



## Discussion

CHRISTINE MATHIEU, PhD

### Matricultural resilience in historical context: a focus on the Nazi nationality

In the Sino-Tibetan Marches, the number seven is a feminine number. Seven is associated with matrilineal, mountain valleys, and rivers, and it is the agent of change. It seems a poetically appropriate coincidence that Volume 2, Issue 1, of *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* should contain seven contributions on the matricultures of East Asia. These seven contributions offer a multifaceted approach on matriculture, examining history, religion, economics, and intangible cultural modalities. If the approaches featured in this issue are diverse, so are the family systems. Sino-Tibetan kinship modes are diversified and flexible: polyandry, polygyny, monogamy, patrilocality, matrilocality, neolocality, patrilineality and matrilineality are all found in this region.

The kinship systems explored in the present collection, being specifically concerned with matricultural modes, tend to promote sibling relationships over individual conjugal ties: brothers and sisters were at the core of royal and commoner families in ancient Japan (Sato) as they are today in the marriage-less families of Zhaba and Yongning (Darragon, Milan, Mattison *et al*). The polyandrous households of Deqin are likewise centred on sibling relations (Previatio), and the patrilineal Mosuo families of Labei confirm a brother's lifelong interest in his sister's welfare.

Yet, conjugal ties are not entirely absent from these social arrangements. Nor do conjugal ties cancel out matricultural ideals. Married women are their husbands' equals among the patrilineal Mosuo people of Labei, where they are *dabu* (household heads), just as are sisters among the matrilineal Mosuo people of Yongning (Mattison *et al*; Mathieu, 2003). According to Previatio, marriage establishes women as household heads among Khamba polyandrous households (Previatio). In fact, conjugal ties also play a role in the continuity of the marriage-less Mosuo households, where a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law may be taken into the house to balance the gender ratio needed for labour or for biological reproduction (Milan). It is remarkable that among the Mosuo, kinship diversity should be notable for the geographical distribution of matrilineal and patrilineal families rather than for its impact on the moral economy of Mosuo society.

The matricultural ideals that imbue both matrilineal and patrilineal Mosuo families are especially salient when, as Milan writes, we set our sights beyond the household. From my own research



experience, matrilineal ideals are especially salient when we consider the role of ancestors in the Mosuo worldview. The Mosuo worship their ancestors: they offer them daily libations and invite them to all major rituals, and their traditional Daba religion is entirely focused on ancestor worship. In Daba religion, there are two types of souls: the souls of one's own ancestors and the souls of other people's ancestors. The former are benevolent (so long as the living offer the correct rituals and take care of them), the latter are dangerous and the cause of all calamities. Indeed, a living family is not a synchronic unit but a link between a long line of predecessors and future generations. Importantly, in the Mosuo worldview, both men and women are full members of their family lines and both female and male ancestors are worshipped. Milan reports that when a female sexual partner is brought into a matrilineal household, she continues to honour her own ancestors as well as honouring the ancestors of the house into which she has been adopted. Meanwhile, in Labei, when people marry, the core concern of the Daba ritual consists in ensuring that the bride's ancestors do not follow her into her husband's house because ancestors (also) belong to women. Mosuo ancestral lines have a persistent and unequivocal connection to women among both the matrilineal and the patrilineal families.<sup>1</sup>

The Sino-Tibetan borderland is characterised by socio-cultural flexibility. The diversity of kinship systems found in this region is matched by a diversity of ethnic people whose social and territorial claims depend on demographic strength rather than on exclusive boundaries. Thus, interspaced Naxi, Tibetan, Qiang, Yi, Lisu, Bai, and Pumi (Premi) villages and households are found within Tibetan, Naxi, Bai, and Pumi dominated territories. In these settings, kinship organisation is not always dependent on ethnic identification. The Naxi people who live among the Pumi nationality of Muli have polyandrous families, and the Pumi people who live in the Yongning basin among the Mosuo have marriage-less matrilineal families. In other words, Sino-Tibetan kinship organisation may be less a function of ethnicity than of geographic location.

Such diversity speaks for adaptability and pragmatism. The societies of the Sino-Tibetan borderland are founded in subsistence economies and in the physically demanding existence of a challenging environment. Kinship is flexible because life demands practical solutions to issues of social, economic, and biological reproduction, but social flexibility is also enabled by a particular worldview about fertility and prosperity and the roles of women and men. This worldview places high value on the life-giving powers of women because it does not dissociate economic prosperity from general well-being, human fertility from economic prosperity, and female fertility from female sexuality. Nor does it entirely dissociate the material from the spiritual or the biological from the social. It is a worldview, in other words, that values life in the communion of nature and culture, in large part, no doubt, because in this formidable and ever-present mountainous environment, nature commands uncircumventable respect.

