

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Chokwe a.k.a *Cokwe*, *Ciokwe*, *Tshokwe*, *Tschiokwe*, *Shioko*, *Djok*, *Imo*, *Kioko*, *Quioco* and *Tschiokloe* belong to the Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Narrow Bantu, Central, K, Chokwe-Luchazi (1).

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

CJK (1)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

The Chokwe are/were traditionally split between to locales: Angola (*latitudes 4° and 18°S, and longitudes 12° and 24°E.*) & Zambia (*latitudes 8° and 18°S, and longitudes 22° and 34°E*) (1).

1.4 Brief history:

The history of the Chokwe people is closely linked to the Lunda Empire which dates to the 17th century C.E. During this time the son of a chief named Mwata Yamvo, migrated westward with his followers from the traditional Lunda territory in the southern portion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo into northeastern Angola. By the early 19th century they were involved in trading with Ovimbundu, exchanging was, ivory, and slaves for European goods. The Chokwe remained under Lunda control until the latter part of the 19th century when they invaded Lunda territories in the north successfully taking the Lunda capitol and establishing their domination over the region west of the Kasai River (2, pg. 147).

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

There has been a Christianity presence in Angola, the Chokwes traditional territory, since 1600 with two overall approaches to understanding Chokwe culture and the Chokwe people themselves. One approach was to forcibly force them to repent and stop their so called “evil spirits”, whereas the other was to embrace their culture and religious beliefs finding similarities between Christianity and traditional Chokwe religion. Nevertheless, in present day an overwhelming majority of Chokwe people have abandoned their traditional religion adopting some form of Christianity (11, pg. 56).

1.6 Ecology:

They lived in woodland savannas intersected with strips of rainforest along the rivers, swamps, and marshlands. The climate in this area is consistent all year because of the close proximity to the equator- typically humid and in the 70's F in the day and in the 60's F at night. The rainy season started October and lasted through May (5).

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

According to the most recently performed studies approximately 455,800 individuals live in Angola and 44,200 reside in Zambia (1).

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Corn, cassava, millet, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, tomatoes, okra peanuts, rice, and beans (11, pg. 18)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

While the Chokwe raise cattle, goats and pigs, they only eat these animals on special occasions. To provide protein hunting is a staple of everyday life with the main sources coming from fish, antelope, and other animals obtained from hunting (11, pg. 18).

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Bows and arrows were used for hunting and also as weapons. Environment played a large part in their design and usage. Small arrows were favored in the deep jungle forest of central Congo. In Angola and Zambia, more powerful bows were required as the target distance was longer. The bows averaged as much as six feet long, while iron headed arrows measured over thirty inches. The bowstring was made from animal gut and the arrows were called *mungamba* or *mwevu* (9).

2.4 Food storage:

“The Chokwe used prestige food storage and presentation bowls or baskets. These baskets served as lidded containers, but when opened provided two bowls. The construction ensured that when used as bowls, each was uplifted. This was accomplished by fiber weaving (main base) and by attaching bark wood (top cover or bowl), thus added a longer and more stable life to the basket.” (9).



2.5 Sexual division of production:

“Males, females and children all plant cassava extensively. Men are responsible for cutting trees and clearing the fields. Women do all the processing and cooking. Men are responsible for providing the household with protein foods, either by hunting, trapping, fishing, raising domestic stock, or through cash purchases. Men are also responsible for all village construction and for providing tools, as well as some clothing, for wives and children. Women provide most of the child care, with some assistance from husbands and older children. Women also secure and maintain the cooking and other household utensils” (15).

2.6 Land tenure:

“Land is rather abundant throughout most of their territory and is, therefore, rarely a subject of dispute. Traditional use rights are established by requests made to local chiefs and senior headmen. Requests for land are generally denied only if a prior claim exists” (15).

2.7 Ceramics:

There is no evidence for use of ceramics by the Chokwe, they appear to have engaged instead in weaving and wood carving for their art work, and other material needs such as storage containers and/or serving ware reference the weaved basket notated under food storage practices or the extensive wooden masks carved by artisans.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

Unknown at this time

2.9 Food taboos:

The availability of food supplies depends on season and location, therefore there does not appear to be an emphasis on food taboos, however, there are instances of Chokwe women observing food taboos of neighboring tribes during the marriage process, such as the Bemba practice of not eating eggs during the marriage process, however, this is a limited example and may be attributed to cultural contamination (15).

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Given that the majority of the Chokwe live near rivers, they often supplement their diet with fish and as such men often fish with line and hooks or with nets from rudimentary dugout canoes (11, pg. 18).

