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Land Tenure and Social Structure in Micronesia

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The islands of Micronesia are not all of the same type: the Marianas, Palau, Yap, Truk, Ponape, and Kosrae are high volcanic islands; the other Carolines, the Marshalls and the Gilberts are composed entirely of low coral islands (Fig. 1). Although the sizes and forms of those islands are varied, each island society, except those of the Marianas and the Gilberts, has a tradition of matrilineality. However, the structure and function of the matrilineal system differs from one society to another.

In this paper I attempt to clarify the nature of the relationship between social groups and their system of land tenure. For this purpose it is necessary to answer the following questions: What aspects of the natural environment are categorized as real property? What kind of social unit is the basis for land tenure? How may a person or a descent group acquire, uphold and alienate several rights to land (Lundsgaarde, 1974: 286)? Therefore I consider land tenure as the way in which people obtain, use and distribute rights to land (Crocombe, 1968, 1971).

Traditional land tenure in Micronesia may be broadly conceived of as a system of social relationships between persons or social groups with respect to real property: land. Patterns of land tenure in Micronesia range from "ownership" by matrilineage through that by matri- or patri-extended family to patri-lineage.

Based on a study of eight Micronesian societies, this paper examines the social basis for different types of land tenure in the region. Although details of course vary, four main types of land tenure may be distinguished in Micronesia:

Type 1: Land is owned by a matrilineage and used by a matri-extended family. The children of its male members have the right to use or to inherit partially their father's lineage land, as in the Marshalls, the Mortlocks, Truk and the Central Caroline Islands.

Type 2: Land is owned by a matrilineage, but is used by a patri-extended family. The land is inherited mainly through the matri-line, as in Palau.

Type 3: Land is owned by a matrilineage, but is used by a patri-extended family and mainly inherited through the patri-line, as in Ponape.

Type 4: Land is owned by a patrilineage, as in Yap and Fais.

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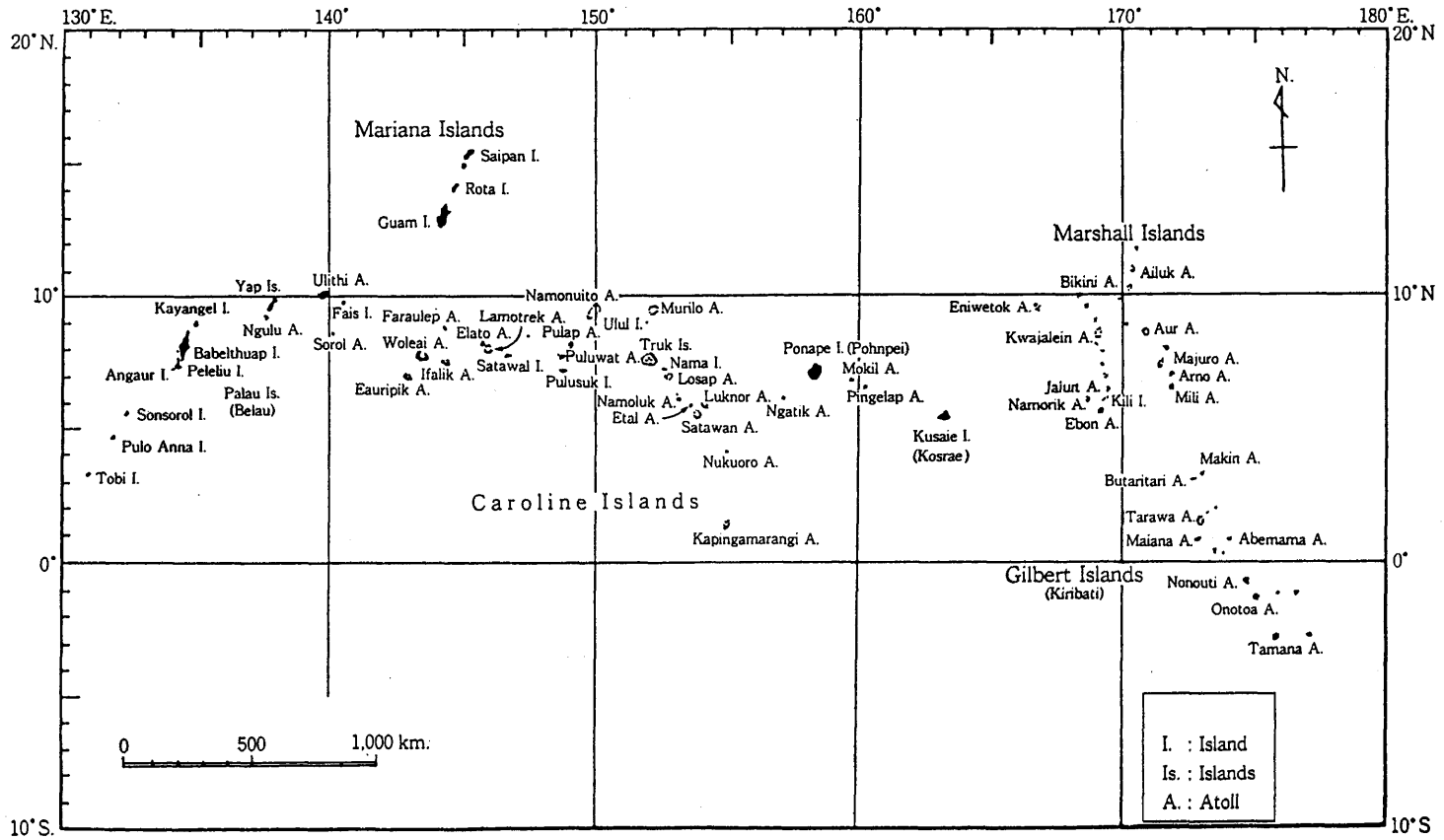


