

THE LAST QUEENDOM OF WOMEN?

A brief social research into Mosuo society – the only matriarchal society in China.

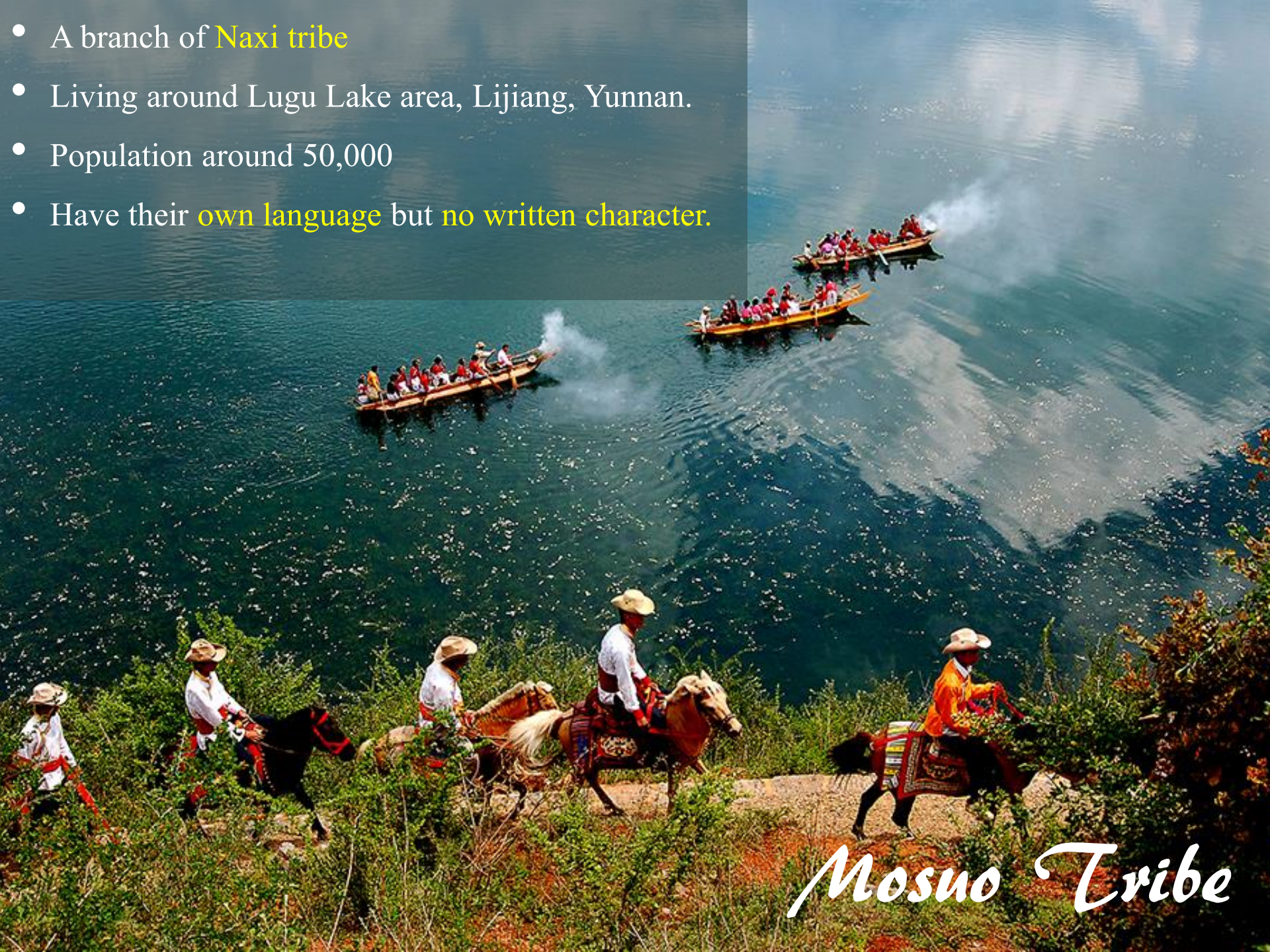
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- A branch of **Naxi tribe**
- Living around Lugu Lake area, Lijiang, Yunnan.
- Population around 50,000
- Have their **own language** but **no written character**.



Mosuo Tribe

LUGU LAKE AREA







SECONDARY RESEARCH

VISITING MARRIAGE

- Visiting marriage is the dominant form of marriages in Mosuo society.
- Two types of visiting marriage: living apart or together
- Unlike arranged marriage, visiting marriage is **not** influenced by **familial** or **financial factors**.
- Visiting marriage follows **monogamy**.
- The marital relationship ends when the couple's **emotional bond** breaks.
- Visiting marriage is based on **equal love**.





SECONDARY RESEARCH CHILDCARE

- Living apart: Children are raised by the **mother's families** and live with them.
- Living together: Children are raised by the couple and their families **together**.
- Living apart: The biological father is **not economically responsible** to his children.
- Living apart: A rite will be held to confirm the children's relationship with their biological father.
- Living apart: The biological father will visit his children occasionally to **fulfill his responsibility**.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

DIVORCE

- 
- A person wearing a red hooded garment and a red and white patterned vest over a white long-sleeved shirt and white trousers stands on the deck of a boat. They are holding a green bag over their shoulder and a red bag in their right hand. The background shows a cloudy sky and a body of water.
- Divorce is easy to access.
 - Divorce is **commonly accepted**.
 - **Children's** opinions are respected.
 - Financial issue is usually settled peacefully.
 - Less likely to have **empty shell marriage**.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

FEMALE STATUS

- **Motherhood** is highly praised.
- Women are granted **more rights and responsibilities**.
- Women tend to be **more economically active** than men.
- Heritage is passed down the **female line**.
- Children take their **mothers'** surnames.
- Women are highly respected, but men are not neglected.