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Information Unavailable

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Information Unavailable

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

Female initiation is linked to first menses and accordingly females generally undergo initiation at approximately 13, therein making the age at menarche approximately the same (11, pg. 46).

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

Information Unavailable

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

Information Unavailable

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

Information Unavailable

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

Information unavailable, however girl's first marriage tends to be linked with their first menses.

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, like neighboring tribes, it was relatively easy for a couple to divorce. A woman could divorce her husband, if he failed to have intercourse with her or if he was sterile (12, pg. 43).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

A percentage of marriages living polygynously is unavailable at this time, however, it appears that polygyny was rare and restricted only to men of wealthy classes and chiefs (16).

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

“Bride-service was performed for in-laws by assisting with agricultural tasks and village construction; bride-wealth generally consisted of agricultural commodities, tools, household utensils, clothing, and a small amount of cash” (15).

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

In pre-colonial times, matrilineage coexisted with a patrilineal system, which dictated that economic issues such as property rights and inheritance were determined through the matrilineal line and political authority was traced through the patrilineal line (13, pg. 120).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Information is currently unavailable

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

During the first phase of initiation of, Chokwe boys, while the initiates were recovering from their circumcisions, they did not wear clothing, and played with the penises of the *vilombola* (keeper of the initiation lodge) and *tulombolachika* (initiated assistants of the *keeper of the lodge*). This was considered to hasten healing; and the novices hope that by so doing, their own organ would grow large and strong. It appears that this was performed on visitors to the lodge. Furthermore, there are recorded myths of inter-sexed deities and spiritual beliefs in gender transformation, which coupled with the above would seem to imply that although no solid evidence of direct homosexual activity was found, it likely would not have been entirely taboo (12, pg. 32).

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Traditionally, there appears to have been tribal endogamy, with their being a slight preference towards cross cousins, however, marrying inside one’s own clan, i.e. parallel cousins was considered taboo (15)

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

Unknown

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

Unknown

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

Unknown

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

Rape and/or sexual coercion between a traditional man and wife family unit appears to have been non-existent, however, wives taken through war or purchase as slaves lost their freedom of sexuality and could become subjected to such treatment. Moreover, like any individual taken as a slave they were not viewed as individuals and instead were viewed as property (12, pg. 44-45).

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

“Traditionally among the Chokwe and related people there has been a slight preference for cross-cousin marriages. Little pressure is exerted, however, and individuals generally enjoy a great deal of latitude in the choice of marriage partners” (15).

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

No evidence located, however, as polygyny was not readily practiced in Chokwe society, gift giving to extramarital partners would seem unlikely as to avoid unwanted attention from fellow tribal members.

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

Like the nature of the Chokwe decent system children often were able to choose if they wanted to remain in their fathers home if the family had in fact been living patrilocally, if they were living matrilocally they too had a choice they could remain with the mothers family or follow their father if he returned to his original clan (15).

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

These numbers for aboriginal Chokwe are unavailable

4.22 Evidence for couvades

No evidence found

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

Currently unknown

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

In-laws observed a medium between respect and avoidance. For instance they greeted each other formally, always from a distance. The younger of the two would step off the path if an older in-law approached and the two couples never ate together (7, pg. 113).

4.24 Joking relationships?

A joking relationship existed between grandparents and grandchildren which allowed them to be publicly affectionate towards one another and joke about sexual matters in way that were generally deemed inappropriate for other relationships (7, pg. 113).

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

In pre-colonial times, matrilineage coexisted with a patrilineal system, which dictated that economic issues such as property rights and inheritance were determined through the matrilineal line and political authority was traced through the patrilineal line (13, pg. 120).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

Given the Chokwes view of marriage with in a clan as being taboo, it would seem natural that incest avoidance rules would be set in place to forbid incestuous relations and to punish the offenders (15).

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

There does not appear to have been a formal ceremony, beyond the gift giving by the groom and his family to the would be brides family.

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

Unknown

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

Traditionally, there appears to have been tribal endogamy, with their being a slight preference towards cross cousins, however, marrying inside one's own clan, i.e. parallel cousins was considered taboo (15)

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

In terms of traditional marriages (not marriages to slaves), it was up to a man to identify his potential spouse, but following that the matter was taken up by representatives of both the man and the bride to be, generally performed by maternal uncles (2, pg. 259-260).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

No evidence was found

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

No information is available

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

No information is available

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

No information is available

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

No information is available

4.18 Cannibalism?

No information is available

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

Villages are typically made up of a group of brothers, maternal uncles, these men's wives, and their children. Typical these villages are small ranging from 40-80 people and move frequently in search of better food supplies or out of conflict with relatives (4, pg. 343).