Kinship, however, is also socially constructed. Dominant and antithetical kinship systems as existed until recently amongst the Mosuo and the Naxi are found in regions closest to the historical centres of political power because these kinship systems and the societies they once organised are also the product of a very long history. Located at the crossroad of Qiangic, Burmese, Yi, Tibetan, Mongol, and Chinese civilisations and empires, the people of the Sino-Tibetan borderland have

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Mathieu, 'The Moso *Daba* Religious Specialists', in *Naxi and Moso Ethnography: Kin, Rites, Pictographs*, eds. Michael Oppitz and Elisabeth Hsu (Zürich: Völkerkundemuseum, 1998), 209-34.

witnessed waves of invasions, conquest, and migrations. These have left impressions on social organisation. Perhaps nowhere is it more evident than in the history of the Naxi nationality, one of fifty-six officially identified nationalities (*minzu*) which make up the Chinese state, among whom the Han nationality accounts for 91% of the total state population.

History has shaped the social present and the collective memories of the Naxi Nationality [*Naxizu*], whose people dwell on opposite shores of the Jinshajiang river (*Gold Sands River*), as the Yangtze River is known in these parts. On the eastern shore, Na people self-identify as Mosuo and their territories are divided between Yongning in Yunnan province and Zuosuo in Sichuan. Yongning is also the name of the township and the ancient Mosuo capital. On the western shore of the Jinshajiang are the Naxi, with their capital at Lijiang. In the 1950s, at the onset of the People's Republic of China, the Naxi and the Mosuo dwelt in very distinct socio-cultural realms marked by antithetical kinship systems and gender relations. The Mosuo were then, as they are now, renowned for their customs of free love and their matrilineal families. By contrast, the Naxi were patrilineal and had earned a tragic reputation on account of their strict marriage rules and the inordinate number of young people who committed love suicide. Yet, both peoples had deep historical roots in common. For centuries, the ancestors of present-day Naxi and Mosuo were known to the Chinese under the common ethnonym of *Mo-so* and, in 1956, both communities were officially identified as a single Naxi nationality. These observations raise evident questions for social scientists, for if the Naxi and the Mosuo were once a single ethnic group, and if they are still classed today as a single nationality, how did their respective (pre-1949) kinship systems come to diverge so dramatically? A number of scholars, including Yang Fuquan in this issue, believe that Naxi society was in earlier times more akin to Mosuo society, and that the Naxi developed harsher forms of patriarchy under Confucian and Imperial pressure. According to the contribution of Mattison *et al* to this volume, however, matriculture was more than likely *not* a universal feature of Mosuo society over a thousand years ago. From the Naxi Dongba manuscripts –whose contents Chinese scholars date to the Tang period (618-907) – it is clear that proto-Naxi worldview was founded in a powerful binary principle and gender complementarity rather than in the matrilineal/matricultural ideals found in Mosuo society or the patrilineal/patriarchal ideals which were still extant in Lijiang in the twentieth century. Should we then presume that Mosuo and Naxi cultural outlooks were always divergent, very much as they are today, or should we entertain the possibility that the cultural history of northern Yunnan is both complex and diversified? The latter seems to be in order, for the historical record strongly suggests that matrilineality and matriculture came to northern Yunnan in the course of history, and that it once had a presence on the Lijiang side as well as on the Yongning side of the Jinshajiang.

Matriliny possibly has a very ancient history in northern Yunnan. In the fifth century CE, the region was invaded by Dianxi tribes under their leader Meng Cucu. While very little is known about Meng Cucu, the Dianxi were Qiang, amongst whom some tribes were noted in the Chinese records as people who 'know their mothers but not their fathers'. Chinese scholars generally understand the latter to infer matrilineality, as Darragon does in her article.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, there is also an historical link between the peoples of northern Yunnan and the Dong Nüguo, the matriarchal queendom of the

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph F. Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom of South-West China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1947); *Naxizu Jian Shi* [Brief history of the Naxi Nationality] (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1963); Christine Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study of the Ancient Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland: Naxi and Mosuo* (Lewiston NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003); see also Darragon's article in this issue.