SECONDARY RESEARCH

SEXUALITY AND SHY CULTURE

- Shy culture: It is very **impolite** to talk about sexuality or marriage in public.
- Values behind shy culture relate to **humility, respect, privacy** and a sense of **shame**.
- **Implicit attitude** towards sex
- Still, women have more initiative in their sexual relationship with men.
- No means to know about their attitude towards homosexuality.



SECONDARY RESEARCH

FAMILY STRUCTURE



- In 2000, **69%** of all investigated family were matrifocal, while **20%** were patrifocal. (Source: Yong Ning local government)
- Matrifocal family headed by a **female leader** is the traditional norm.
- Women's opinions are **significant** or even **deterministic** in domestic decisions.
- Men are mainly responsible for taking care of their **sisters' children** rather than their own children.
- Mosuo people are proud of having a **big family**.
- Mosuo people are proud of having a **daughter**.



**House of the eldest female or the
female leader**

**Siblings or
children**

Bonfire

**Siblings or
children**

Gate



PRIMARY RESEARCH

METHODOLOGY

- Two investigators (One male, one female)
- Covert observation for 15 days (12th June 2015– 27th June 2015)
- Content analysis of advertisements
- Visited around 15 households
- Successfully interviewed three family and one innkeeper; 7 people in total aging from 18 to around 60; 3 males, 4 females.(translators included).
- All interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

Inform the interviewee about the research



Acquire consent from the interviewee



Start interview



Notes written by researcher
reconfirmed with the interviewee

THIS IS WHAT WE DISCOVERED

Marriage and Family

- Visiting marriage is **no longer** the dominant form of marriage among Mosuo people.
- Visiting marriage is in **rapid decline** due to **assimilation** of Han culture.
- **Matrilocal marriage** has almost replaced visiting marriage. Marriage between a Han and a Mosuo will follow Han tradition.
- **Neo-local marriage** occurs if the couple are economically capable.
- Even though, children of the couple are **not** closely related to their **father's families**.



Education, Career and Childcare

- Old people are **not educated or poorly educated**. But the **youngest generation** is usually supported by their family to be **educated**.
- **Tuition** is usually paid by the **mother's family**.
- **Both men and women** are encouraged to **work** outside if they are skilled. They are also welcomed to stay at home if they are not.
- Baby boys and baby girls are **equally wanted and treated**.
- People are not judged or treated differently based on **how many children they have**.
- **Childbearing** is seen more as an **ability** of women, rather than a **responsibility**.



**‘DO YOU THINK THAT VISITING MARRIAGE
WILL DISAPPEAR SOMEDAY IN FUTURE?’**

‘I don’t really know... It seems that fewer and fewer people are doing it now. It [marriage] has become more **flexible** than before. But I believe that our culture **will be preserved and passed on.**’

**‘IN YOUR OPINION, WHY DO PEOPLE GET
MARRIED? WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF
MARRIAGE?’**

‘Like... You like a person very very much and then you
want to marry him.’

**DO YOU THINK THAT MARRIAGE IS TO
HAVE A CHILDREN AND TO PASS ON YOUR
BLOOD?’**

No.

'IF A WOMAN HASN'T GOT MARRIED OR HAD A CHILD FOR HER ENTIRE LIFE, WILL YOU FIND THIS A BIT WEIRD OR DO YOU THINK THIS IS OKAY?'

'If she chooses to be like that, then **it is her choice and her life**. My aunt hasn't got married yet and she's in her 30s. We asked her why and she said she just didn't want to get married. Then I think it is totally fine.'

'ACCORDING TO YOUR KNOWLEDGE, DO YOU THINK THAT MOSUO PARENTS WOULD INTERFERE WITH THEIR CHILDREN'S MARRIAGE OR NOT?'

'They usually wouldn't... No, they don't do that.'

'IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO TELL US?'

'We have fathers and husbands
in our society, and we love them.'



OBSERVATION

- ◆ Women **are all working (except the old and students)** either in the field or market during the day.
- ◆ Some households left **a man** at home to look after the house.
- ◆ Men tended to let women to answer our questions.
- ◆ We saw **more Mosuo women than men** on the streets.
- ◆ People of **other ethnic minorities** (Bai, other branch of Naxi tribe) were living in the town as well.
- ◆ Songs sung by Mosuo people were always about **homesick and the beauty of motherhood**.
- ◆ Some areas were **highly commercialised**.
- ◆ Matriarchy was used as an **eye-catcher** by merchants.

EVALUATION OF THEORIES

- Mosuo tribe denies that 'the nuclear family is universal.' (G. Murdock)
- Mosuo tribe denies the theory of men being instrumental and women being expressive. (T. Parsons)
- Mosuo tribe denies the theory of 'children need a positive male figure to grow properly.' (New Right thinking)

EVALUATION OF METHODOLOGY

- **Sample:** Small, gender biased
- **Duration** of observation
- **Misunderstanding**
- Very little quantitative data
- No local history or documents to refer to.
- Some secondary data were **outdated**.

EVALUATION OF METHODOLOGY

- Two researchers carried out the research
- Literature review.
- Reconfirmation with responders
- Primary research is updated.
- Six out of seven responders are local residents/wide age range – more comprehensive and authentic information.

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THANK YOU.