Figure 1. The Micronesia Islands.

Land Tenure Principles in the Marshalls, the Mortlocks, Truk and the Central Carolines

Marshall Islands

The 29 atolls and 5 raised coral islands which comprise the Marshalls have a total land area of only 120 km², and a population of 31,200 (1980). Marshallese society is composed of number of ranked matrilineal clans (*jowi*) and non-localized exogamous descent groups, each of which is named. The head of the highest-ranking clan in any island or atoll assumes the status of paramount chief (*iroij labalab*) (Spoehr, 1949). There are 14 paramount chiefs throughout the Marshalls (Tobin, 1958).

Each clan may include several distinct matrilineages (*bwij*), the basic and foremost landholding group. The lineage head (*alab*) administers the land, while lineage members use it. Land is inherited through the matrilineal line. Matrilineal rights in land are considered of greater importance than other land rights. An individual also has rights to use land belonging to his/her father's matrilineage. These rights may be exercised during the lifetime of his/her father (Pollock, 1974: 108). According to Tobin, land rights bestowed by a father continue to the fifth generation from the original transfer (Tobin, 1958: 20).

Although a parcel of land, which runs from the ocean side of an islet to the lagoon side, may be owned by a matrilineage, the paramount chief has ultimate control of all land parcels under his jurisdiction. Therefore he receives part of the produce as "first fruits."

Mortlock, Truk and Central Caroline Islands

The land tenure systems in Mortlock, Truk and the Central Caroline Islands are traditionally of the same type. In this paper I describe the land tenure system of Satawal Island, located in the Central Caroline Islands, as a typical example.

Satawal Island lies 1,000 km east of Yap and 500 km west of Truk. It is a raised coral island surrounded by a fringing reef that averages 50 m in width. In 1980, 492 people lived on Satawal, in 87 households.

The important kin group and unit of landholding in Satawalese society is the matrilineal lineage (*yeew raa*, lit., "one branch of the tree") or clan (*yáyinang*). Due to the custom of matrilocal residence, the residential group is a matrilocal extended family: several women (sisters), their daughters and granddaughters with their in-marrying husbands, unmarried sons and adopted children. Family members live in adjacent houses built on their lineage land, and comprise a corporate group. This co-residential group is called *pwukos* (homestead). There are 15 homesteads, the largest of which contains 12 households and 72 members (Sudo, 1984).

Satawalese society is composed of eight matri-clans, which are strictly exogamous, are ranked and have names. All the clans are ranked based on the

sequence of their arrival on the island. The three highest-ranking clans are thought of as the "original" clans, and are known as the "clans of chiefs." The other five are considered later immigrants and called the "clans of commoners." The eldest man of the senior line in each clan has the status of clan chief. He controls his clan lands and allocates plots of land to lineage members.

The heads of the three chiefly clans have authority to organize and initiate island or inter-island activities. They discuss and make decisions on the important affairs of the island, such as communal fishing, ocean-going expeditions by sailing canoes, and sanctions to be imposed on a person. They also responsible for controlling food resources. For example, they may place a taboo on the use of taro patches, coconut palms or particular sea areas in times of scarcity.