Sui (581-601) and Tang (618-907) dynasties explored in Darragon's article. For the name of a queen of Nüguo, Ngue, appears in the genealogical records of the Lijiang feudal lords and more precisely, with the tenth century proto-Naxi chief La-tu Ngue-Jun.<sup>3</sup> However, to appreciate the significance which the name Ngue potentially holds for the history of matriculture amongst the Naxi and Mosuo, it is necessary to backtrack to the eighth century, to the first historic ancestor of the Naxi chiefs and the Nanzhao conquest of northern Yunnan, when the Naxi and the Mosuo's ancestors still dwelt under a common tribal polity on either side of the Yangtze River.<sup>4</sup>

### **Patrilineality and marriage alliances among the elite clans of northern Yunnan in the Nanzhao period (713-902)**

Discussing the transformations of gender roles which were imposed on the Naxi people of Lijiang during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), Yang Fuquan notes that, in ancient times, Naxi ancestors carried the clan names of their mothers and wives. In fact, these ancient names are found in the Naxi Dongba religious manuscripts as well as in the genealogical records of the Lijiang rulers. These names were made up of four syllables identifying the Mother's clan name, Father's personal name, Wife's clan name, and Ego's personal name, in this order. This four-syllable naming system, however, did not identify a matrilineal system but rather a patriline and marriage alliances. In other words, the naming system reflects avuncular concerns. Evidently, avuncular kinship *per se* is neither an index nor a recipe for matriculture because it is compatible with both matriliney and patriliney, as well as with extreme patriarchal systems in which women pass from their fathers and brothers' tutelary control to that of their husbands. Nevertheless, as it is exemplified amongst contemporary Mosuo patrilineal people in Labei and among the Nuoso people of Liangshang (Yi nationality in Ninglang county and the immediate neighbours of the Mosuo), avuncular kinship in the Sino-Tibetan region is characterized by the high status of wife-givers, enduring brother-sister ties, and the high-status of women.

In the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family*, composed in 1516 by the Naxi headman Mu Gong, the four-syllable naming pattern is specifically attached to the ancestors recorded between 714 and 902 CE.<sup>5</sup> The names and the biographical notes Mu Gong provided in this record give a great deal of information with which one can recover the history of Naxi and Mosuo kinship.

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3 See Mathieu 2003, 56-7 and 392-407.

4 The Nanzhao (Southern Kingdom) ruled present day Yunnan province and extended into present day Myanmar; its capital was at Dali. Nanzhao conquered Lijiang in 702 CE. Lijiang and Yongning passed between China, Tibet, and Nanzhao (later the Dali Kingdom) until the Mongol conquest brought the province that became Yunnan into the Chinese empire in the thirteenth century.

5 Mu Gong composed two Chronicles: the first in 1516 and the other in 1545. There are glaring discrepancies between them, as well as mythical stories mixed in with historical events, and strange generational gaps. J.F. Rock and the twentieth-century descendants of the Mu family who showed Rock these documents found much of their contents incomprehensible. In my doctoral research, I proposed that these genealogical chronicles make historical sense when they are read through the lenses of myth and symbolism because in these documents, history is sacralised. The reading I give in this discussion is based on Christine Mathieu, *Lost Kingdoms and Forgotten Tribes: Myths, Mystery and Mother-right in the history of the Naxi nationality and the Mosuo people of Southwest China*, PhD dissertation, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia, 1997, and Mathieu 2003. See Rock 1947, and Mathieu 1997 and 2003.

Beginning in the fourteenth century, the rulers of Lijiang had the clan name Mu but tradition relates that their original ancestor was a member of the Yang clan. Mu Gong's genealogy confirms this with a first ancestor named Yang Gu<sup>6</sup> (also pronounced *Ye Gu* in Naxi), who is said to have arrived in Lijiang in 714 CE, which is to say, with the Nanzhao conquest of northern Yunnan. In this same genealogy, Yang Gu is himself preceded by six mythical ancestors, among whom figures Meng Cucu (the fifth-century leader of the Dianxi mentioned above); heading the list of these six mythical ancestors is none other than the founding ancestor of the Naxi people, the mythical hero Coseilee'ee.

Coseilee'ee, hero of the Naxi creation myth, survived the primordial flood and married the Celestial princess Ceiheibubami. The story of their marriage is recorded in Naxi Dongba religious manuscripts and is told during many rituals. In particular, the story of Coseilee'ee and Ceiheibubami is told on the occasion of the Sacrifice to Heaven, which commemorates the Naxi's mythic ancestors and the marriage of Heaven and Earth. During Imperial times, the Sacrifice to Heaven was primarily concerned with renewing the Naxi pledge to their feudal lords and their feudal lords' pledge to the Chinese emperor, while during the twentieth century, it was also concerned with renewing the solidarity of Naxi patrilineal lines.<sup>7</sup> By linking Yang Gu's origins to the hero of the flood, to the Sacrifice to Heaven, and to the foundation of the Naxi people, the sixteenth-century chief Mu Gong placed his own genealogy at the apex of sacred and cosmic time in the royal traditions of Tibet, Nanzhao, South, and East Asia,<sup>8</sup> for the primordial flood and the marriage of Heaven and Earth are emblems of kingship among Tibetans, Yunnanese, and South Asians.<sup>9</sup>