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

The Chokwe share a similar mobility patterns to their Zambia neighbors the Cewa and as such "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". Therefore, they are often forced to migrate around the dry and wet seasons (9, pg. 564-565).

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

Traditional Chokwe society is arranged politically by a well-defined system of chiefs. These chiefs share a common ancestry that can be traced to Lunda migrations in the sixteenth century. The concept of sacred kingship, originally introduced to the Chokwe through the Lunda by Chibinda Ilunga, a foreign (Luba) hunter of royal blood, is at the core of chiefs' central position in society. Chiefs are therefore representatives of God (Kalunga-Nzambi) on earth and intermediaries between the world of humans and that of ancestral and wilderness spirits that may affect people's lives and environment. The chief, or mwanangana, is also the "owner/overseer of the land" and the individual ultimately responsible for the well-being, success, fertility, and continuity of his or her people (3, pg. 18-20).

5.4 Post marital residence:

While Chokwe society is arranged matrilineal, however, women take up patri-residences after marriage (4, pg. 343).

5.5 Territoriality? (Defined boundaries, active defense):

Information unavailable, however, given that once the Chokwe broke off from the Lunda, eventually overthrowing their government, replacing them as the dominant expansionist of their immediate area, it would seem likely that they had some form of defined borders with active defense.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Currently unknown

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

A joking relationship existed between grandparents and grandchildren which allowed them to be publicly affectionate towards one another and joke about sexual matters in way that were generally deemed inappropriate for other relationships (7, pg. 113).

5.8 Village and house organization:

The main dwelling house for the Chokwe took the form of a rectangular floor plan and averaged approximately 9 ½ by 13-20 feet, however, for chiefs were known to be as big as 14 ½ by 27 ½ feet, with hipped roofs. The walls of the dwelling were generally made by weaving thin branches and saplings through a series of posts that formed the outline of the hut. Additionally they usually lined the inner walls with clay and the doors were typically made from large wood planks, carved smooth (10, pg. 31-32).

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

The most common specialized village structure is the *chota*, which is a cone shaped grass roof set on a structure of freestanding wooden poles. It was generally built in the village circle and was used to receive visitors and where men met for meetings (11, pg. 16).

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Unknown

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

Central to Chokwe life is art and sculpture and as such the Chokwe are divided into two separate classes: "the *songi* and the *fuli*. The *fuli* class is responsible for sculpture for the court while the *songi* make every day figures as well as communal sculpture. Therefore, the *fuli* class is responsible for turning out scepters, thrones, royal figurines, pipes, and tobacco boxes. The *songi* sculptors, on the other hand, are more versatile and they are responsible for producing charms, wooden objects and the *mahamba* statues found in family shrines" (15)

5.12 Trade:

After breaking off from the Lunda Empire and forming their own distinct society, the Chokwe became highly involved in a trading network with the Ovimbundu and other surrounding tribes, trading ivory, wax, and slaves. They extended their network with the arrival of the Portuguese trading for European goods, like firearms, which they eventually used to overthrow the Lunda in the latter part of the 19th century (8, pg. 266).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

Beyond the established system of chiefs, Chokwe society appeared to be very egalitarian in terms of equality among tribal or clan members (15).

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

Numbers are currently unavailable

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

In place of a termed shaman or holy man a “diviner (called *tahi* or *nganga*) serves in this role and aims at creating order out of disorder, by trying to mend what individuals may perceive as their torn situational realities. With the aid of a divination instrument and a protective/tutelary ancestral spirit, called *hamba kayongo*, a diviner has the capacity to search beyond ordinary human experience to expose that which is hidden; to recommend actions towards the resolution of conflicts, and redress the afflictions of individuals or society in general. Diviners typically engage in a variety of activities including dealing with illness, death, misfortune or bad luck, impotence or infertility, and theft. Part of the job of a diviner is also to reveal the nature of affliction, whether it is related to social or inter-personal situations, ancestral afflictions known as *Mahamba and/or*, the influence of witchcraft. After a cause has been attributed to the symptoms of a client, a course of action to redress the source of conflict is stipulated by the diviner. This may result in treatment with medications, prescription of amulets in the form of medicinal bundles or carved figurines to be worn by patients. The creation of these carved wooden figures for ancestral veneration, or recommendations on how to change a member’s behavior so as to regain normality and harmony in life” (6).

