

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Pohnpei, Pohnpeian, Micronesia

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

PON

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

6°57' N, 158°14' E [1].

1.4 Brief history:

“Pohnpei is a high island in the Eastern Caroline island group of Micronesia. The name "Pohnpei" means "upon a stone altar"; the people refer to themselves as "Mehn Pohnpei" or "of Pohnpei." Throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, the island was known to the outside world as "Ponape." In modern political terms, Pohnpei Island and the neighboring atolls of Mokil, Pingelap, Sapwuafik (formerly Ngatik), Nukuoro, and Kapingamarangi constitute the State of Pohnpei, one of the four Caroline island groups that make up the Federated States of Micronesia” [1].

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

Contact with Europeans brought new diseases which decreased the population from 10,000 to fewer than 5,000 such as in 1854's smallpox epidemic. But the steady growth in the population has been seen in the past century and in 1988, the population was estimated to be around 27,700 people. About 6000 people live in Kolonia town which is a center for government and commerce for the island. Most of the people living in Kolonia come from neighboring atolls of Pohnpei State or from other areas of Federated States of Micronesia where Pohnpei is the capital [1]. Evidence indicates that Pohnpei had been settled from areas east, west, and the south. Christian era marks the earliest human activity on Pohnpei. In nineteenth century, contact with European-American world intensified, bringing in trade, social disruption, new diseases, and Christianity [2]. “Resistance to foreign domination has been another strong characteristic of this culture. Pohnpeians resorted to violent resistance against both Spanish (1886-1899) and German (1899-1914) colonial rule. Pohnpeian resistance to later Japanese (1914-1945) and American (1945-1983) colonialism has involved less violent and more subtle cultural forms” [2].

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

Barrier reefs surround Pohnpei, creating a lagoon which is approximately 207 square kilometers. Forty small islands of volcanic and coral origins are found within this region. Rugged mountains and dense forest cover the inland. The tallest mountain found is 778 meters tall. Coastal plain is found in the south and east. Between January and March, there is a heavy northeast trade wind. Throughout the remainder of the year, the heavy rainfall is observed in Pohnpei [1]. Average precipitation along the coast is 482 centimeters per year, and the average precipitation for inland is much more [1].

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

Presently, the population is estimated to be 29,000 total with 24,000 living in Pohnpei and 5,000 living in outer islands and other regions [3].

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Breadfruit, yam, taro, cassava, sweet potatoes, coconuts, bananas, mangoes, etc. [5].

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Dogs, pigs, and chickens; smaller number of deer, cows, and goats [5]. More than 120 kinds of edible fish are found in the lagoon and coastal areas [5].

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Spears, nets, hooks, lines, and local poisons are used during fishing within the lagoon [5].

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Men fish, hunt, build houses, and grow more prestigious agricultural foods such as sakau and yams [5]. They also hold jobs. Women mainly do household chores such as taking care of children and domestic animals, washing and sewing clothes, and gardening chores. Some women also work as secretaries of shopkeepers. Both men and women cook [5]. Boys assist fathers in the land while the girls look after their younger siblings [10].

2.6 Land tenure:

In the past, the land was controlled by matrilineal groups. “With the establishment of a system of chieftainship, all land in a given chiefdom theoretically came under the jurisdiction of the paramount chief. Individuals occupied small farmsteads as tenants. The planting of crops on the farmstead earned tenure and security for the land's occupants as any crops were considered the property of the person or persons who planted them. An offering of first fruits to the local and paramount chiefs was required. In 1907, the German colonial administration removed all land from the jurisdiction of the chiefs and deeded it to the actual occupants. The German reforms further specified that inheritance was to be patrilineal with all wealth and property going to the eldest surviving son. Later, Japanese administrators revised the German system, permitting the division of parcels of land among a number of heirs that could include female relatives. These reforms provide the basis for the modern land tenure system. Competing land claims within family groups are a major source of friction” [5].

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

Some fish are considered as taboos for different clans [13].

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Men built large canoes [9].