Yang Gu's descendants had four-syllable names, and they ruled over northern Yunnan from father to son, from the Nanzhao conquest of 714 to the fall of Nanzhao in 902 CE.<sup>10</sup> This four-syllable naming system, however, is itself a variation on the genealogical patronymic linkage system of the Tibeto-Burman clans of Nanzhao. In the Nanzhao system, a man's name is made up of two syllables: his father's name and his own. The genealogies of Nanzhao elite families thus consisted of lists of father-son names.<sup>11</sup> The four-syllable names in Mu Gong's genealogy have at their core these same father-son links to which are added the names of the clans from which men took their wives. Yang Gu's successors were named:

Yang Gu

**La-gu Pu-meng**

**Pu-meng Pu-wang**

**Pu-wang La-wang**

**La-wang Xi-nei**

**Xi-nei Xi-ge**

6 Yang Gu is actually given as Yang-Yin Du-Gu, a cosmic pun on *Yin-Yang*, the intricacies of which are too complex to be explained in the current discussion. For details, see Mathieu 2003, 79-83.

7 See Mathieu 2003, 295.

8 See Mathieu 2003, Chapter II.

9 Jean Przyluski, 'La princesse à l'odeur de poisson et la Nagi dans les traditions de l'Asie Orientale', *Études Asiatiques* 2 (1925), 265-84.

10 See Rock 1947 and Mathieu 2003.

11 Lo Ch'ang-p'ei, 'The Genealogical patronymic linkage system of the Tibeto-Burman speaking tribes', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 8 (1945), 349-63; Paul Pelliot, 'Deux itinéraires de Chine en Inde', *Bulletin de L'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, Tome IV (1904), 131-413; Mathieu 2003, 58 and 317.

**Xi-ge La-tu**  
**La-tu Ngue-jun**

The important thing to note is that Yang Gu married a woman of the La clan as shown by his son's name: **La-gu Pu-meng**. La-gu Pu-meng for his part married a woman of the Pu clan, and so forth. The name patterns in this genealogical segment show that between the eighth century and the turn of the tenth, the Yang chiefs married women from three other clans, the La, Pu, and Xi, and that their marriages occurred on the basis of matrilineal alliances with the Pu and the Xi, and recurring alliances with the La, which is the clan into which his own great-grandfather married. In other words, the name patterns indicate a tribal system held together by four clans: the Yang, the La, the Pu and the Xi, in which the Yang and the La dominate.

Mu Gong's *Genealogical Chronicles* are steeped in symbolism and magical reckonings because myth and history run in parallel and entwine to confirm the Nanzhao conquest of Lijiang as a cosmic event. In the myth, in times before time, a great flood destroys the known world and extinguishes humanity. One man survives, Coseeilee'ee, who has the favour of the gods. But Coseeilee'ee is alone and lonely on the empty earth, and he is eager to re-start humanity. In desperation, he ascends to Heaven to seek a wife. The Celestial Ceiheibubami falls in love with him but her father Ze-La Apu (*Grandfather Ze-La*) is more than reluctant and devises a series of treacherous trials with the goal of killing the upstart. Thanks to Ceiheibubami's intelligence and magic, the helpless Coseeilee'ee manages to overcome all the hurdles, Ze-La finally relents, and the couple marry. They descend from Heaven to create humanity on Earth. After Coseeilee'ee has learned the rituals to propitiate his wife's Celestial ancestors, Ceiheibubami gives birth to three sons who become the ancestors of the Tibetan, the Naxi, and the Bai (Nanzhao people). Indeed, from the perspective of traditional Yunnanese culture, ancestors rather than biology grant descendants because genealogical descent is a societal rather than a biological arrangement.

The Nanzhao conquered Lijiang during the eighth century and destroyed the previous political order, but brutal war is not sufficient to confer territorial rights. In Yunnan, as common to ancient China and other places in the world, stabilization after conquest required treaties between the warring parties and, not least, the marriage of the conqueror to the widow or daughter of the defeated ruler.<sup>12</sup> The name patterns connected to the Nanzhao period in the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family* show that such a marriage took place between the Nanzhao conqueror and a daughter of the defeated Qiangxi, descendants of the fifth-century chief Meng Cucu.

