

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

The Chewa (AKA: Cewa, Nyanja, Chinyanja) speak a language classified as a subdivision of bantu/Niger-Congo (Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Narrow Bantu, Central, N, Nyanja (N.30)) (4).

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

NYA (4).

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

Malawi 13° 30' S and 34° 00' E; Zambia 15° 0' S and 30° 0' E; Mozambique 18° 15' S and 35 ° 00' E (19)

1.4 Brief history:

“Speaking at the 2007 *Kulamba5* ceremony, Chief Lukwa of Kasungu explained that the Chewa people have been nomadic throughout history. Their origin can be traced to Sudan before they settled in Zaire”, before then migrating southward to Malawi. Historically, the Chewa society used dual leadership, which reflected the two main clans that it comprised – the Banda and the Phiri. The Banda leadership (900 – 1400 AD) emphasized ritual authority and was embodied in the title “Mwali”. Mwali was a female medium associated with rainmaking and general fertility. On the other hand, the Phiri leadership (1400 AD onwards) stressed political role of their leaders and gave them the title *Kalonga*. *Kalonga* is a Chewa word that means, the one who enthrones or installs subordinate chiefs.” By 1600, *Kalonga* ruled over a very large territory north of the Zambezi. Although the territory he had direct rule over was much smaller, he entrusted the rest of the territory to his matrilineal nephews who administered the adjacent regions as territorial chiefs. Political rivalries and succession disputes resulted in breakaway and separation of territorial chiefs. (20, pg. 50-53) By the 17th century Portuguese explorers had penetrated the Zambezi basin and established relations with the Malawi confederacy that was headed by Chewa King Kalong (21, pg. 1) and by the late 19th century Christian ideologies and European teachings and ideals began their introduction into Chewaian society, eventually eclipsing most traditional customs (2, pg. 257-260).

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

From the 1870s onward missionaries began to introduce Christian teaching, which are now the dominant religions of the Chewaian people (especially Catholicism) and European techniques of education, and from the 1890s the Chewa were not only subjected to colonial rule but drawn into a capitalist economy. The influence of European can also be attributed to the decline of the matrilineal system in favor of a more patrilineal system in modern Chewaian society (2, pg. 257-260).

1.6 Ecology:

“Lake Malawi, which is located within the Great Rift Valley in south-central Africa (which is where the overwhelming majority of Chewa individuals traditionally resided), is one of Malawi's most conspicuous topographic features. The southern Lake Malawi area is located within low lying valleys with an altitude ranging from 472 to 914 meters above sea level. Drainage in the area is good. Besides the Shire River which drains from Lake Malawi into the Zambezi River, there are many other rivers and numerous streams that rise in the surrounding hills and drain into the lake. The annual rainfall in the area ranges from 820 mm to 1030 mm. Although this amount is less than that of some of the other regions, it is still sufficient for dry farming. The temperature is between 25 and 30 c° year-round. The vegetation which existed there before the area was heavily cultivated supported a wide variety of wild fauna as confirmed by remains from archaeological sites. However, today wild animals are rarely sighted. However, the rising human population and uncontrolled hunting have reduced these numbers to near extinction” (7, pg. 103).

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

5.8 million spread throughout mainly Malawi, with smaller proportions in Zambia and Mozambique (5).

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

“The Chewa diet consists mainly of *nsima*, a thick porridge made from corn flour. It is eaten with a side dish called *ndiwo*, made from leafy vegetables, beans, and other ingredients.” (5) Corn, beans, rice and potatoes as well as other agricultural products were also frequently eaten as a staple of the Chewaian’s diet especially when meat was scarce (16, pg. 186-188).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

While the Chewaian diet tended/s to consist mainly of agricultural products and wild plants, the preferred dish was in fact meat, however as mentioned above there tended to be a scarcity of meat and often most forms of meat were eaten, these include, fish, insects such as termites and locusts, bats, chickens, mice, antelope and just about any other mammal that could be hunted (16, pg. 189-190).

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?

The main weapon employed the Chewans was the bow and arrow, during times of war and/or defense they often dipped their arrows in a poison derived from the strophanthus plant and would leave spikes dipped in the same poison hidden in suspect paths of their enemies (3, pg. 55).

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Prior to the arrival of Europeans the Chewa can be viewed as having a social life that revolved around a defined sexual division of production that centered on women being largely engaged in agricultural work, the cooking and preparation of food and basic household and child caring activities, whereas the men generally were absent for long periods of times, especially during dry seasons where their efforts were focused on fishing and the hunting of other mammals and in long distance trade, including the slave trade (16, pg. 46).

