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Introduction

(*english)*

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In this Issue 1 of Volume 2, the Editorial Collective at *Matrix* sought interests from scholars working in East Asia. What does the concept of matriculture evoke in the context of this vast region? The answer is a collection of seven contributions by Yasuko Sato, Tommaso Previato, Pascale-Marie Milan, Siobhan Mattison *et al*, Frédérique Darragon, Yang Fuquan and Lamu Gatusa. The writers examine matriculture in the societies of early Japan and the Sino-Tibetan marches—Kham, Jiarong, Zhaba, Mosuo and Naxi— from distinct yet complementary perspectives: feminist anthropology, history, evolutionary theory, administrative policy, environmental practices, economics, and social organisation. The issue ends with a collection of proverbs, songs and stories in English translation which Lamu Gatusa, Mosuo scholar and poet, recorded from the oral literature of his people.

The contributors to this volume do not speak in a single voice. The matriarchy examined in Darragon's paper is almost diametrically opposed to the maternalism explored in Sato's article. Yet, common threads emerge in overlapping, connecting, and corroborating themes: relatively flexible gender roles (Sato, Milan, Yang, Darragon, Mattison); communal interdependence (Sato, Milan, Mattison); feminine sexual power (Sato, Darragon, Yang); connections to nature and to the cults of nature (Sato, Previato); female household management (Milan, Darragon, Yang, Previato); maternal and filial love (Sato, Lamu Gatusa); linguistic vitality and lyrical poetry (Sato, Yang, Lamu Gatusa). These themes guide the order in which the seven contributions are sequenced, for it is my impression that, read in this particular order, Volume 2, Issue 1 of *Matrix* tells a story that is larger than the sum of its individual parts.

Yasuko Sato explores the writings of feminist activist, poet, ethnologist, and historian Takamure Itsue (1894-1964). Sato proposes to treat Takamure's historical reconstructions of ancient Japanese society as ‘matricultural explorations.'

Sato begins with the ideas that inspired Takamure during her early years as a feminist activist. 'In the beginning, woman was the sun', wrote Takamure's friend and fellow activist, Hiratsuka Raichō, but women had become a dependent and sickly moon reflecting another’s brilliance. Like Hiratsuka Raichō, Takamure Itsue believed that women must reclaim the sun within themselves – the sun being their powers of generation, love, and life. Takamure Itsue was a maternal feminist who upheld maternal empowerment as the font of universal love and true empowerment.

Takamure's historical research into pre-Heian Japan (794-1185 CE) nourished her feminist ideals, particularly when she discovered a matricultural, animist, gender-egalitarian, and clan-based society. Takamure found that this ancient society, in which uxorilocal and duolocal patterns of residence organised family relationships and descent, and poetic lyricism rather than contract and procedure ruled love between women and men, possessed many elements in common with the matrilineal societies anthropologists have described in other parts of the world, and in particular, the Iroquois confederacy of North America and the Minangkabau of Indonesia. Yasuko Sato extends Takamure's anthropological interests by comparing her reconstructions of ancient Japanese society with the socio-cultural mode at work among the Mosuo people of Southwestern China.

Takamure saw in matricentric societies a model for the future of humanity and an antidote to the commercial, urban-based, patriarchal social structures that reduce men as well as women to various modes of servitude, and nature to destruction. Yasuko Sato's article makes a feminist plea for a kinder, nurturing, gender-egalitarian world based on Takamure's own vision of a benevolent past and the possibility of a better future.

Tommaso Previato is concerned with the intersection of eco-sustainability, development policies, Indigenous beliefs, and gender practices in southwestern China. Previato discusses China's economic development and environmental policies in the context of the ritual economy of two ethnic communities of the southwestern province of Yunnan: respectively, Deqin (Diqing) and Yongning (Ninglang). Current government policies of economic development and environmental sustainability, Previato writes, are informed by scientific and technological understandings. These leave little room for the traditional practices and knowledge informed by local religious and cultural traditions in which women play significant roles.

Previato refrains from appealing to an intrinsic metaphysical relationship between women and nature that reproduces negative traditional dichotomies of women as nature and men as culture. However, he does argue that Indigenous religious traditions and women's roles within them have long made significant and worthwhile contributions to environmental sustainability. Amongst the Khamba and the Mosuo, as amongst other Himalayan people, kinship patterns and animistic beliefs are essential to preventing environmental over-exploitation and preserving natural environments. In Deqin, women are at the economic and affective center of patrilineal polyandrous households and act as household heads alongside their husbands or even on their own. On the ritual front, men are closely involved in the Buddhist tradition while women have the primary ritual responsibility to propitiate the *klu* spirits of nature upon whom the fertility and the health of crops, animals, and, ultimately, humans depend. The Mosuo people of Yongning inhabit a matricultural and feminized landscape. Their tutelary goddess is the divine mountain Gamu, located on the shore of Lake Lugu, the Mother Lake. Like the *klu* spirits, Gamu is responsible for the fertility of people, animals, and crops.