Yang Gu married A-Yao, a woman of the La clan of Lijiang. The name La means *tiger* and is a symbol of divine kingship among the Qiang. It is also the name of Ze-La Apu, the Celestial Grandfather, and

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<sup>12</sup> When Cao Pi succeeded the Han emperor and established a new dynasty in China in 220 CE, he sacrificed to Heaven and married Han Xiandi's two daughters, just as Emperor Yao had married the daughters of Shun. Charles P. Fitzgerald, *A Short Cultural History of China* (London: Cresset, 1961), 258-9. Refer to the genealogy of the early Tibetan kings in Sarat Chandra Das, *Contributions on the Religion and History of Tibet* (New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House, 1970), 28. In the same vein, Ren Guo, who was invested as king of Yunnan in the wake of the Han conquest, was the son of Asoka and of a celestial princess. The first king of Nanzhao, Xinuluo, married a defeated king's daughter and established the Meng She Kingdom. Yang Chen, *Nan-tchao ye-che. Histoire particulière de Nan-tchao*, trans. Camille Sainson (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1904), 29, 31,33.

father of the heavenly princess Ceiheibubami. In Mu Gong's official genealogy, Yang Gu is the seventh ancestor after the flood. He is the mediator between myth and history because with his marriage to the La 'princess' in historic times, he replayed the union of Cosseilee'ee and Coheibubami in mythic times, which is to say, the union of Heaven and Earth.

Yang Gu, the Nanzhao conqueror, had no ancestors among the defeated Qiang tribes of Lijiang, just as Cosseilee'ee, being the sole survivor of the flood, is a lonely orphan in the myth. And just as Cosseilee'ee must learn to sacrifice to his wife's Celestial ancestors before she may give birth to humanity, so the historical Yang Gu's union with La A-Yao transfers her La ancestors to his own Yang descendants and thus unites the past and the future. The transfer of the ancestors from the La to the Yang confirms the legitimacy of conquest, and makes good on the promise of a new line of rulers and a new 'humanity' in the Yang clan. The various tribes are now united and the brutality of the conquest has been erased.

The cosmic flood is a symbol of dynastic change. The number seven is the agent of change, and it is associated with matriline. In the Naxi cosmogonic myth, the matriline of mythical seven ancestors belongs to the Celestial Ceiheibubami, daughter of the Celestial Ze-La Apu. In the history of Lijiang, the foundational matriline belonged to the daughter of the conquered La clan, who became the wife of the conqueror.<sup>13</sup> The Naxi creation story and the *Mu Chronicles* give cause to believe that thirteen centuries ago, Lijiang political organisation valued (elite) women's natal families as well as patriline.

### ***The matrilineal shift in the 11th century***

The name of the chief La-Tu Ngue-Jun appears in the genealogy of the Lijiang rulers (ca. 902 CE), where it introduces a brand new syllable and with this a brand new clan: the clan Ngue, whose name can be associated with the matriarchal Nüguo. The date 902 is significant because it identifies another landmark event in the history of Lijiang and heralds renewed territorial conflicts. In 902, the ruling clan of Nanzhao was overthrown, and almost four decades later, Duan Siping seized power and founded the Dali kingdom (937 CE). The sequence of events ran in this manner: after the fall of Nanzhao, the tribes of northern Yunnan failed to rally to the Dali kingdom, and sometime later, the Pu tribes recovered their land. Then, at some stage of the 10th century, the Mo-so conquered Lijiang by force and took the land from the Pu.<sup>14</sup>

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13 A lot more can be said about these genealogical and mythical reckonings, including connections to the Tibetan and Bon traditions, and so forth. Refer to Mathieu 2003, for details.

14 The Pu clan figures in the genealogy of Lijiang chiefs among the original clans of northern Yunnan conquered by Yang Gu (see above). Naxi Dongba manuscripts and Mosuo oral traditions associate the Pu with the ancestors of the present-day Pumi nationality; Naxi and Mosuo folk traditions relate that the Pu occupied Lijiang before them. Chinese scholars believe the Pumi to be descended from Qiang tribes. For more details, including information about the populations who preceded the Dianxi in this region, see translations of the *Dushi fangyu zhi yao* [Minutes of the 21st history and FangYu] compiled between 1659 and 1692; the *Ming Histories*, and the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family*, among others, in Rock 1947; Édouard Chavannes, 'Documents Historiques Et Géographiques Relatifs a Li-Kiang', *T'oung Pao*, 13:4 (1912), 565–653; Guo Dalie, 'Naxizu Shi Liao Biannian' [Annalistic Records of the Naxi Nationality], in *Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha*, Vol. 2 (Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1986); *Pumizu Jian Shi* [Brief History of the Pumi Nationality] (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1988); and Mathieu 2003, Chapter IX.

The chieftain La-Tu Ngue-Jun is associated with these latter events and, according to the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family*, with the onset of a long period of political stability which lasted through most of the Song dynasty (960-1279), up until the Mongol conquest of 1253 CE. While Mu Gong does not provide much more information than this, the names of the ancestors he has recorded between 960 and 1253 tell an important story.

