

MATRIARCHY AND “WALKING MARRIAGES” AT THE LUGU LAKE

The Lugu Lake is situated in the north-east of Yunnan Province, China, on the border with Sichuan Province. The lake itself is 2,700 m. above sea level.

The Mosuo people live around the lake and in a valley beyond the Shizi Mountain on the northern edge of the lake. They speak a Tibeto-Burman



Travelling by boat to visit a monastery on Liwubi Island. The boats are built from two dug-out tree trunks and are partly built from planks.



language, practice the Tibetan form of Buddhism and have a culture with strong Tibetan influences.

Mosuo women do not marry in the conventional sense and all children (both men and women) live in their mother's house for the whole of their lives.

When a girl reaches the age of 13, she goes through a ceremony and receives



adult clothes. She is then given her own “flower room”, starts to meet boys and in due course receives a “walking husband”.

“Walking marriages” continue as long as the “husband” continues to visit his “asha” and as long as she continues to open the door for him when he comes to her room. The “husband” can stay the night, must leave at dawn to return to his mother's house. During the Cultural Revolution, husbands and wives were forced to live together, but, after it ended, 80% of them chose to separate.



Left, Mosuo women gossiping behind a chorten with mani stones on the shore of the lake.

Below, three girls sing a toast to visitors entertained in the grandmother's house.



Women control the family's money and all property passes through the female line, although the mother's elder brother takes decisions on matters such as religion and education.

There is no chimney and the smoke percolates through the shingle roof.

The courtyard will contain the "grandmother's house", which is the most important buildings in the complex. This contains the grandmother's box bed, beneath which are drawers containing the family's valuables, the fire with an altar behind is built against the gable and in the opposite corner is another, Buddhist, altar. This room is where visitors are received.



Entertaining guests in the smoke-blackened interior. In the background, the "women's post".

The houses are all of log construction, but are of wide span and have internal posts. The grandmother's house is of two bays, with the space divided by two posts. These are known as the "man's post", nearest the door, and the "women's post", opposite the door, and both posts must be cut from a single tree.