Previato shows that taboos associated with the spirits of nature in Yongning, as in Deqin, prevent deforestation, illegal lumbering, overhunting, the fouling of waterways, and so forth, any of which might elicit the wrath of the gods and spirits of nature, with consequences for the health of crops, animals, and people. He argues that women's engagement with their community, ritual exchanges between people and nature, responsible planning, and the management of resources are interdependent. Previato concludes that kin-based arrangements, religious norms, and taboos,

however interesting in themselves, also motivate economic choices essential to successful environmental policy making.

Pascale-Marie Milan explores practices of cooperation among the Na (Mosuo) people of the mountain village of Lijiazui. Removed from the tourist economy of the Yongning basin, the Na of Lijiazui practise subsistence agriculture, as they have done for centuries. To meet the necessities of everyday life and to accomplish the demanding tasks of agricultural labour, wood-cutting, and house building, Na families depend on the cooperation of household members and on broader networks of friendship and mutual aid. In examining Na practices of mutual aid and the moral economy entwined in these practices, Milan analyses an aspect of Na society that has received relatively scant attention from anthropologists, who have focused on gender and kinship. Anthropologists have been especially interested in the question of whether Mosuo society should be regarded as matrilineal or house-based. In the simplest terms, the 'house' may be understood here as a social unit of mixed composition focused on its own reproduction rather than on the continuity of a lineage. Among the Na, the house includes the people and the animals who live within the walls of the architectural structure. Constructed according to symbolic rules and principles, the Na house is a representation or, rather, a manifestation of the cosmos. In fact, Milan's discussion makes significant contributions to both the field of Na moral and material economics, and the field of Na kinship.

While Milan agrees that the house is the fundamental unit of Na society, she extends the analytical field to the matrilineage, and beyond the matrilineage to the village. She provides the emic perspective that the composition of the Na house is dependent on the ability of households to meet two essential needs: the everyday provision of the necessities of life (household labour) and the reproduction of the house itself (biological reproduction). Both of these continuities are dependent on a certain gender ratio. Hence, houses may adopt children of either sex, taking in a ‘son-in-law’ if having only daughters, in order to meet their material needs, or a ‘daughter-in-law’ to meet biological reproductive needs. Milan then shows that descent and the matrilineal standard play a major role in these decisions. New house members are recruited on the basis of genealogical relatedness and of their belonging to the same matrilineage. However, the members of a house may also decide to make do with an unbalanced gender ratio in order to maintain the consanguineous composition of their household when they are confident that the mutual aid system will allow them to meet their labour needs.

Milan's ethnography reveals that mutual aid practices form a true system of cooperation which functions on a hierarchy of preferences and modalities in which degrees of kinship relatedness play a fundamental role. She concludes that anthropological theory needs to differentiate between the Na ideal system, which is matrilineal, and the practical adaptations which Na households make in order to meet the necessities of existence. The latter do not cancel out the Mosuo matrilineal system or Mosuo matriculture.

Siobhan Mattison heads a team of fourteen researchers studying the development of the Mosuo dual-descent kinship system from a multi-disciplinary and evolutionary perspective. The joint authors investigate the transitions that may have led to the existence of a matrilineal system in the Yongning basin and a patrilineal system in Labei among people with a single culture, a common language, and a shared identity.

The authors begin by contextualizing their approach and clarifying how contemporary evolutionary anthropological theory differs from Bachofen, Morgan, and Engels' constructs. Engels and Marx's theory of cultural evolution became a core doctrine of Chinese communist discourse generally and a core principle of the Chinese social sciences after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. From the perspective of Chinese social sciences (history and ethnology), matriliny and matriarchy are not differentiated as they are in Western anthropology. Just as importantly, in both classic evolutionary anthropological theory and Engels-Marxian historical materialism, matriliny/matriarchy and patriliny/patriarchy are inevitable stages of development obeying historical law. Accordingly, matriliny must precede patriliny and not the other way around.

The authors make clear that while contemporary evolutionary theory attempts to understand and find explanations for the diversity of human kinship systems, it departs from the unilineal and universal theories that typify classic evolutionary approaches in anthropology. Contemporary evolutionary anthropological theory is interested in the factors that may establish the central role of women or alternatively limit the role of men in any given social system. The authors signal two correlates of matriliny: matrilineal systems exist alongside low paternity investment, in which men see little advantage to investing in offspring they cannot be sure they have fathered, and within economic systems that do not benefit men disproportionately. But whether from a classic evolutionary anthropological perspective or a contemporary one, Mosuo society with its dual matrilineal and patrilineal system raises questions: how did these differences in kinship norms arise in a single cultural and social context? Did Mosuo society originate in matriliny, patriliny, or yet another system?

Mattison *et al*. explore these questions in the context of the matrilineal villages of the Yongning basin and the patrilineal villages of Labei. DNA data analysis supports a transition to matriliny about a millennium ago among the Mosuo people of Yongning, and a later transition among the people residing in Labei, followed by yet another transition from matriliny to patriliny among the people of Labei about two hundred and fifty years ago. Taking into consideration data from historical, ethnohistorical and kinship studies, the authors conclude that matricultural ideals define Mosuo society whether Mosuo families are matrilineal, patrilineal or conjugal-nuclear.