Like the names of his Yang predecessors, La-Tu Ngue-Jun's name was composed of his mother's clan name (La), his father's personal name (Tu), his wife's clan name (Ngue), and his own personal name (Jun). The Mo-so conquest of northern Yunnan, like the Nanzhao conquest of the eighth century, is thus marked in the *Genealogical Chronicles* by a marriage between the conqueror and the La clan. But this is not all. According to Mu Gong, La-Tu Ngue-Jun's descendant Ngue-Jun Mou-Ju founded a brand new dynasty called the Mo-so Zhao (*Mo-so Kingdom*) and heralded a new name pattern. Ngue-Jun Mou-Ju's descendants were named:

**Mou-Ju Mou-xi**  
**Mou-xi Mou-cuo**  
**Mou-cuo Mou-luo**  
**Mou-luo Mou-bao**<sup>15</sup>

The name pattern **Mou-x Mou-y** implies that the wives and mothers of Ngue-Jun's descendants belonged to the same clan Mou. Now, keeping in mind that the name Mou is more than likely a transliteration of *Mee* (also *Meng*, *Mai*, *Mi*, *Mu*, *Mo*, *Ma*), meaning Heaven, and therefore an honorific title marking the Celestial status of the tribal chieftains, it is also reasonable to infer that the Mou did in fact succeed each other in a matriline.

There are other indices. To begin with, there are the matrilineal families of contemporary Yongning. Then, there is the name *Ngue*, which potentially ties the Mou to the Nüguo. There is also the name Mo-so, which Chinese scholars believe to have first appeared in the third-century *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, where it is given as Mo-sa and Mo-sha.<sup>16</sup> I heard the name Mo-so (Mosuo) pronounced in this manner in Yunnan in the 1990s. While the suffixes /so/, /sa/ or /sha/ have no meaning in Chinese, they indicate descent in the mother or the wife's line in Tibetan.<sup>17</sup> Finally, there is the Mosuo creation myth. Mosuo cosmogony shares many elements with the Naxi Dongba creation myth (and other regional myths), with the significant difference that where Naxi myth establishes the origins of the Naxi patriline, the Mosuo creation myth is a matrilineal and a matriarchal charter.

The Mosuo are descended from Mumigugumi and Mumijajiami: two Celestial sisters who are daughters of the Celestial Mother, for there is no Mosuo equivalent to Ze-La Apu, the Celestial father of Naxi cosmogony. On the other hand, like the Naxi Celestial Ceiheibubami, the Celestial Mumigugumi falls in love with Codeiliusso, a man who survives the flood (like his Naxi counterpart). But whereas the disgruntled Ze-La Apu eventually relents and allows the Naxi hero to

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15 Rock 1947, 160; Mathieu 2003, 78.

16 *Naxizu Jian Shi*, 16.

17 Rolf A. Stein, *Les tribus anciennes des marches tibétaines* (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1959), 49n137; Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, 3 vols (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1949), 679n7.



marry his Celestial daughter, the Mosuo's Celestial Mother plays a dirty trick on Codeiliusso by engineering his marriage to his beloved's sister, Mumijajiami. When the couple returns to Earth, Mumugugumi is furious with jealous rage. She changes herself into a male monkey and follows them. She then lures Codeiliusso deep into the forest, feeds him delicacies that send him into an enchanted sleep, and goes off to seduce her sister Mumijajiami. From their union, two little half-monkeys, a brother and a sister, are born. Satisfied with her work, Mumigugumi returns to Heaven and Codeiliusso wakes up. He returns to his house where he finds his wife and the half-monkeys. Realising that he is too old to father humanity, he takes pity on the little creatures. He places a cauldron of water to boil over a fire. He pours the scalding water over the children, removing most of their body hair, and humanising them. The Mosuo people are descended from this brother and sister.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family*, oral lore, and mythology corroborate the proposition that matrilineality has historical depth in northern Yunnan. And it is certainly of great interest that the DNA data studies cited by Mattison *et al* lend support to the proposition that there was a shift to matrilineality in Yongning about a thousand years ago, for the latter corresponds to the Mou dynasty, and the foundation of the Mo-so Zhao - as given by Mu Gong in the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family*.<sup>19</sup>

### ***The patrilineal shift in thirteenth-century Lijiang***

In 1253 CE, the Mongols invaded northern Yunnan. The syllable Mou then disappeared from the genealogy of Lijiang chiefs, replaced by the syllable Ah. The first chief to carry this new name is Mou-Bao Ah-Cong. After him, all the descendants up until the Ming conquest of Yunnan in 1381 CE will carry this name. From Mou-ba Ah-cong, they are:

**Ah-cong Ah-liang**

**Ah-liang Ah-hu**

**Ah-hu Ah-lie**

**Ah-lie Ah-jia**

**Ah-jia Ah-de** [who will take the family name Mu and become Mu De in 1381, at the time of the Ming conquest of Yunnan]

The double syllable *Ah* appears with the Mongol invasion; it no doubt belonged to the Mongols, and, in particular, to the Mongol chief who married into the defeated Mou clan. In a second version of his *Genealogical Chronicles*, written in 1545, Mu Gong actually confirmed that his Mongol ancestor Ah-Cong was adopted by the local chief Nian-Luo Nian-Bao (who is Mou-Lou

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18 See the complete English translation of the myth collected by Lamu Gatusa in Mathieu 2003, 427-59.