There are three primary types of land use on Satawal: *pwukos* (homestead), *pwunék* (coconut land) and *pwéén* (taro patches). In *pwukos* several dwelling houses and cooking huts are built. *Pwunék* is cleared land where coconuts (*Cocos nucifera*) and breadfruit trees (*Artocarpus altilis*) are planted. *Pwéén* is swamp planted to taro (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis* and *Colocasia esculenta*).

The lands held by each matrilineage fall roughly into two categories, *rapinúfanú* (original or stem lands) and *faangétofanú* (incoming or given lands). The original lands have continuously been owned by the lineage. Of the 322 land holdings sampled, 151 (46%) are considered "original lineage lands." The other 171 (54%) have changed lands for a variety of reasons, many having passed from one lineage to another in a sequence of three or four transactions during the past 100 years. The main occasions for these transactions are marriage, childbirth or adoption of an infant.

At marriage a husband's lineage must give a plot of taro patch or coconut garden to the wife. These plots are called *faangetofanú* (lit. "given land"), and serve not only to ratify the marriage but also to provide the husband with food resources. After the birth of a child his lineage again gives some plots of land or several breadfruit trees. The quality of the properties given by the father's lineage depends on the number of children. Those properties are regarded as *mwongonúyafakúr* (food resources for the children of a male lineage member) and held jointly by the children, and are distinguished from the properties of their own (mother's) lineage. Thus in Satawalese society the smallest unit of landholding is a couple's children (sibling set).

The sibling set is obliged to occasionally contribute gifts of foods to the father's lineage when its members become sick or die, and to help in constructing its canoe and canoe house. The father's lineage holds potential rights to regain those properties when its male member's offspring do not fulfil their duties toward it, or fail to care for these lands. The father's lineage has the residual right to "given lands," and its male members' children (*yafakúr*) have the right to use and dispose of them.

In contrast, the "original lands" (*rapinúfanú*) of each lineage are owned by lineage members and administered by the male lineage head (*sómwóón*). All

the lineage members have the right to use these lands freely. However, male members of each lineage marry out and live in their wives' lineage land (*pwukos*). In everyday life they do not directly use their lineage's original land. Instead the in-marrying men (their sisters' or daughters' husbands) may use those lands to provide food to feed their wives and children. Male lineage members decide whether or not an in-marrying man is maintaining these lands properly. They have the right to control their lineage's original lands whereas the in-marrying men have only use rights to them.

Lastly, the highest-ranking chief has the right to oversee the food resources of the island (*mwongonúfanú*). As mentioned above, he may regulate the use of taro patches and coconut palms in times of scarcity, especially when breadfruit is scarce, from November to March. Violators are punished by the chief. People are obliged by custom to give the first breadfruit (*mmanimááy*) to the highest-ranking chief, in token payment to the clan of the first occupants of this island.

To summarize, the land tenure system on Satawal is comprised of bundles of rights and duties related to real property. The ultimate right to oversee the island's food resources is held by the highest-ranking chief. This I denote as the right of sovereignty. I have classified the rights that arise in relation to real property into four types: the right to own, the right to control, the right to use, and the residual right. These are connected with the unit of landholding and the category of the land. Each lineage owns its original lineage lands (*rapinúfanú*) and holds provisionally given land (*faangétofanú*). Lineage members are co-owners of the original lineage lands and have the right to use and dispose of them. Even after they give a plot of these lands to other lineage, out of which its male members married, they still keep the residual right to confiscate them. They also have the right to control their original lineage lands.

In-marrying male members may use their wife's original lineage lands. And the rights to given lands are held by the sibling set of the same father. The members of a sibling set may use and dispose of the lands given by the father's lineage. This use right accompanying the right to dispose is passed on from one lineage to another through the male line. Original lineage lands serve to support the elementary lineage members' food resources, and given lands serve to keep a balance between a lineage population and its food resources (Table 1).

In Greater Trukese Society (Truk, Mortlock, North-Western Islands of Truk, and Satawal), it is common for a kin group to be formed on the basis of matrilineal principles. The important kin group and landholding unit in these societies is the matrilineal descent group. Today, however, the size of the corporate group owning lands and other resources differs from society to society. I attempt to compare the structures of landowning kin groups in three island societies, Satawal, Uman (Truk Is.), and Satawan (Mortlock Is.).

