

Round Table on Intangible and Underwater Cultural Heritage Data (I/UCH) Collection in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to carry out anthropological research in outer islands of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) as identified and pre-arranged by traditional community organizations and historic preservation offices of Chuuk State and Yap State, as well as Yap State's Council of Tomol.¹ The objective of this project was two-fold: (1) through round table discussion, create and improve awareness of I/UCH data collection and protection of culturally appropriate ways for documenting knowledge related to navigation, wayfinding, and women's roles in exchange relationships promoted through navigation and wayfinding and (2) understand the role of exchange relationships in food sovereignty of the past and present contexts. The method for visiting these islands was by sailing boat, aboard it a project team including a traditional Micronesian navigator, translator, two anthropologists, two historic preservation officers, and a lifelong sailing boat captain, which sailed from Kosrae to Chuuk Lagoon, to Polowat, and lastly to Pohnpei. While visiting target islands, communities arranged themselves into groups of women and men with children permitted to attend for the round table discussion and individual interviews took place on food sovereignty. The expected results of this project included gaining a deeper understanding of islanders' perceptions of I/UCH, culturally appropriate practices for preservation, protecting heritage through community-based discussion about these topics, and enable islanders to collect their own I/UCH data and transmit to an established repository. Through this project and associated experiences, the project team gained a deeper understanding of meteorological challenges communities may face in attempts to carry out community-based inventorying.

Key words: Micronesia, wayfinding, women's roles, community-based inventorying, exchange relationships

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INTRODUCTION

From 2016 to 2020, an on-going collection of ethnographic data occurred in the FSM in each of the high island states. Mostly recently ethnographic data was collected on two key projects: (1) traditional routes in Kosraean culture, indicating routes beyond the island of Kosrae to neighboring islands of Pinglap, Mokil, Pohnpei, Satawan Atoll, Weno, and Ifalik (Meredith, 2018; Sarfert, 1917) and (2) a Youth Ethnographic Field School on Ethnozoology was carried out at the KSHPO in Tofol, Kosrae, FSM (Meredith and Fazzino Forthcoming). These projects led to the project objectives in this paper.

The purpose of this FSM NACH project was to address underrepresented communities within the country on three main objectives: (1) food security in the outer islands of and throughout the FSM, (2) the relationship between wayfinding, exchange relationships, food security, and women's roles, and (3) to create and improve awareness of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH) data collection and protection of culturally appropriate ways for

documenting knowledge related to navigation, wayfinding, and women's roles in exchange relationships promoted through navigation and wayfinding.

SUMMARY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC WORK IN YAP AND CHUUK OUTER ISLANDS

Traditional navigation and wayfinding served many functions for early Micronesians, including leaving one's home island in search of new food sources, housing opportunities, adventure, and perhaps crew desires to not return home (Hanlon, 2014; Lewis, 1994). Oral histories of navigators who returned and made repeat trips demonstrate some participation in a traditional exchange system referred to as "*sawei*", a practice inclusive of Yap's main and outer islands as well as some of Chuuk's outer islands. To some extent, these exchange relationships have been referenced (Hanlon, 2014; Hunter-Anderson and Zan 1996) or spoken of with reference to Kachau—for some it is a mythical place (Goodenough, 1986) or direction in the east, however, according to participants in this project from island atolls in Yap and Chuuk, this reference is to Kosrae.

These inter-island exchanges served as a necessary survival strategy which promoted economic growth in social capital, communication of current and new ideas, contact with newcomers for foreign items deemed of value to islanders (navigators from other islands or early Europeans for example), exchange of resources in times of emergency (such as after a typhoon), or general exchange of resources for items not grown or made on all islands, or tribute of respect in exchange for refuge in case of hard times. With the men as navigators, this situation often leaves women remaining on the island with non-navigator men who may or may not be in training for navigation. Oral histories from fieldwork in 2016 with Yap State Historic Preservation Office indicate some women held traditional knowledge about navigation; however, few projects have focused on women's roles in the Outer Islands as related to navigation (Meredith 2017). Of the available written literature in English, there is little knowledge on the roles of women in the preparation for the *sawei*. Only Berg (1992) notes any role of women in the *Sawei*, that is, those women without children could make the trip but did not explain further while Hunter-Anderson and Zan (1996) mention briefly the excitement the women have when the men return from the tribute voyage. In addition to the relative lack of publication on women's roles in navigation are limited studies on the interrelationship of Outer Islands in the FSM as a whole; however, there are studies state by state.

FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The *sawei* was a key element in the social and biological reproduction of Micronesians involved in its associated practices. *Sawei* can generally refer to trade and the tribute portion of the *sawei* system (Lingenfelter, 1975). It is also a general term to describe the baskets hosting the contents (Lessa, 1950). Among the available literature, *sawei* refers to the traditional tribute made from the Outer Islands of Chuuk and Yap to Yap Proper in exchange for amicable relationships in the form of protection, goods, and services (Hunter-Anderson and Zan, 1996; Nakayama and Ramp, 1974; Müller, 1908). The social relationships and groups in the Yapese Socio-political organization indicate different types of *sawei* the Outer Islanders have with Yap Proper through Gagil Municipality. Hence, *Sawei* allows for exchange of both material goods and ideas, tangible and intangible elements of culture.

Tangible Cultural Heritage (TCH) and ICH are intricately bound with one another. As has been increasingly recognized, any separation of the two is artificial and reductionist (Lewis, 1994). The oceans which connect and comprise the FSM represent tangible resources necessary for health and wellness offering both direct and indirect economic opportunities in the present, past, and future. The food sovereignty and continuity of practices regarding foods are reliant upon the continued and sustainable use of the sea and the exchanges that Micronesian navigation practices and technologies have made possible. The FSM gears efforts toward this realization and revitalization of traditional navigation practices, including emphasis on Navigation at the College of Micronesia – FSM, Yap campus, UCH field school sponsored by the University of Guam in Chuuk, development and exploration of key sites in FSM.

Food sovereignty entails local control over the entire food system, in all aspects from production, to distribution/exchange, and finally to consumption. It involves elements of material culture and associated knowledge, skills, abilities, beliefs, and practices which comprise intangible cultural heritage, and for Micronesians, in particular, underwater cultural heritage. Food security is achieved when all people have access to safe, healthy, and culturally appropriate foods. For Indigenous Peoples, this oftentimes means nothing less than achieving food sovereignty or the decolonization of their entire food system away from imported foods towards local decision-making, and hence control of the entire food system (production, distribution/exchange, and consumption). A cornerstone of this approach is the knowledge and practices associated with subsistence, the collection and production of foods for local consumption. This is a key element in achieving both food security as well as food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty advocates work to overcome limitations to realizing local autonomy over the entire food system. In addition to the economic dependence noted above, other factors such as ecology, knowledge base, and perceptions towards food must be considered. As noted by Hunter-Anderson (1991,1), “Ecologically-oriented ethnographic field work to document within- and between-island variations in these tropical island farming systems is recommended for a better understanding of the environmental and cultural controls that have shaped Micronesian horticulture past and present.” More recently, Connell (2015) noted shifts in dietary preferences towards more imported and processed foods, with increased expenditure on those products, and the resultant health impacts.

Observed globally, these shifts can be led by laws and policies which favor commodities and industrialization of food production in the United States (Fazzino, 2010). Settler Societies (Peoples, 1985) dramatically impacted the history of the FSM. This impact includes the development of reliance on short-term cash income from government jobs, as well as infrastructure projects, which are funded by the United States (Peoples, 1985). These purchased goods replace historic and traditional agriculture, hunting, and fishing technologies.

This project builds off of previous work of Meredith (2018ab), Meredith (Forthcoming, abcdefgh), Meredith and Fazzino (Forthcoming), Fazzino (2008a), Fazzino (2008b), Fazzino and Loring (2009), Hozid and Fazzino (2017), Fazzino *et al.* (2019), Loring *et al.* (2019) to establish baseline data on perceptions and behavior of Micronesians in the FSM on food production, distribution/exchange and consumption. Our research considers the relationships between subsistence practices, including knowledge and technologies, and food sovereignty, a rights-based

framework for the governance of food and agriculture, placing local autonomy of the food systems as a central element (Windfuhr and Jonsén 2005). The collection of this data may be of interest academically in terms of documenting traditional ecological knowledge (Hunter-Anderson, 1991), but also to prepare strategies to mitigate climate change (Barnett, 2011), cope with extreme weather events (McGregor *et al.*, 2009) and in nutritional interventions in the context of food security and food sovereignty.