2.6 Land tenure:

Chieftainship dominates the social architecture of traditional Chewa community. Land is held in trust by territorial chiefs and partitioned among numerous village headmen who claim land on the basis of ancestral ties to the land and clan ties to the territorial chief. The village headmen in turn grant tracts of garden land to their matrilineal kin, to affines, and to occasional strangers. Village headmen and their close kin thus enjoy a distinct advantage, claiming the best land for their own uses and allocating marginal land to more distant relatives and strangers (9, pg. 564).

2.7 Ceramics:

Young women dig the clay, forming small mines in the earth in order to procure the clay needed. The clay is then set in shallow pools of water beside the potter's house; here it is cured and prepared for pottery making. When the potter is ready to work, she takes a bundle of clay to a dry, exposed stone ledge on the edge of village. There she kneads the clay and removes impurities such as stones and clumps of soil. It is then brought back to the house, where the potter prepares to work. She sets a pot of water beside her and brings out a large pot shard that holds various tools. She adds collected bits of old pottery pieces and finely ground bits of old broken pots to the wet clay in order to give it strength. While the potter works, the prepared clay is covered to keep it moist. The potter begins the pot by taking a lump of clay, tossing it in the air, twisting and shaping and molding it with her hands. She punches the clay lump, pushing her fist into the center to create the shape called *mimba*, 'the womb', and continues to form the pot in her hands. This process takes only a few minutes. She places the emerging pottery form on a large shard of old pottery, which she turns round and round, continuing to shape the pot with her hands. Then she adds bits of moist clay, covering the remaining unused clay each time. She begins building the shape, working up the sides and defining it as she increases the size of the pot. She frequently moistens her hands from the pot of water and works the moisture from her hands into the clay. As she works with the clay, building the sides, she creates the shape and size desired for a specified purpose. Small, wide pots are made for cooking relish and deeper, rounded pots are used for cooking maize meal—*nsima*—in larger quantities. A smooth, white river pebble helps maintain the rounded belly of the pot, and a curved shell rounds the thinner sides. A strip of white sisal, used in making mats and baskets, is now a tool to trim the top before adding the lip of the pot, and a fresh green leaf smooths the rounded rim. The pots are left to dry and harden to the consistency of leather. Often a small fire of twigs and grasses is set in the belly of the pot to ensure the inside is sufficiently dried. Once partially dried, the pots are ready to be trimmed and smoothed with simple metal blades. The potter scrapes the surface of the nearly finished pot, thinning the rounded bottom and cutting away any imperfections in the smooth surface. A knife is used to incise markings (*mpini*) around the rim of the pot. These markings are unique to a particular potter (8, pg. 66).

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

The proceeds from communal hunts and/or individual hunts were traditionally shared among the participants of the hunt, members of the kin group and neighbors. (17, pg. 63) A detailed sharing pattern for the Chewa has been likened to that of the Bisa people who would proportion the meat obtained from a hunt by giving a hind leg to the village headman, keeping a hind leg, the chest, head and intestines for himself and his immediate family and distribute the rest to his maternal uncles, maternal nieces and nephew, and to his wives family (16, pg. 67).

2.9 Food taboos:

No taboos against eating certain types of food exist in traditional Chewa society, however during menstruation there is a taboo against women eating salt (3, pg. 67).

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):

Female menarche generally occurred between 12-14 years old (17, pg. 72) (2, pg. 260).

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

Sexual intercourse often starts at a very early age, with a girl's first sexual experience generally occurring between 8-12 years of age and for males at 15-16. In an interview conducted by Helizer-Allen in 1993 it was found that approximately 60 percent of women reported having sexual intercourse before their first menstruation and the majority had their first child by the time they were 15-16 years of age (17, pg. 71-72).

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

A typical household consisted of the women, her husband, her daughters both singled and married, her unmarried sons and the husbands and children of her married daughters (3, pg. 44).

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

Fertility rates are very high. A woman would expect to have at least seven children during her reproductive years, as children provide/d much needed labor in herding livestock and farming (5).

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

Women traditionally married within a few months after going through puberty (12-13 years old), however, males were forced to wait much longer to marry as they had to acquire certain skills such as the ability to erect a hut for his prospective wife, garden cultivation and various other tasks associated with the ideal Chewa husband (2, pg. 260).

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

An exact calculation of marriages ending in divorce for traditional culture apparently has not been conducted; however, traditionally it was relatively easy for a couple to divorce. A woman could divorce her husband, if he failed to have intercourse with her, if he did not provide clothing for her, if he beat her for no adequate reason, if he could not have children with her, if he showed that he didn't like her family, if he did not work in her parents garden and if he did not respect the head of her lineage. A man on the other hand could divorce the woman if she was lazy, couldn't cook, nagging, unfriendly to his family, if her babies died and if she was a witch (12, pg. 43).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

As with divorce an exacting calculation of polygynous marriages has not been performed, and this may be due on part to the fact that although polygyny was practiced it was rare. If a man wanted to take a second wife he had to consult with the head of his first's wife lineage to get permission to take a second wife. Because of this, generally men who took second or third wives were heads of the lineage or men who had been allowed to take their wives back to tier families. But in the case of men who lived with their wives, who had been granted permission they were required to build and maintain a house for each wife and thus were frequently moving back and forth between homes, thus making polygyny even more rare (12, pg. 42).