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): N/A

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): N/A

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

There is fairly high rate of teenage girl giving a birth to a child. 18 percent of all deliveries in Pohnpei accounts to births to teenagers [14]. This date is taken from 15 year period (1986-2000). "In Pohnpei, 43 children were born to girls age 14 and down during the nine years for which we have figures—for an average of about five a year" [14]. Most of these girls didn't have spouse and most chose to receive birth control pills after delivering their babies. "Births to teenage girls are not a rarity on Pohnpei. According to one of the administrators at Pohnpei's public high school, five or six girls get pregnant every year. A few of the girls are able to continue their schooling until they deliver and afterward, but most opt to leave school when their pregnancy begins showing. More surprising than this is that just as many elementary school girls as high school students are getting pregnant each year" [14].

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

Immediate family is the basic social unit presently [6]; includes a husband, a wife, their children, and the offspring of their children [7]. There is a strong tie among extended families [7].

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Divorce is very rare [7].

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Modern marriage is monogamous [7].

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

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Land is inherited patrilineal [7].

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

"From their earliest years, children were told that whatever they did would reflect on the entire family and were enjoined to behave themselves so that the family would enjoy a good reputation. For this reason, the entire patrilineal group, as well as the child's maternal relatives, had a stake in the proper upbringing of the child" [10]. In the earlier times, a father and a mother are the primary caretakers of their children [10]. Also grandparents spent their time taking care of their grandchildren too, and they were sometimes considered as "second parents" [10]. Aunts and uncles can scold their children, and spank them if needed [10]. "The effect of such a large number of caretakers was to insure that young people were seldom lonely or neglected. There was always someone to provide the support they needed. If a child was misunderstood by one "parent", he could turn to another for solace and comfort. Similarly, if his father neglected to provide for him, his maternal uncle was supposed to fill the gap. The child rearing system of the 1950s distributed responsibilities over a wide group of people and offered a balance that is sometimes sadly missing today" [10].

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Exogamous [6].

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)

Today, the most common marriage is when a couple simply decides to live together. In the past, however, chiefly-clan encouraged cross cousin marriages (a man or a woman marries a person from a father's clan) [7]. "This practice helped ensure that both parental clans benefited from a division of property in a society where descent was matrilineal and inheritance patrilineal. High-titled chiefs often took more than one wife. The nobility also practiced infant betrothal" [7].

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?

"One important feature of the traditional system was the insurance it offered that a child whose parents were unable to perform their responsibilities would be properly cared for. The system offered built-in insurance that, in the event of injury or death of the parents or their absence for a period of time, the child would not be left to his own devices. One informant told of a case in which, after the father of a large family died, nearly all his kinfolk petitioned to be allowed to care for the widow and her children" [10]. But today, the family is more nuclearized and do not have as much support from relatives as they once did before.

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?

“The maternal uncle, known as the uhlap, had a specially significant role to play. He was assigned the job of disciplinarian, chiding the boy as need arose and instructing him as to the right way of doing things. Yet, he was also supposed to be ready to receive requests from his nephew and to show him generosity, particularly when the boy's natural father was not responsive to these requests. The fact that the uhlap was usually not in daily contact with his nephew only enhanced the importance of his position” [10]. “The relationship of a son to his father, or towards the lineage head, was traditionally characterized by a respectful distance and unquestioning submission to authority. One man put it this way: "Obedience was absolute. One word from my father and I was bound to do it. Furthermore, I could not discuss my own problems or concerns with my father unless he asked me about them." Another man recalled that when he was young he hardly ever saw his father talking to his grandfather. They avoided long discussions, particularly personal jokes, and any conversation that took place was initiated by the older man. The relationship between mother and daughter was much the same. Daughters were expected to do what they were told and to keep their private concerns to themselves” [10]. A child could not disobey elders, and they could not look directly into their eyes either. When young, brothers could be friends, but as they got older, they began to avoid each other's company [10].

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

Naming is matrilineal [6].

4.26 Incest avoidance rules:

“There was also a stringent code of respect behavior between sexes in the same family. Girls were expected to assume a lower position, avoid loud talk, and present a humble demeanor when their brothers were around. They were also supposed to conceal their breasts in the presence of their brothers and avoid leaving around their undergarments or other intimate apparel. Brothers, for their part, had to avoid allusions to any sexual matters or bodily functions in the presence of their sisters. The relationship between brother and sister was almost otherworldly in its purity. These strictures were carried even further in the case of parallel cousins of the opposite sex (that is, children of two sisters or two brothers). The woman (pideli, or "taboo sister" [parallel cousin]) was not even allowed to approach her male cousin or touch his food for fear that she might be having her menstrual period at that time. This seems to have applied even after death, according to one of the informants, for a taboo sister who attended her male cousin's funeral never even entered the house where the coffin was placed for fear of breaking the customary taboos” [10].