METHODS

A mixed-methods approach for this research was developed based on previous fieldwork experiences and in unison with KSHPO, KIRMA, FSM NACH, and other local stakeholders. This approach to development of research is in line with best practices in anthropology for community-based work that involves the community at all stages of research (Lassiter, 2008; Minkler, 2005).

For this research project, the team utilized three main methods. The first method involved focus groups (in the form of community meetings). The chiefs of Polowat Atoll organized the focus groups by gender and whose identities remain confidential. The purpose of these focus groups was for participants to engage in discussions on what is ICH and UCH, culturally appropriate ways for collecting oral histories on wayfinding, women's roles, and exchange relationships. The community meetings were led in unison with the chiefs of each gender. The second method was individual interviews with islanders from Chuuk and Yap Outer Islands and the four FSM high islands. These interviews, which remain confidential, contained open-ended questions in the format of a semi-structured questionnaires on topics related to food procurement in the past and present. The third method was a paper-based survey, using a Likert scale multiple choice options, and percentages, on current food procurement strategies, dietary decision-making, and perceptions of healthy eating. The community meetings were recorded and interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Statistical data was generated and analyzed in order to consider how differently situated individuals report on their current state of food security and food sovereignty.

The plan for this research was to interview 60 participants and work towards theoretical saturation in a grounded-theory approach (Glasner and Strauss, 1967). Interviews focused on three distinct age ranges: young adults (18 to 39 years old), middle age (40-59), and elders (60 and over). This followed the model employed in the dissertation work of Fazzino (2008a) on the Tohono O'odham Nation. Interviewees and interviews were arranged through existing network including FSM NACH, COM, and KSHPO. Survey was administered through existing network including FSM NACH, COM, KSHPO, CSHPO.

DATA COLLECTION SITES

Two collaborators from Yap State and the two first authors formed the research team on a sailing vessel that was scheduled to visit six outer islands in order to conduct roundtables, surveys, and interviews with those present. The research locations were scheduled to be visited in the following order:

1. Polowat Atoll
2. Pulap Atoll
3. Pulusuk Atoll
4. Satawal Island
5. Lamotrek Atoll
6. Ifalik Atoll

The research team was able to conduct community meetings and interviews on one of the islands after which, the captain and Satawalese Navigator made the decision to turn around after facing gale force winds and sail to Pohnpei for safety. In lieu of this setback, the research team utilized other field sites. The research team visited the COM-FSM in Pohnpei, Kosrae, and Chuuk during July and August 2019 from which the team collected data from both students and staff in the three locations for a total of 36 individuals. The team was also able to collect data from individuals who were born in each of the States of the FSM. Audio recordings and survey data were examined using content analysis to consider themes which emerge in the transcripts. Figure 1 (below) shows the sailing route of research vessel SV Skye (from Kosrae to Weno, Weno to Polowat, Polowat to Pohnpei is 1,375.81 nautical miles).