19 Please note that a minor correction occurred in this sentence on 24 February 2022. The original read as follows: "... DNA data studies pursued by Mattison *et al* show a shift to matrilineality...".

Mou-Bao in the 1516 Chronicle).<sup>20</sup> This story has not been forgotten, and both the Naxi and the Mosuo say that their feudal lords were descended from one of Kublai Khan's officers.

There is no doubt that the syllable Ah is a patronym. In the Mou successions, as in the earlier Nanzhao successions, Mu Gong provided only the personal names of wives, and not their clan names since these appear in their husbands' names. From the Mongol period onwards, however, Mu Gong indicates the names of wives' fathers as well as the wives' personal names.<sup>21</sup>

### ***At the close of the 14th century, Lijiang and Yongning followed their own destinies***

In 1381, the chieftain Ah-Jia Ah-De joined the Ming armies against the Mongols and thus secured his position as well as hereditary rule for his descendants. In gratitude and to show his devotion, Ah-Jia Ah-De requested the Chinese name Mu from the emperor.<sup>22</sup> Ah-Jia Ah-De became Mu De and all his descendants were called Mu. In actual fact, the name Mu (木, meaning *tree*) is not a Chinese surname, but it functions as a Chinese patronym on two counts: it consists of a single syllable placed before the personal name, and it is inherited patrilineally. However, Mu is also a Chinese transliteration of the Naxi *mee* (meaning *heaven* and *celestial*), and of the Naxi sacred *mei* tree, a Naxi *axis mundi* between Heaven and Earth. Not least, the name Mu is also a Chinese rendition of the former name Mou attached to the matrilineal Mo-so Zhao of Mu Gong's first Chronicle, whilst the names Mu, *mee*, *mei* are also associated with Bon and Tibetan royal symbolism.<sup>23</sup>

In 1381 CE, the Hongwu Emperor rewarded Mu De's loyalty with this new patronym and confirmed his descendants' rule over the tribes of northern Yunnan. However, the emperor also reduced Mu De's territories, by dividing them with the Yangtze. The region of Lijiang was from that time forward placed under the hereditary rule of the Mu clan and the region of Yongning under that of the Ah chiefs (Mu relatives). From this time on, once-unified Naxi ancestors became two distinct peoples, today identified as Naxi and Mosuo, who followed their own political and social destinies.

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20 Note that I have simplified the discussion for the present text, because the story surrounding Ah Cong and the Mongols is particularly convoluted. Conscious of pleasing the Ming authorities, Mu Gong omitted all the ancestors before the Mongol invasion, but he also distanced his family's origins from the Mongol conquest. In this new document, the legendary first ancestor is a Mongol called Yeye, who arrived in Lijiang in the twelfth century—a hundred years prior to the Mongol conquest, which is to say, during the period associated with the Mou in the first chronicle. Mu Gong writes that Yeye was a holy man who was carried to Lijiang on torrents of water arising from the Jinshajiang and that Yeye's first named descendant Ah Cong married into the Mou family (now renamed Nian). The name Yeye simply means grandfather (or ancestor), while in Naxi Ye is also *yang*. Yeye's story recalls the Yang clan, flood mythology, the symbolism pertaining to dynastic change, the Mo-so Zhao, and Kublai Khan's conquest of Lijiang in 1253. With Yeye, Mu Gong encrypted the first part of the genealogy he compiled in 1516 (from Nanzhao to the Mongols), while omitting the historical details in their entirety. I will return to this second chronicle as well as to Nian-Luo Nian-Bao further in this discussion. For the details of the two *Genealogical Chronicles*, see Mathieu 2003, Chapter II.

21 Mathieu 2003, 88-9.

22 Note that this is the official version as provided in the Mu genealogies. See Rock 1947.

23 Mathieu 2003, 110-4.

### ***Marriage and mother-right, and the feudalisation of the Sino-Tibetan borderland***

The Yuan and Ming emperors governed the Sino-Tibetan borderlands by indirect rule. As discussed by Darragon and Yang Fuquan, these Chinese emperors showed little, if any, interest in Sinicizing the people on the margins of their empire at that time. However, the emperors were interested in maintaining the rituals of vassalage, in keeping the peace on their frontiers, and in receiving tribute – and from the perspective of the tribal chieftains whose hereditary rule was entirely dependent on Imperial goodwill, satisfying these Imperial wishes demanded local action.

