purification, mourning, cutting hair, burning house of deceased)
   - Menstruation (restrictions on women)
   - Food (stringent observations regarding deer meat)
2. Shamans
   - Communication with Supernatural World (spirit helpers)
   - Women shamans in NW Calif.
   - Bear shamans in Central Calif.
   - Sucking disease out of body
3. Public Ceremonials
   - Mourning (except NW Calif., Yuki, Pomo)
   - Initiation ceremonies (coming of age)
   - Public and Intertribal Gatherings
4. Mythology
   - NW Calif.: Supernatural human race, not animal
   - Central Calif.: True creation, eagle as chief
   - So. Calif.: Heaven and Earth were first parents.
   - Culture givers (one of whom dies after giving beneficial directions), Migration legends (bird songs)

California Indian Religious Systems

- NW California: World Renewal
- North Central Calif.: Kuksu Cult
- South Central Calif.: Toloache ('Antap')
- Southern California: Chinigchinich Religion

Religion

World Renewal (in NW California)

- Rituals to ensure abundance of food, prevent disease, and avoid unfavorable natural events.
- Two important rituals
  - Jumping Dance
  - White Deerskin Dance
- The most important dances occurred when a fish weir was rebuilt or a house was constructed.
- The wealthy would display wealth during these ceremonies.

Northwest California

- Captain John, Hupa
- Hupa Man with White Deer Skin
- Yurok Woman
Regalia from NW Coast

Jump Dance Headband
Yurok Dress Detail
Jump Dance Basket

Kuksu Religious Complex
(in North Central California)

- Dancers become spirits who come to a village to bring well-being.
- Dancers were members of a men's secret society, and their identity while dancing apparently was unknown to the audience.
- Dances take place in roundhouses.

Dance headresses of central California, painting by Louis Choris, 1845

“Big Head” dancers, Wintu or Maidu, 1910

Kuksu Religious Complex
(in central California)

Pomo Kuksu Dancers in Roundhouse
Wintu Roundhouse

Antap Religion
(Chumash)

- The ‘antap secret society consisted of elite group of political and religious leaders.
- Members were expected to contribute money for the privilege of being in the association.
- The ‘antap conducted rituals and dances at major ceremonies.
- ‘Antap rituals were conducted to maintain cosmic balance.
- Chumash rock paintings are believed to be created by ‘antap.

Rafael Solares 1878

Importance of the Winter Solstice to Chumash Peoples and Their Neighbors

- Candelaria Valenzuela spoke of an elder named Tomas Cora who observed the sun rise over the eastern horizon to determine the time to observe the winter solstice ceremony.
- Maria Solares noted that the new year began at the winter solstice: “For us the new year was at night.”
- Fernando Librado described the solstice ceremony as the most important conducted throughout the year. It was when “the sun’s brilliance begins.”
- The Kitanemuk referred to both the winter and summer solstices as when “the sun retraces its path.”

Joe Talaulog at Painted Cave (CA-SBA-506)

Sun Pole (drawing by Malcolm Farmer)
Winter Solstice Ceremony
Most Sacred Chumash Ritual Observance (conceptualized as the time when the Sun was reborn)

The Ventureño Chumash “called this stick ‘oqshposhinash, or miwalaqsh, meaning ‘to divide’ or ‘separate in the middle’. The north star was also called this. At midday the sun is opposite the north star.”

Pleito Creek (CA-KER-77)
Previous Interpretations:
- Circular motif = schematic representation of the Universe (Hudson & Underhay 1978).
- “Exploding human,” depicting the shaman’s transformation (Whitley 2000).

Proposal:
- Zoomorphic figure is a hierophany, representing the guardian of the North Star, because of its significance in Chumash cosmology.

Rock Art Sites with Motifs Similar to Pleito Creek

Chinigchinich Religion (in Southern California)

Luiseño ceremonial dancers consciously imitated the movement of the constellations around the North Star as they danced around the fire in their sacred enclosure (DuBois 1908:163).

Father Gerónimo Boschana (Franciscan Ethnographer)

Arrived in Monterey on June 8, 1806
- Missionary at La Purísima, 1807-1811
- Served at San Luis Rey, 1811-1814
- Missionary at San Juan Capistrano, 1814-1826
- Described the Chinigchinich Religion in the only full-length ethnography written during the Mission Period
- Died at San Gabriel in early July, 1831

Title page and Illustration from Chinigchinich, published in English Translation as an appendix to Alfred Robinson’s Life in California, 1846
**Chinigchinich Religious Beliefs**  
(Luiseño and Juaneño)

- Earth Mother (Tomaiyowit) gave life to prototypes of all living things.
- Wiyót (culture hero) was last of the births and greatest in power and knowledge. He lived at the time when animals were people.
- Wiyót was poisoned by Frog because of jealousy, and his death brought death to the world.
- The body of Wiyót was cremated, which is why the Luiseño practice cremation.
- He rose in the sky as the Moon, and the souls of great chiefs became the stars.
- Chinigchinich (came after Wiyót) was the creator of laws and ceremonial.
- Chinigchinich created a new class of spirits to enforce moral order. The avenging spirits include rattlesnakes, spiders, bears, ravens, and stingrays.

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**Some Observations Pertaining to California Indian Religious Life**

- Public ceremonials and ritual practices were often linked to subsistence pursuits:
  - Scheduled before or after seasonal harvests,
  - Conducted to propitiate Nature to guarantee food supplies,
  - Provided opportunities for social and economic exchange.
- Secret Societies were linked to elite members of society (political leaders and wealthy families), whose members had access to special esoteric knowledge and maintained ritual paraphernalia.
- Mythological narratives reflected social structure and provided moral lessons regarding acceptable cultural behavior.