In Satawalese society the unit of the corporate descent group which owns resources, a cooking hut and a meeting house, and functions as a cooperative

Table 1. Lineage, Population and Landholding in Satawal Island

Clan and Lineage	House-holds	Popu-lation	Lands		Taro Patches		BT ³⁾	In-marrying 1880-1980	Married-out 1880-1980
			Total	OL ¹⁾	Total	OT ²⁾			
Neyáár									
Ráápiirakirh	10	32	32	14	18	10	187		
Neyimwenikát	3	13	11	2	6	2	55		
Neyáár	2	15	7	4	7	4	91		
Sub-total	15	60	50	20	31	16	333	74	65
Yáánatiw									
Yáánatiw	5	45	27	17	25	5	130		
Neyán	6	40	28	15	23	1	115		
Weneyiya	1	5	11	5	8	2	22		
Sub-total	12	90	66	37	56	21	267	43	60
Noosomwar									
Kaningeirek	7	42	32	16	29	6	113		
Fááyinen	12	71	34	8	46	3	?		
Sub-total	19	113	66	24	75	9	113	56	42
Kataman									
Yósukunap	8	61	29	16	24	7	138		
Wenikeyiya	2	10	12	7	5	3	?		
Sub-total	10	71	41	23	29	10	138	49	42
Piik									
Nesátikúw	5	20	16	7	11	3	106	22	26
Sawen									
Fáániyór	3	23	27	15	19	10	96	22	26
Sawsát									
Yápééw	5	19	15	7	12	6	151		
Yatiirong	5	39	13	5	17	9	108		
Sub-total	10	58	28	12	29	15	259	32	41
Maasané									
Weyisow	13	57	28	13	28	1	142	32	27
Total	87	492	322	151	278	85	1454	330	324

¹⁾ OL: original land; ²⁾ OT: original taro patches; ³⁾ BT: breadfruit tree.

working group is called *yáyinang* of *yeew raa*, as mentioned above. The *yeew raa* is a matrilineage composed of descendants from one ancestress of seven or eight generations ago. In Satawanese society, this group is referred as *ew show* (lit. "one branch of a tree," or sub-lineage) and its members are matrilineal descendants who can trace a common descent from a female ancestor of four or five generations ago. In Uman society the landholding group is called *eterekes* or *aain* (descent group or descent line), whose members are

matrilineal descendants of one great-grandmother. This means that the Satawalese corporate group is the most traditional and stable. The Trukese group is the smallest. And the Satawanese *eeu show* is located in the middle in a progression from less to more sub-divided.

The tendency toward a smaller corporate descent group is correlated with the factors of population increase and the influence of cash resources (Table 2). In Trukese and Mortlockese societies, owing to rapid population increase, many male lineage members have divided the lineage lands and given them to their children. The matrilineage no longer functions as the landowning unit. And in those societies a cash economy has become predominant through copra trading and off-island work, among others, since early in this century. During both the Japanese and American mandates many men earned cash by working in phosphate factories (Angaur Is. or Nauru Is.), for the government, or in stores and other commercial services in the district centers. Therefore the new tendency was for "rich men" to expropriate lands from others and give lands to their children. They were thus able to establish self-supporting "families," and the reduction in the importance of the descent group resulted in the independence of the *faaminii* or *famili* (family).

Although the descent group has not functioned as a landowning unit, it remains important as a kin group, as seen in the succession to the chieftainship and in individual social status, marriage regulations and the mutual-aid system (Sudo, 1986).

Land Tenure Principles in Palau

Palau is composed of about 350 islands, the largest of which is Babeldaop, a volcanic island with a total area of 370 km². In 1980, 12,116 Palauan people resided in the town of Kokor and in the villages scattered along the coast of the major islands. In aboriginal times the population was probably about two or three times larger.

The total population of Babeldaop Island in 1980 was 4,526. It is divided into 10 states comprising about 70 villages. Each village was traditionally settled by either seven or ten ranked clans (*kebliil*). The eldest man from one of the four highest-ranking clans became the leader of the Village Council (*klobak*), which was composed of the heads of all the local clans.

The clan, which is primarily based on the matrilineal descent, is segmented into lesser units, or lineages (*telungalek*). It is a dispersed, exogamous, named and ranked group. On the other hand the lineage is a landholding unit. Since the post-marital residence is usually patri-avunculocal, a family is composed of a man, his sons, their in-marrying wives and their children. After his father's death, a man usually moves to his mother's village, where his own clan members reside. In this case matrilineality combined with patrilocality results in a degree of flexibility in kin-group membership.