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

A formal marriage ceremony includes a feast and a church service in which a man and a woman receive gifts from parents, friends, and other relatives [7].

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

Matrilineal descent [6].

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

Often, a couple decides to marry [7].

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

Casualties from warfare were usually light and not very serious [8].

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

There were some warfare between the chiefdoms, but large-scale warfare was rare [8].

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

“Causes of warfare included disputes over access to resources, competition over the acquisition of chiefly titles, or affronts to chiefly honor or clan dignity” [8]. “Raids into enemy territory constituted the most common form of overt hostility” [8].

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.18 Cannibalism?

N/A

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

“Although it is a member of the Federated States of Micronesia and has a modern local Government that includes an elected governor, his administration, and a popularly chosen state legislature, Pohnpei retains its indigenous system of political organization. The island is divided into five separate chiefdoms that also serve as municipalities for modern governmental purposes; each is governed by two distinct chiefly lines. At the head of the primary ruling line of titles is the nahnmwarki or paramount chief. The nahnken, a "talking" or administrative chief, leads the second line of ruling titles. Different clans control the two title lines in each of the five chiefdoms. In theory, the senior male Members of the ruling clans succeed to the titles of nahnmwarki and nahnken. In actuality, political maneuvering, circumstance, and personal skills affect succession. Each chiefdom or wehi is composed of smaller

administrative sections called kousapw. Each kousapw is governed by two lines of title holders that, in effect, mirror those of the larger chiefdom. A kousapw is, in turn, divided into smaller farmsteads known as peliensapw). Traditionally, the chiefs' most direct source of power was their claim to jurisdiction over all land contained within their chiefdom. More than a century and a half of intensified contact with the larger world has worked to diminish the actual power of the island's chiefly system" [8].

5.4 Post marital residence:

Patrilocal [7].

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

"On Pohnpei, social control is maintained through subscription to cultural values and practices that stress deference, reserve, and accommodation. Wahu, or respect, is a fundamental value that characterizes personal relationships today. A fear of social embarrassment leads Pohnpeians to behave with a reserve known as mahk. In times of stress, Pohnpeians are expected to evidence a patience called kanengamah. When grievous offense is given, Pohnpeians seek reconciliation through a ceremony called a tohmw. This ceremony usually includes formal apologies and offerings of sakau to the offended parties and their chiefs, family heads, and clan leaders. Pohnpeians also honor, Somewhat selectively, a Western system of courts and laws" [8].

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

Households are scattered and relatively distant from each other. Most of the people live within half a mile from the shore. There are no villages or hamlets with exception of Awak and Wone areas. "Formerly, individual dwellings were rectangular in shape with thatched roofs, reed walls, dirt floors, and raised stone foundations. The nahs or community meetinghouse, with its pitched roof, open sides, and raised seating platforms on three sides, persists as a major architectural form on the island. Imported lumber, cement, and tin have become the preferred building materials in recent years" [4].

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade:

In the past, there was no trade among people of Pohnpei. They emphasized more on gift exchange which was determined by social ranks [5]. But in mid-nineteenth century, European traders arrived, and they established a trading system including tortoiseshells in exchange of muskets, tobacco, steel tools, and gunpowder [5].

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

"Pohnpeian society is ordered by consideration of rank and status, which derive from clan Membership and from individual merit. The traditional distinction between noble and commoner has been softened. Education, employment, travel, and material wealth have become increasingly important determinants of modern status" [8].

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

"In the past, priests called samworo mediated between men and gods through a complex collection of rituals and prayers. Sorcery for both constructive and harmful purposes was practiced. Today, American Jesuit missionaries, with the help of local deacons, direct the affairs of the Catholic church. Most Protestant churches are headed by Pohnpeian pastors" [9].

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Both western and local herbal medicines are used by the people of Pohnpei. They also believe in massages as a way to heal. Many people still believe in sorcery and violation of cultural taboos as the cause of diseases [9]. "...illness is interpreted as punishment for offenses against men in high-ranking positions" [11].