6.2 Stimulants:

No information located

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

No information located

6.4 Other rituals:

No information located

6.5 Myths (Creation):

The Chokwe creation myth involves “Olorun who inhabited the sky while the earth was too wet for human habitation. Olorun decided to create dry land giving the task to Orisha Nla who descended to earth with a small shell of dry soil, a pigeon and a hen and scattered the soil around and then the first man and women were then sent to live on earth and produce crops” (7, pg. 307-309).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

The Chokwe have a rich artistic heritage, sculpting figures in both wood and clay representing different categories of supernatural beings or are portraits of ancestors. Ornate masks are made out of wood, often representing male and female ancestors and generally incorporate some form of animal like elements. These masks were often worn by village elders during initiation ceremonies for both sexes (2, pg. 149).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

No information located

6.8 Missionary effect:

There has been a Christianity presence in Angola, the Chokwes traditional territory, since 1600 with two overall approaches to understanding Chokwe culture and the Chokwe people themselves. One approach was to forcibly force them to repent and stop their so called “evil spirits”, whereas the other was to embrace their culture and religious beliefs finding similarities between Christianity and traditional Chokwe religion. Nevertheless, in present day an overwhelming majority of Chokwe people have abandoned their traditional religion adopting some form of Christianity (11, pg. 56).

6.9 RCR revival:

Information unavailable

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

Like many of their neighbors the Chokwe traditionally believed in life after death, and their traditional religion recognized the universe as a unified entity with the living in close connection with the spirits of their dead ancestors. These deceased ancestors were believed to be capable of playing a part in the lives of the living and as such required worship. Traditionally neglect in worshipping ones deceased ancestors was believed to jeopardize the welfare of the individual, the society, and even the later decent group. Therefore worship was generally seen as mandatory and was performed among other reasons to curry favor with the spirit who they believed could avert disasters such as plagues, famines, and other catastrophes (13, pg. 44).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

No evidence for or against.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

No evidence for or against.

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

The Chokwe believe in the existence of a remote supreme being, responsible for creation, called Kalunga and/or Nzambi. However, they do not worship this god directly, but instead through Mahamba, or ancestral and natural spirits. Mahamba are generally represented by small, carved statues and by elaborate masks worn by senior village men and women on public and ceremonial occasions (2, pg. 148).

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

Body paint does not appear to have been common in everyday life; however it was used frequently during the male and female puberty ceremonies often taking on geometric patterns (15).

7.2 Piercings:

No information located

7.3 Haircut:

The hairstyle most commonly seen is called *kambu ja tota*. This is formed by first combing the hair and then braiding it into plaits, called *milamba*. Those plaits are then covered in red clay and formed into small balls that are set in rows along the scalp and resembles a “cross-hatched honeycomb”. Presently, only Chokwe women spend the time and effort it takes to create such elaborate hairstyles, but in previous decades, including the turn of the 19th-century, men would also wear their hair in *kambu ja tota* (14).

7.4 Scarification:

“Scarification [was] regarded as arousing to the touch of both genders, and it represented on almost all sculptures of women.” The practice itself for women was performed during her initiation ceremony after her first menses and occurred generally on the lower back, stomach and inner thighs. The girl must make her choices known to her family before her initiation begins; because once she starts she is completely under the control of her initiation teacher. The teacher would choose the pattern the scarification was to take and either performed he ask herself her drafted another skilled women to perform the procedure (3, pg. 79-80).

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

While the Chokwe were mainly known for their carvings in ivory, bone, wood and clay, “they also excelled in producing jewelry and ornaments made of copper and bronze as well” (8, pg. 267)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

No information located

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

No information located

7.8 Missionary effect:

There has been a Christianity presence in Angola, the Chokwes traditional territory, since 1600 with two overall approaches to understanding Chokwe culture and the Chokwe people themselves. One approach was to forcibly force them to repent and stop their so called “evil spirits”, whereas the other was to embrace their culture and religious beliefs finding similarities between Christianity and traditional Chokwe religion. Nevertheless, in present day an overwhelming majority of Chokwe people have abandoned their traditional religion adopting some form of Christianity (11, pg. 56).

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

Information unavailable

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

The Chokwe distinguish between siblings on the basis of age and gender. For example they refer to an older sibling of the same sex as *yaya* and younger siblings of the same sex as *mwakwethu*, whereas *ndumbwami* for any sibling of the opposite sex (7, pg. 113).

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

No evidence for or against.

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

None

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

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