In Palau, land is classified into two categories, public and private. The public lands consist of the interior of islands and mangrove swamps. They are

administered by the Village Council. The private lands consist of house sites, swamp taro patches and gardens on the hillsides. They are traditionally "owned" by a *kebliil*, with use rights granted to affiliated *telungalek* (Sugiura, 1944; Smith, 1977). Although a *kebliil* is primarily based on matrilineal descent, it includes "members" who belong to it through adoption or absorption of other groups.

The *telungalek* is a matrilineal descent group in theory. But it actually includes individuals who are outside this range. Its members are classified into two major categories: *ochell* (child of woman: primary members by birth) and *ulechell* (child of man: secondary and conditional members). A man lives in his father's lineage house site (patrilocal). He used his father's lands while the latter is alive. If he has no house to move to in his mother's lineage land after the death of his father, he has to continue dwelling in his father's house. If his father has no siblings, he can join his father's matrilineage to gain inheritance rights within it.

However, rights to control the disposition of property owned by *telungalek* are mainly determined by the matrilineal principle. The *telungalek* head, who is the oldest man in the highest-ranked line, has the supreme authority. To dispose of property he must gain the consent of his matrilineal clan members (*ochel*), who have "stronger voices" in decisions. Thus the matrilineage lands are mainly inherited through a matrilineal line.

In 1925 the residents began to abandon their villages on the hillsides and to move to the present coastal area. Traditional houses were built on the basalt foundation. According to Smith (1977: 157), Palauan traditional land tenure patterns have been changes as follows: 1) Matrilineal inheritance and automatic use rights in mother's matrilineage have evolved into the tendency of earning landownership or use rights from father's matrilineage; 2) Matrilineages (*telungalek*) may own their own land; and 3) Some land is individually owned.

Land Tenure Principles in Ponape

Ponape is a high island with a total area of 375 km². In 1980 it had a population of 20,341. Ponape is divided into five states or chiefdoms, each of which was originally independent and dominated politically by two lines of chiefs (Nanmwarki and Nahnken), each with particular ceremonial and political functions (Fischer, 1957; Riesenbergh, 1968; Shimizu, 1987). The head of the most important line was Nanmwarki; he was considered the original titular owner of land and seashore in his chiefdom, but who appointed a sub-chief to control each section (*kowshap*). So first-fruits presentations were required. These were basically tribute payments.

Ponapean society is composed of matrilineal descent groups: clans (*sou*), subclans (*keimw*), and lineage (*keinek*). There are 18 or 19 clans on Ponape. Clans are not localized, but they are named, totemic, unilineal and exogamous (Sugiura, 1944; Petersen, 1982; Mauricio, 1987). Each clan segments into a

number of ranked subclans, which control the line of title. Actual genealogical ties among members are ordinarily unknown. But the members of a matrilineage (*keinek*) are usually able to trace their common descent from an ancestress four or five generations back. Matrilineages were traditionally localized landholding groups. Modern Ponapean sections have evolved from older localized matrilineages (Sugiura, 1944: 285; Petersen, 1982: 20). However, due to patrilocal residence, the most common residential group was a small patri-extended family (*peneineinei*).

Land was divided into *nanuwel* (forests or uncultivated lands) and *nanshap* (cultivated lands: swamp taro patches, breadfruit groves or hillside gardens). The former was controlled by the Nanmwarki or section chiefs (Fischer, 1958). The latter was actually used by a patri-extended family, composed of a male lineage member, his sons and grandchildren and their in-marrying wives. (The male lineage member is designated as *ipwuipwu* and his grandchild as *wanumwan*.) These cognates were considered secondary members of their father's matrilineage. They had rights to use and inherit their father's lineage lands. Therefore the individual plots of land were mainly passed on patrilineally from father to son, especially to the oldest son (Imanishi, 1944: 153).

On the other hand, the chieftainship of a lineage or section, individual social status, and ranks and titles were succeeded to through matrilineal descent (Sugiura, 1944; Bascom, 1965). Thus there was no close correlation between descent and succession and land inheritance in traditional Ponapean society. Alkire wrote that choice to affiliate with descent group other than that of the true matrilineage was probably more common early in this century, during the period of depopulation, when proper heirs were scarce (Alkire, 1977: 63-65).