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

6.4 Other rituals:

"Lineages were obliged to give a feast (kamadipwen wahu) for the Nanmwarki and the Nahnken each year, as well as a "thank you" feast whenever a member received a new title" [10]. "A betrothal was another occasion for a party. When a woman reached the seventh or eighth month of her pregnancy, there was a feast known as kamweng kasapw to signal the family's support of the woman at what would have been a critical time in those days of primitive health care. Another feast, pilendihdi, was held soon after the birth to celebrate the survival of the mother and her infant. In addition, there were other lineage parties to celebrate the arrival of visitors, the departure and return of a lineage member who was traveling, recovery from an accident or sickness, and church events" [10].

6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

Drums and nose flute [9]. Dance paddles are also very unique to the people of Pohnpei. "Pohnpeian dance survives. These dances, in which men stand and women sit, tend to be largely stationary and emphasize head and hand movements" [9]. Usually, two women and two men perform this dance together. First row is comprised of sitting women who do a bare hand/wrist dance known as *sapei*. In the next row, group of women do a hand/wrist stick dance called *dokia*. In the third row, group of men perform their *kepir* dance. "Each dancer holds a paddle in his hands, rolling and tapping it on a bamboo pole in a continuous rhythmic movement, along with the rest of the group" [12]. Last row is a group of men who perform a dance called the *wen*. "Dancing begins when the leader of

the group from wen or kepir chants, “ooh, ooh, ooh ooh, ooh!” then everyone starts the chant and dancing at the same time” [12]. The tradition of paddle dancers continues to remain to this present day.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

Christianity has replaced most of the indigenous belief system [9].

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

“Pohnpeians possess a stoic, accepting attitude toward death. The funeral feast is the largest and most important form of feast held on the island today. Interment usually takes place within twenty-four hours of death. The funeral feast lasts for four days. Family members, fellow clanmembers, and close friends remain together for an additional three days of feasting. A commemorative feast on the one-year anniversary of the person's death marks the formal end of all mourning. Christianity has changed Pohnpeian beliefs regarding the nature of life after death and the dwelling places of departed souls” [9].

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

“Beneath an order of paramount deities, there were lesser spirits called eniwohs that directed the movements of the land, sky, and sea. The spirits of the deceased, especially chiefs, were thought to involve themselves in the affairs of the living. Varying beliefs in different areas added to the complexity of Pohnpei's religious system. Nowadays, the island is divided equally between Roman Catholicism and a number of Protestant denominations, the largest of which is the Congregational church” [9]. Though Christianity has replaced most of the system of the indigenous beliefs, many people of Pohnpei still believe in these spirits [9].

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

Women conducted tattooing [9]. It served to record individual lineages and clan histories [9].

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

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

In the past, before Christianity took over Pohnpei, people had ceremonies upon stone altars called *pei* [9].

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Women wove fine mats, chiefly belts, and decorative headbands [9]. Men built large canoes and attractive meetinghouses [9].

7.8 Missionary effect:

Due to a contact with West, many indigenous art was lost in Pohnpei over the time [9].

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

Cousin terminology uses modified Crow type which put emphasis on matrilineal rather than on generational relationships [6].

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

- The ecology and geography of Pohnpei make it hard for the large-scale agriculture. In addition, the cultural values are emphasized on social relationships rather than on productivity which also prevents the economic development [5].
- Yams, pigs, and kava (sakau) are the three main feasting foods [5].
- Traditionally, people of Pohnpei made their own clothing, but today, they depend mostly on the manufactured goods [5].
- Adoption of a child is quite common especially for a childless couple who wants an heir for their property and a support in their old age. Children are often adopted by their parents' immediate families. Children are considered as a source of wealth and security, and larger family is preferred among the people of Pohnpei [7]. But the frequency of adoption has declined currently [10].
- When the couple is going away for a long time, they usually prefer to leave their children with mother's family [10].
- As of recent years, suicide has become an increasing problem, with Federal States of Micronesia having among the highest rates of suicide in the world. “...But it [suicide] is also a taboo subject... the majority of Micronesians believe that talking about suicide will “put the idea into the heads” of others – when I suggest reaching out to young people and educating them about suicide, the trainees tell me that parents would find this unacceptable... local belief is that the spirit of a suicide victim will “infect” others and cause them to kill themselves too unless prompt action is taken – e.g. the tree that is used by someone to hang themselves is burnt to the ground...“anger suicides” are rife – that young people who are refused some latest gadget by their parents, or who are jilted by a girlfriend or boyfriend, kill themselves as a way of punishing their families” [15].

Numbered references

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