

1. Description

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

- Yao, Yao, and Bantu

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

- yao

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

- 1-10° S/ 22-41° E (Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia)

1.4 Brief history:

- The Yao believe that their ancestral home is the “Yao Hill” located between the Lujenda and Rovuma Rivers east of Lake Malawi. The various tribes of the Yao then broke apart from each other due to infighting. Arab traders who colonized East Africa came into contact with the Yao around 700 A.D. Portuguese missionaries came into contact with the Yao around 1798 and competed with them for the slave trade. The British established the first permanent mission in Yao territory in 1861, at the behest of the explorer Stanley Livingstone. Yao warriors destroyed this first mission because the missionaries opposed their slave trade. The British then took control of the former Yao controlled areas by 1891.

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

- The major religion of the Yao is Islam, which was given to them by Arab traders. The Yao became slave traders because of their close proximity to Portuguese traders. This continued until the British stamped out the slave trade. (3, p 22-31)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

- The region of Nyasaland is mainly hilly, with fertile soil in the valleys between hills. The hills are mainly sand and clay, with swampy regions between the hills. The climate is divided into the wet (December to March) and dry (May to October) seasons, with monsoons in the wet season.

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

- 1,916,000 people in all, no data, no data, no data.

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- Sorghum

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- Fish

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

- Spears

2.4 Food storage:

- No evidence

2.5 Sexual division of production:

- Men hunt, women farm

2.6 Land tenure:

- Land is owned by matrilineal groups

2.7 Ceramics:

- Yes, made from clay

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

- No data.

2.9 Food taboos:

- None

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

- No evidence

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

- None found

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

- None found

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

- None found

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

- None found

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

- No data

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

- No data

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

- 20 and 20
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:
- No data
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:
- No data
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:
- Husband's lineage pays the wife's lineage for her.
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns:
- Matrilineal
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
- Fathers are close to their children. Adult sons support mothers, when they are in charge of the village. A mother's daughter is identified not by her mother, but by her maternal grandmother, and is considered to be her in another form. As such, the mother has to follow her mother/daughter if she chooses to leave a village. Mothers are also known to curse their adult or adolescent children, which is said to either lead to death or madness.
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
- No data
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):
- Must marry outside of clan.
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?
- Only one recognized father. Semen "clots" inside the womb.
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")
- Semen "clots" inside the womb, where it is then nurtured.
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?
- Yes, semen "clots" and the child is "fed" by more sperm.
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape
- Yes, if caught man is fined.
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)
- Cross cousins
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?
- Yes. Men for marriage pick women, but once in, the women can commit adultery and leave her husband. The husband's family then has to repay the dowry.
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- No evidence
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
- Maternal uncle's family (2, p 72)
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- No data
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- No evidence
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- No data
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?
- Respect is given for the oldest woman in a matrilineal group.
- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- Most of the joking takes place between cross cousins, and usually at the headman's expense.
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- Bilateral, with clan distinctions
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules
- Brother and sister may never sleep in the same hut, and cannot seem too close to one another, for fear of being called a sorcerer.
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?
- No, men ask their future wife's brother for permission, and if he grants it, they are married.
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
- No data
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)
- Outside of clan. Villages are mainly related women and their husbands.
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?
- No. Young men and women decide whom they marry.
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:
- No, because marriages are easily dissolvable.

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

- No data

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

- In-group: stabbings.

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

- Killed for being a sorcerer.

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

- The Yao raid the other societies for slaves.

4.18 Cannibalism?

- No.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

- 97

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

- None; permanent settlements

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

- Chief and his “headmen,” which could be his younger brothers, friends, or refugee chiefs from another village.

5.4 Post marital residence:

- Wife’s hut

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

- No data

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

- None

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

- Most joking occurs between cross cousins

5.8 Village and house organization:

- Houses are organized around matrilineal groups and sorority houses.

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

- Boys live in a dormitory by themselves; women sometimes live in sororities with their sisters under the care of their brother

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

- The Yao sleep on the ground.

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

- Matrilineal lineages and clans

5.12 Trade:

- The Yao mainly bartered with other tribes and Arab traders before currency, now they trade for tobacco, clothing, and food, etc.

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

- Headmen who are the nobility of the village get to wear special headbands.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

- No data

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

- Diviners, sheikhs, and mwalimu (lower level Muslim practitioners)

6.2 Stimulants:

- None

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

- Puberty for both sexes is celebrated in ritual. Boys when they reach puberty are circumcised. All other rituals come from Sufi Islam.

6.4 Other rituals:

6.5 Myths (Creation):

- The Yao, being largely Muslim, believe in seven-day creation by Allah.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- The Yao are most known artistically for their pictograms that are used in puberty ceremonies.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

- Women cannot serve as sheikhs or mwalimu.

6.8 Missionary effect:

- The Yao believe in Islam, which was given to them by Arab traders.

6.9 RCR revival:

- The Yao have experienced movements in recent years to stamp out remnants of ancestor veneration and move to pure Islam.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

- The Yao believe that they will be with their ancestors after death. They will then be raised on the last day and judged.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

- No evidence

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

- No.

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

- The religion of the Yao is Sufi Islam with elements of ancestor worship.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

- None

7.2 Piercings:

- None

7.3 Haircut:

- Short for both sexes.

7.4 Scarification:

- None

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

- Ritual necklaces that are medicated for magical effects.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

- None

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

- Women wear headscarves.

7.8 Missionary effect:

- Most traditional adornment died out because of the influence of Arab traders and Islam.

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

- None

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

- Mostly found in the Crow kinship typology (matrilineal).

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

- None

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

- The Yao follow the Crow kinship typology.

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. Ethnologue.com

2. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/651932/Yao>

3. Mitchell, J. Clyde (1966) The Yao Village. Manchester, UK: The University Press.

4. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Yao.aspx>