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

Both bride purchase and bride service were common in traditional Chewa culture. For example, a token payment (in beads, chicken, iron hoes or cloth) had to be made to the bride's parents by the groom's family, and the groom had to render bride service to his parent-in-law before the marriage could be consummated (2, pg. 260).

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

By rule of Chewa succession and matrilineal descent status and property are inherited by the deceased's younger uterine brothers and by the eldest son of his eldest sister. This accounts for the significance placed on the male heads of matrilineage as they dominate the dispersal of land, and largely control households even when his sisters have married and thus by this inheritance pattern property and status remain within a lineage for generations (15, pg. 262)..

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

Homosexuality in traditional Chewa culture was viewed with extreme disapproval and was associated with the practice of witchcraft. There has been evidence of young girls, often of close relation stimulating each other's genitals, however the cohabitation of two women or for that matter two men was extremely uncommon, likely due in large part to their conception of witchcraft and the extreme disapproval of their kin groups. (17, pg. 72).

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Clan exogamy was the rule traditionally, i.e. a member of the Banda clan married into the Phiri clan, however, often slaves were preferred as wives over traditional wives as they were completely subservient to their husbands whereas, traditional wives were viewed much more equally if not viewed with more respect than their husbands (12, pg. 260) (13, pg. 259-260).

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

Morris writes that while the human infant is seen as being constituted both by the male semen and the female blood components, that this conception of birth does not infer partible paternity as infants and more broadly individuals are not viewed as androgynous beings (17, pg. 54).

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

Sexual coercion and/or rape between a man and his wife married through the traditional matrilineal customs was non-existent, however, wives taken through war or by purchase lost their freedom of sexuality and was frequently abused and moreover was not viewed as an individual in and of herself but instead of what she could provide to her master/husband (12, pg. 44-45).

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

The preferred form of marriage is between cross cousins (6, pg. 37).

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Intercourse was seen as a wholesome, enjoyable, and necessary activity for overall good health. Chewaians while they don't actively promote promiscuity, liken their sexual passions to that of an animal such as a dog or baboon, and free engage in extra-marital affairs, although this can be grounds for a man to divorce his wife (17, pg. 69-73).

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

In Chewa society husbands never secure the rights to his children. If a marriage ends in divorce the children stay with the mother or her matrilineage. While the subject of who raises the children upon the death of the mother has apparently not been broached, following the line of reason above, then upon the mother's death it would seem to imply that the children would remain in the mother's matrilineage, likely raised by an aunt or grandmother (3, pg. 178).

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

By rule of Chewa succession and matrilineal decent status and property are inherited by the deceased's younger uterine brothers and by the eldest son of his eldest sister (15, pg. 262).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

Incest and bestiality, while their naturally were occurrences of, was seen as destroying the kin group and like social attitudes towards homosexuality was met with extreme disapproval. It should also be noted that a westernized conception of incest should not be applied to Chewaians society as cross cousin marriage was not uncommon and in many instances was preferred and therefore in a westernized sense can't constitute incest. (17, pg. 72)

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?

Generally a name consists of three parts, a personal first name, a second name derived from the child's father's first name and a surname taken from a member of the father's kin group or from the father's clan name (16, pg. 21).

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

While custom was to marry outside of one's village, the importance of the wife's brother due to the matrilineal regulation of Chewa society often prompted men to marry within their own community, i.e. cross cousins as this form of marriage did not force the man to live in a completely different village where he would be viewed as an outsider, with his prospects for class movement were limited. Furthermore it was not uncommon for men to take slaves as wives to avoid the same conflict previously mentioned above (2, pg. 258-262).

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

As far as regular marriages were concerned, it was up to a man to take the initiative in identifying his spouse, but thereafter the matter was taken up by the maternal uncles on both sides (2, pg. 259-260).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Out-group v. in-group 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:

A traditional village had from about 40 to up wards of 200 huts. An average-sized village has about 60 huts and a population of just over 100 (1, pg. 131).

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

“Weather patterns determine the schedule of most rural enterprises such as food production, house repair, and initiation rites, for these depend on the processes of growth and change that the rains set in motion. The center of the work cycle is the garden. Chewa farmers depend on a single wet season and a single harvest to obtain the bulk of their subsistence needs” and thus the calendar year is divided into six month intervals (9, pg. 564-565).