The German Government began enforcing a land reform policy in 1912. This policy purported to establish a sort of individual ownership and patrilineal inheritance of land. It evidently intended to provide each married man with land of his own to exploit and produce copra. A married man actually using a parcel of land was given a "land stamp" for it. Owners were forbidden to divide their land or dispose of it other than to proper heirs, as determined through patrilineal primogeniture (Sugiura, 1944; Fischer, 1957; McGrath and Wilson, 1971).

After these land reforms there was some trouble regarding land distribution. Ponapean society accepted its new rule. In Truk the Germans also issued "land stamps" and attempted to institute patrilineal inheritance of land; but although Trukese obeyed the German land policy superficially, they actually continued to observe the traditional custom of matrilineal land inheritance.

Principles of Land Tenure in Yap and Fais

Yap is a high island 216 km² in area. In 1980 it had a population of 6,670, settled in about 100 small coastal villages. In aboriginal times the population is estimated to have been eight or ten times larger (Marksbury, 1979) (Table 2).

Table 2. Population Density in Micronesia

	Pop. density in early 19C. (per km ²)	Pop. density in 1980 (per km ²)	Pop. increase rate 1937-1980 (%)
Type 1			
Marshall	288	260	220
Truk	150	303	210
Mortlock	450	639	290
Satawal	150	350	140
Type 2			
Palau	75	32	260
Type 3			
Ponape	65	54	250
Type 4			
Fais	202	82	120
Yap	263	30	180

The important kin group and traditional unit of land ownership in Yapese society is the agnatic (patrilineal) lineages, *tabinaw* (lit. "one land"). As residence is usually patrilocal, the residential group is the patri-extended family composed of a man, his sons and their sons and their in-marrying wives and unmarried daughters. This family may live on the lands which belong to a single, named house site. Schneider (1974) has referred to these associated land-parcels as an "estate." Lingenfelter (1975) and Labby (1976) characterized the *tabinaw* as a "landed estate."

A Yapese estate usually consists of one or more houses, several taro patches (*maut*), yam gardens (*milay*), coconut palms (*niw*), grassy uplands (*tayid*), forests (*egaragar*), tracts of sea inside the reef (*daay*) and stone fish weirs (*ech*). The oldest man of a patrilineage heads the estate and has nominal control over all estate land. The Yapese regard these associated land and sea resources as a single unit centered around an elevated stone foundation, on which the main dwelling house is constructed.

This stone foundation is called *dayif* (Mahoney, 1958; Ushijima, 1987). It is important because the rank of a lineage is derived from that of the name-bearing *dayif* itself. It is also the seat of all authority and political rights that belong to an estate. That is, a man is a chief because he holds the chief's land. It is said that a person is not chief; rather, the land is chief. Therefore the "estate" (*tabinaw*) supplies more than just subsistence and living space to its occupants. It is also the source of their social status (Lingenfelter, 1975; Labby, 1976).

The house foundation associated with food resources and social status was traditionally passed from father to son. In particular, the highest titled foundation was inherited by the oldest son. Labby observed: "While the eldest son

would inherit his father's house and authority, younger sons would be given plots carved out of the father's estate on which they could build new foundations and houses and start new estates" (Labby, 1976: 16-17). The married-out women retained some rights in their patrilineage, and after giving birth they were given small plots of land by their father's lineage. When they had no male siblings, they could inherit their lineage lands (Mahoney, 1958).

Today, however, owing to depopulation there no longer exists a definite and rigid inheritance rule. In his survey of all the lands in Rang village, Fanif municipality, Ushijima found 40 house foundations, including abandoned examples. Of these, 12 were acquired through patrilineal inheritance, 11 from in-marrying women, 10 from married-out women's husbands and 7 from non-related individuals (Ushijima, 1987: 71). In this case, the number of traditional inheritance examples is only 12.

The other kin group of importance on Yap is the clan, a dispersed matrilineal, exogamous, and named descent group. It functions primarily as a marriage regulating and mutual-aid group.

In precontact times Yapese society had the experience of expanding population and land scarcity (Table 2), and the subsistence economy changed from slash-and-burn agriculture to a more intensive form of agriculture—swamp taro cultivation. Accompanying this change in agriculture, a patrilocal/patrilineal system began replacing the matrilineal/matrilocal form of organization (Labby, 1976: 122). The coexistence of the agnatic and matrilineal descent groups in Yap resulted from the change of subsistence form accompanying social organization in precontact times.