Frédérique Darragon discusses the social customs of the people of the Sino-Tibetan borderland: Zhaba, Mi Nyag, Jiarong (rGyal-rong') and Mosuo. She posits their origins in the Eastern Nüguo, a queendom of the east recorded in the Sui (581-605 CE) and Tang (618-907 CE) *Histories*. Darragon's paper opens on a description of societies where women have sexual freedom and high social status, which she notes are in sharp contrast with Tibetan customs.

On the basis of linguistic, cultural, and historical data, Darragon argues that the matricultures of Sichuan and Yunnan have significant historical depth and links to the Qiang cultural sphere. Darragon links the marriage-less societies of Sichuan and Yunnan to the matriarchal (Qiang) state of Dong Nüguo (Eastern Queendom). She attributes the survival of matricultural modes of these contemporary societies to the resilience of a cultural system that offers advantages to both women and men, and to the particularities of Chinese Imperial policies which, during many centuries of indirect rule, refrained from Sinicizing the fiercely independent people who lived in impassable mountain terrains on the margins of the empire.

Darragon then turns her attention to the Chinese historical records, providing a previously unpublished inventory of sources that mention the Nüguo. No fewer than seventeen tributary

missions were sent from the Nüguo to the Chinese Imperial court between the sixth and tenth centuries CE. The documents provide the names of queens and their envoys, as well as information about the roles of women and men in politics, economy, and war. Darragon concludes that the Nüguo afford not only historical evidence of the origins of matricultures in the Sino-Tibetan Marches, but also proof of the historical existence of matriarchy. This last is a concept fiercely resisted not only in anthropological theory but also among feminist scholars, among whom some have redefined the term *matriarchy* as matricentric or matrifocal and not the reverse of patriarchy. Darragon notes that, in contrast to their Western counterparts, Chinese scholars are not troubled by the idea that women could rule over men and that they could have done so in historical times. Darragon explains this difference of perspective in light of the particularities of Chinese intellectual and philosophical traditions, and the particularities of Chinese historiography. For Darragon, matriarchy means the rule of women. She argues that, in light of the Chinese historical record, academic reticence regarding the historical possibility of women's rule amounts to an indefensible taboo anchored in persistent gender prejudice.

Yang Fuquan is a professor and former vice-president of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. A member of the Naxi nationality, Yang Fuquan has spent decades recording and studying the tangible and intangible culture of the Naxi people. For this issue of *Matrix*, he has contributed an essay on the history of the Naxi love suicide custom. As recently as the mid-twentieth century, love suicide had such high romantic value among Naxi youth that it had become customary, causing young people to die in alarming numbers. The love suicide custom was extinguished post-1949, following the newly-established Communist authorities' abolition of arranged marriage and their implementation of free-choice marriage.

Yang Fuquan book-ends his essay by drawing attention to the fact that the Naxi love suicide custom was a complex phenomenon intrinsically attached to Naxi cultural modes, economics, history, and politics. In this essay, he has opted to focus on the policies of assimilation which the Qing emperors imposed on the Naxi during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1723, after centuries of indirect Imperial rule characterised by non-interference in local customs, the Qing emperor mandated the naturalisation of the Naxi into the Imperial system of administration. The mandate imposed Confucian moral and ritual norms on the Naxi, forcing the local population to comply with extensive customary changes and to adopt new cultural attitudes. Chinese ideas about family and decent, the status of women, notions of chastity, and ritual pollution were imposed on the Naxi's traditionally flexible patrilineal family arrangements. Women suffered tremendously, and like the women Takamure Itsui encountered in Heian Japan, Naxi women expressed their grief and resentment in songs. Invoking historical sources and referencing a range of cultural data, Yang argues that Naxi women had once benefited from the sexual freedom and high social status customarily enjoyed by women of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. Furthermore, Yang writes, even after 1723, Naxi society was not evenly Confucianized: Qing magistrates never managed to establish gender segregation among the Naxi and youths continued to engage in pre-marital love affairs, even though betrothal arrangements had become immutable and unwed pregnancy now imposed an unbearable and unforgivable disgrace. When Confucian expectations blended with the age-old customs of free love and traditional romantic ideals, Naxi girls chose romantic love over arranged marriage, and suicide over social ignominy.

Lamu Gatusa closes these discussions with a collection of pieces from Mosuo oral literature recorded in the 1980s and presented here in English translation. Lamu was born in Labei and is a member of the Mosuo people. He is a senior academic at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences

and a poet. In 1992, Lamu Gatusa and I spent several months in Kunming reading his translations of Mosuo literature into Chinese, which I then transcribed and translated into English. The work was especially rewarding as Lamu Gatusa explained every nuance and subtlety, and contextualised metaphors and cultural references. In all, we translated an estimated tenth of Mosuo Ddaba ritual literature, including wedding (Labei) and funeral songs. We also translated songs dedicated to mothers and to lovers, songs about the horse caravan, proverbs, myths, and fables. The texts selected for this issue illustrate the themes presented in the six articles summarised above, and shine a light on Mosuo matriculture from within. Lamu Gatusa provides short background discussions and explanations to contextualise the stories and aspects of the poetic language that are inevitably lost in translation.