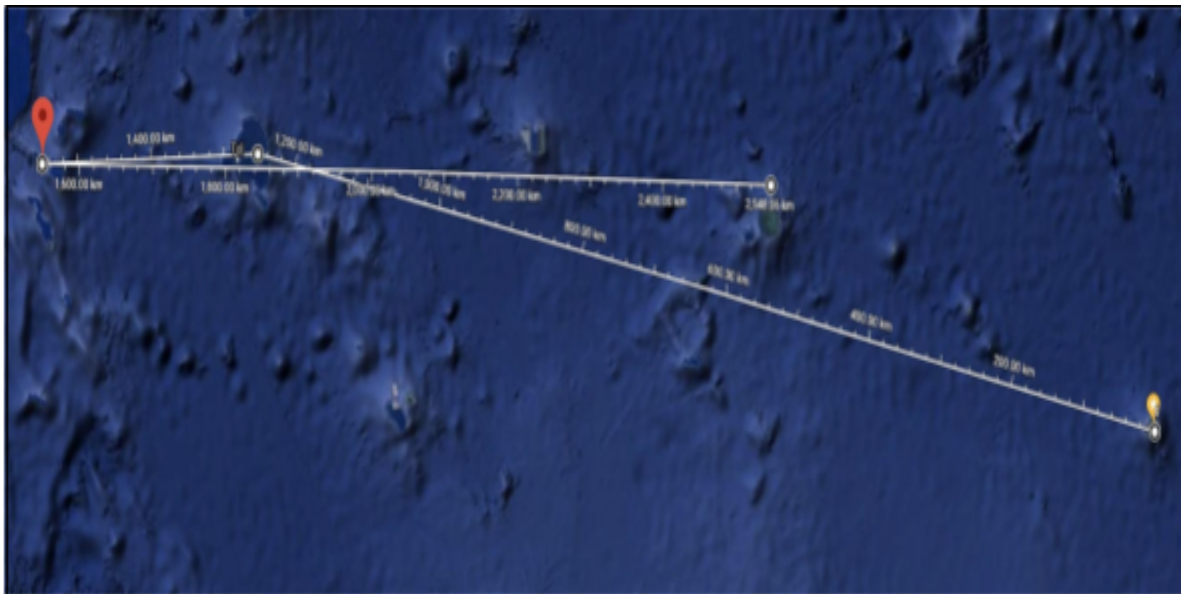


Figure 1: Research Vessel Sailing Route of SV Skye (Google Maps 2020)

RESULTS

The research team set sail from Kosrae on July 3, 2019 to learn about food security and carrying out projects in the Outer Islands of the FSM. From July 3 to 10, the team sailed from Kosrae to Chuuk Lagoon. During this time, they observed and learned about Micronesian navigation practices as well

as prepared and conducted interviews. On July 10, with permissions secured, the team set sail to Polowat from Chuuk Lagoon. During the community meetings, women and men sat separately. The chief of the men and women both joined and spoke on challenges to data collection and culturally appropriate ways for documenting knowledge related to navigation, wayfinding, and women's roles in exchange relationships promoted through navigation and wayfinding. The community meetings to discuss I/UCH and appropriate data collection, terms including "UNESCO," "intangible cultural heritage," and "underwater cultural heritage" proved to be new terms to residents of this atoll. A portion of the meeting was spent sharing about these terms, why they are important, the role of UNESCO and their relationship with the FSM NACH, as well as some examples of I/UCH. One such example of UCH included a plane in the bottom of the Polowat Lagoon and sea lanes such as those known in open ocean way finding practices. Among ICH examples were oral histories which may host traditional navigation knowledge, roles of women in preparation of the seafarers, and exchange relationships.

Interviews on food security noted the importance of traditional foods in association with what he had learned from his elders. One Kosraean participant shared, "That really reminds me to really understand and to really listen to our old folk. If you keep eating local, traditional food... fish, local products like taro, bananas... you don't get diabetes." For another, subsistence was associated with changes in the tide. When asked how he knew, "when the tide is just right?" he responded, "At times I scope out by just looking out into the ocean and see when the tide is high, and then recording what time it's very high, and what time it is very low. Subsistence practices like these tend to be carried out by young men on Kosrae. In some cases, distribution of one's catch may take place, and in others, it may not. Some participants noted a change in sharing.

On Pohnpei, a larger island in land area and population, also the Capital center for the FSM and United States Compact of Free Association personnel, participants shared on changes in thinking. One elder man shared, "Even our grandkids, they are growing up in a different way of thinking or life or whatever. Even though like if you, before we could drink sakau [literally the act of drinking of feeling the kava plant]. Nowadays you go to check out bars. It's kind of a little boring because normal people talking no more sharing It is our custom that you come to my house. It is my responsibility to offer you food. Before we don't have a fridge or whatever. That's why we have to offer food to neighbors, people who visit us. But now because we have fridge or freezers, we stack it we stack it..."

Not only time, but also space matter in terms of accessing oceanic resources. For one elder from the Outer Islands of Yap use of the ocean and engagement with his heritage is not simply a matter of erosion over time, but rather depends on where he finds himself. When he is in the outer islands, he shares, "I know my diet is back to normal, because I never eat rice...I only eat local food, not like on the ship and high school. I eat all kinds of food. But in (the outer islands), I only drink coconut, water, and eat local food, like taro, yams, or sweet taro, and fish."