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

5.4 Post marital residence:

Traditionally the marriage practice was for clan exogamy, and since the Chewa society was matrilineal the man would reside in his wife’s village, however, after a specified tie the man was allowed to seek to take his wife back to his village. This was generally only granted if the man was returning to become the headman for his village and thus the wife’s status would increase because of this (2, pg. 260).

5.5 Territoriality? (Defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions? (Age and sex):

In Chewaian society the interaction between grandparent and grandchild is one of equality. While the grandchild respects their grandparents they do not fear them and refer to them as their affines. For example a grandson would refer to his grandmother as my wife and a granddaughter would refer to her grandfather as my fellow husband. Furthermore, the grandchildren spent the majority of their early years with their maternal grandmother and therefore a joking relationship is prevalent between grandparents and grandchild (18, pg. 47).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

“There is generally no pattern of hut-grouping, but socially most villages comprise sections the spatial limits of which are not clear. These sections are usually a kinship unit, though it may include a few biological families who are not related to the majority of the section inhabitants. The kinship group comprising the core of the section is a matrilineage with a depth of three or four generations, to which are appended the spouses and seminal children of certain members” (1, pg. 131).

5.9 Specialized village structures (men’s’ houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

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

5.12 Trade:

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

6.2 Stimulants:

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

The funerary ritual starts with *utaya*, the burial rite, and is completed by *bona*, a rite that takes place after the harvest of corn in the subsequent year. The Nyau (a masked men society) carry the body of the deceased on a stretch to the burial site and also perform the burial itself. *Bona* is performed along with beer brewing. According to the Chewa, the beer is not only for the people attending the rite, but also for the spirits of the dead. The Chewa believe that if the dead are merely buried, they cannot be born again, being tied to the earth. The role played by the Nyau at the *bona* ritual is to enable the spirits of the deceased to leave the earth and return to God; as ancestral spirits, they can be reincarnated in the bodies of their descendants. The initiation ritual for girls is called *cinamwali* and during this ritual a girl who has reached the age of puberty is secluded in a house for a certain period of time and is taught the manners and accomplishments required of an adult woman. She is also warned not to reveal to men any of the things she will learn in the ceremony. The content of the teachings, presented mostly through songs and dancing, can be classified into two types: instruction in womanly manners and practical instruction in sex and childbearing (6, pg. 30-43).

6.4 Other rituals:

6.5 Myths (Creation):

Religion among the Chewa starts with the idea of the creator deity Chiuta, who created all living things on the mountain of Kapirintiwa along the borders of Malawi and Mozambique during a thunderstorm. “As a result of the storm, the rains softened the hard surfaces, but as the surface hardened, their footprints became engraved in the actual rocks” (10, pg. 159).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

According to the Chewa, traditionally the spirit of the deceased remains on the earth after the burial to roam in and outside of the village (6, pg. 39).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

Yes, when speaking to individual who is older or superior that person is addressed as the mother of the child’s first name and/or the father of the child’s first name, i.e. the father of Jim, however when speaking to a peer they will address that person by their personal name (16, pg. 36).

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

Chiuta remains the central figure in traditional Chewa religion, however, the spirits of men and wild animals converge in everyday life through dances where men wear masks formed in the likeness of wild animals, and the dead. Therefore in that sense the dead and living are thought to be in constant communication. Another central figure to traditional Chewa religion was a serpent spirit known as Thunga, who had the ability to fly through the air to scared pools where rain calling ceremony were taking place. Keeping with the above traditional Chewa religion seems to fall between animism and ancestor worship (11, pg. 161).

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:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

Sororate and levirate in the strictest sense of the definitions don’t seem to exist in traditional Chewa culture; however, it is believed that formerly a man would marry the widow of his maternal uncle upon his death, so this would seem to imply a loose following of levirate (3, pg. 262).

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

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Witch Beliefs

- “Most Chewa believe that certain persons are witches who impoverish, harm, or kill their fellow beings by using destructive magic and by performing supernatural feats of various kinds. That they are greatly preoccupied with this belief and its various implications is shown by the frequency with which they attribute death and misfortune to witchcraft, and by their related tendency to take precautions against possible attacks by 'witches', e.g. by having their bodies and huts magically protected. Although Chewa distinguish between the *mpheranjiru*, who is a witch whose dominant motive is hatred, and the 'real witch' *mfitiyeniyeni*, who is motivated primarily by 'flesh-hunger', they do not make the distinction between witch and sorcerer. . . . The belief that witches are necrophagous has important practical consequences. Whenever anyone dies, Chewa take elaborate steps to prevent witches from disinterring his corpse. They close the graveyard with magical substances and having set magical traps for the witches; keep a vigil at the graveside for two or three evenings after the burial. They say that, if the witches come, they beat them severely and wound them fatally by ramming sharpened sticks through their anuses and stirring up their entrails.” (14, pg. 217)

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