These phenomena are observed on Fais Island, lying 180 km east of Yap. Fais Island is a raised coral island with a total area of 2.5 km². In 1980, 207 people lived on Fais. The unit of landholding is the agnatic descent group (*bogota*), living male agnates with their wives and children. The *bogota* shares a common cookhouse, burial land and rights to lands. There are two types of land in use on Fais, "garden land" and "forest land." The former is planted mainly in sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*), yams (*Dioscorea alata*) and taro (*Colocasia esculenta*, *Alocasia macrorrhiza*). The latter is planted in coconut palms, breadfruit trees and indigenous hardwood.

The landholdings of each *bogota* are classified into two categories, "permanent land" and "incoming land." Permanent lands are the *bogota's* real or original land. Incoming lands have been passed from *bogota* to *bogota* over 30 years. The predominant occasion for these transactions is either a marriage or the adoption of an infant. At marriage the wife's mother and father, her mother's mother and her adoptive fathers will give several plots of garden or forested land to the husband. These plots serve to provide joint property for the woman's offspring. In return, the husband's relatives customarily may give land outright to the wife's relatives (Rubinstein, 1979: 142-146).

It is of interest that old men know the name of the matrilineal clans (*gay-ilangi*) and six or eight generations of matrilineal ancestry. Although today matrilineal clans have no connection with land and perform no corporate or

communal functions on Fais, these still function as the unit of marriage regulation. I consider that matrilineality on Fais has been displaced by agnatic principle since the last century. My estimation is supported by the change in subsistence economy that has taken place on Fais. According to Krämer, sweet potato cultivation was brought from Yap around 1850 (Krämer, 1937: 330-331) and became a major form of agriculture (Rubinstein, 1979: 14). Accompanying this change in subsistence agriculture was a shift in social organization, whereby a patrilocal/agnatic system began replacing the matriloca/matrilineal form of organization as in the Yap case.

Conclusion

In this paper I have described various aspects of land tenure principles in Micronesian societies. Each society has a tradition of matrilineality. However, there are multiple coexisting tenure categories and there are diverse forms of land use. I have tried to classify them into four types, focusing on the social unit of landholding, the right to exploit lands and the rule of inheritance.

Type 1 societies are marginally productive and have high population densities. In those societies the landowning unit is rigidly arranged by descent principle and the residential unit is a large matri-extended family based on matriloca residence. Married-out male lineage members have obligations to pass on some lands or use-right to their children. This custom of land-gifts functions to keep a balance between group population and food resources.

On the other hand, Type 2 and Type 3 societies have abundant land and low population densities. In those societies lands are nominally owned by the matrilineage, but are actually used by a small patri-extended family because of the custom of patrilocal residence. An individual living on his father's lineage land may choose to belong to either his mother's or his father's side. The systems of ambilateral inheritance choice and the flexibility in group affiliation are the other means of keeping a balance between group population and food resources.

In Yap and Fais, Type 4 societies, food resources are owned by the agnatic (patrilinea) lineage and inherited patrilineally. Especially in Yap, these belong to a "house" as a unit. This system may be the basis for establishing the self-supporting "family."

Murdock's (1948, 1949) general study of social structure and his work on Micronesia both reached the conclusion that descent systems grow out of regular patterns of postmarital residence. That is, patrilocal residence led to patriliney and matrilocality resulted in matriliney.

This emphasis on the direct tie between descent system and residence rule has been applied to the descent systems in the Caroline Islands by Goodenough and Alkire. Goodenough (1968: 143), discussing the Oceanian kinship system, wrote: "Where matriloca residence became the rule, as in the Carolines, the group became automatically matrilineal." Following Murdock's idea, Alkire

(1977: 87) states that the evidence from the strongly matrilineal areas of Micronesia "supports the conclusion that unilineal (matrilineal) kin-groups developed because of a close identification of a residential kin-group with particular land parcels and inheritance rights to such parcels."

These suggestions do not fit the case on Palau and Ponape, which have a matrilineal descent system and a patrilocal residence rule. On the other hand, the classic assumption that matriliney is the product of female subsistence activities and a consequence of matrilocality, is supported neither by the Ponape data nor that from Truk, where women did not traditionally engage in agriculture.

Plasticity or flexibility in social organization is a characteristic of matriliney in Micronesian societies. So it remains important as a type of kin group formation.

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