DISCUSSION

The overall sentiment of those with whom we spoke was that the younger generations are losing touch with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and even desire to participate in subsistence practices. Those in the older generations can point to a time when there was not the luxury to turn away from

the land and ocean as a means of livelihood. For example, a middle-aged woman from Pohnpei shared that subsistence was an everyday part of growing up, “But anyway, that's basically the kind of life that we had. All the young children would come after school and we'd all go down into the mangroves to catch fish, to gather coconut and then, we'd come back up and then, some would carry the fish and then, some would carry firewood and then, we'll go and put our stuff and then, go down to the land and get bananas and taros and all that stuff, and bring it up. That's basically our daily work every day.” Along with the introduction of automobiles the introduction of the refrigerators and freezers led to the decrease in sharing behaviors that historically situated exchange relationships surrounding subsistence.

The findings for this research are preliminary in nature as only one of six target islands were visited and community meetings carried out and 36 of a planned 60 interviews have been conducted. Due to meteorological challenges experienced and the migration of Outer Islanders including key community leaders to Weno, the remaining focus groups (in the form of community meetings) are to be held in Weno of Chuuk State. Nevertheless, the preliminary data collected and cursory consideration of the transcriptions indicates a number of trends which align well with literature on cultural and dietary change. Participants for the food security aspect of the project highlighted the importance of consuming traditional foods to maintain health. Particularly those in older generations demonstrated the traditional environmental knowledge associated with fishing including the various technologies that they utilized in order to fish while younger generations recalled aspects of this knowledge or at the minimum recognized that their parents had participated in these subsistence practices.

Participants expressed concern about increasing development of the islands leading to a decrease in the traditional knowledge and skills associated with the procurement of sustenance from marine environments and a desire for researchers returning to share what they have learned of their island(s). There also were differences in the value of maintaining traditional practices including subsistence practices that comprise a key aspect of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The *sawei* is one such example of a cultural practice that can disappear unless deliberate efforts are made within communities to continue practicing or a variation of it.

Lastly, during the community meetings on Polowat, some challenges identified include the absence of key person(s) due to migration to Guam or Chuuk lagoon for health or economic reasons and a strong desire to care for their own data. For this community, the path forward was for the community to collect the data with an arrangement with the CSHPO that would allow safekeeping of records specific to their island. The expressed interest to collect their own data. The voyage from Kosrae to Chuuk Lagoon followed by stopping at Polowat Atoll and return to Pohnpei provided an understanding of the meteorological phenomenon facilitating exchange relationships and food security. With light easterly winds, the weather was promising but by July 12, the southwest monsoon began pushing northeast toward Chuuk waters—sometimes referred to as the typhoon belt (Petersen, 2016; Myers and Raymundo, 2009). On July 15, 2019, the the SV Skye sailed away from the impending storm.

CONCLUSION - IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The work completed for this jointly sponsored project highlights the interconnections between terrestrial and marine resources, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and continuity and change in the FSM. It also highlights the pressing need to align consideration of highly fundable projects sponsored by international entities, agencies and governments within a larger framework of cultural sovereignty, including food sovereignty. Documentation of historic sites and their preservation should also include plans for local participation and engagement in all aspects. This engagement should not only be designed to meet donor directives of participation, but also seek to focus on the maintenance and continuation of cultural practices and everyday heritage that are threatened by shifting value orientations towards consumerism. While traditional practices have long been subject to change from both outside pressures (colonialism, resource exploitation, and globalization) as well as innovation from within, there remains a pressing need to align goals of underwater cultural heritage preservation and documentation with contemporary subsistence practices which provide not only buffers from fluctuations in outside markets but also continuity with the lifeways of ancestors. Research can be conducted in such a way so that complexes and structures are recognized as not only important to outsiders as exemplars of culture and ancient civilizations representing the distinctive achievements of humans and part of a global heritage but as part of the continued heritage and everyday practice of those seeking to live a meaningful life rooted in place.

This project was possible through a collaboration between the Federated States of Micronesia Office of National Archives of Culture and Historic Preservation (FSM NACH), the Kosrae State Historic Preservation Office (KSHPO), the Chuuk State Historic Preservation Office (CSHPO), the Yap State Historic Preservation Office (YSHPO), the College of Micronesia (COM), and Bloomsburg University (BU).

Acknowledgements

Kulo, Kalanghan, Kinisou Chapur, and Kammagar gad (thank you). We would like to acknowledge and congratulate the FSM NACH, KSHPO, CSHPO, YSHPO, Council of Tomol, and the COM for requesting and prioritizing this work for the FSM. We thank our sponsors, UNESCO, Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), and the US National Park Service, for their generous support.

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