Native chieftains of northern Yunnan had to impose their governance over the clans under their jurisdiction because, until the fourteenth century, tribal societies were still relatively anarchistic groups held together through both matrilineal and reciprocal marriage alliances and prescriptive marriage taboos. They were also caste societies. Nanzhao clans were organised as higher Black and lower White castes. The Mongols, meanwhile, were organised as superior White and lower Black castes.<sup>24</sup> Dongba religious manuscripts make explicit that, in some distant past, Naxi society was also organised into castes which were ranked in the following order of prestige: Per, Na, Boa and Wu (White, Black, Pumi and slaves).

The tribal societies of the Sino-Tibetan frontier were prone to violence. Blood feuds were frequent and arose as a result of arguments over theft, murder, insults, and women. Inter-clan warfare was enabled by a system of marriage alliances that nurtured avuncular concerns alongside the high status of wife-givers and of women. In the first instance, marriage alliances had the potential of forging tribal federations and with this to form alliances that challenged the political *status-quo*. But just as importantly, marriage alliances fostered volatile relationships between in-laws, as fathers, uncles and brothers did not hesitate to take up arms in defence of their daughters, nieces and sisters.<sup>25</sup> To counter blood feuds and to consolidate their political powers, the hereditary rulers of Lijiang and Yongning reformed the tribal polities on both sides of the Yangtze River from tribal and caste societies to class societies. Chinese historians have established that by the mid-sixteenth century, Lijiang was organised as a three-tiered feudal domain composed of aristocratic families, commoners, and serfs.<sup>26</sup> The Ah of Yongning likewise ruled over a three-tiered feudal domain which was only abolished in 1956 and is well remembered by contemporary Mosuo.<sup>27</sup>

During the Ming dynasty (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries), the Mu chiefs of Lijiang expanded their dominion over neighbouring hill tribes and into Tibetan country. They opened their realm to Han immigration (farmers and soldiers), and extended their cultural and civilizational interests. They constructed Taoist, Chinese Buddhist, Tibetan Karmapa, and Nyingmapa Buddhist temples. They wrote poetry and espoused Confucian values (at least officially). In Tibetan territories, they

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24 The Nuosu (today's Yi minority nationality) were still organised on this caste system up to 1956. The Nuosu are said to be descended from the Wuman tribes of Nanzhao. They are the Mosuo's immediate neighbours and the dominant ethnic group of Ninglang County.

25 Alain Y. Dessaint, *Minorities of South-West China* (New Haven: Human Research Area Files Press, 1980), 31. The Naxi king Mu Gong was himself embroiled in such fighting with his own in-laws, the Feng family, in 1528. Rock 1947, 115-6. See also Mathieu 2003, 323-7.

26 Guo Dalie and He Zhiwu, personal communication, Kunming, 1991. Also, *Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha*, Vol. 2, 52.

27 See Rock 1947 for first-hand accounts of feudal Yongning and other feudal domains of the Sino-Tibetan borderland prior to the Communist revolution.

sponsored both Karmapa and Gelugpa temples.<sup>28</sup> At the turn of the seventeenth century, on the eve of the Manchu conquest of China, the Mu governed over a sizable kingdom and diverse people among whom they had established garrisoned towns, and from whom they collected tribute. According to Chinese historians, Lijiang was not only a feudal domain, it was also a militarist organization where, as the traditional Naxi proverb puts it, 'when the peasants are together they are soldiers, when they are dispersed, they are commoners.'<sup>29</sup> It is very likely that this military experience had consequences for gender definitions, and that among the Naxi as among the ancient Mongols, conquest turned men into warriors and women into civilian men.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to their Lijiang cousins, the Yongning feudal lords appear to have opted for territorial contraction. Mosuo leaders came under the growing influence of the Gelugpa church and eventually converted to Buddhism. Due this process, they lost part of their territories, when, in 1700, the La clan of Zuosuo refused to convert and seceded from Yongning with Imperial blessing. In addition, in an attempt to make their realm less attractive to Han immigrants as well as to the fiercely independent Nuosu, Yongning feudal lords reduced the economic potential of their domain by forbidding their subjects from growing rice.<sup>31</sup> The strategy had its rewards: Yongning chiefs were not always able to defend against raiding from the Nuosu, but they maintained stable relations with both the Chinese interior and neighbouring Tibet. As mentioned above, they also retained their hereditary rule until the mid-twentieth century, when the Communist regime abolished the feudal system.<sup>32</sup>

The reorganisation of both Lijiang and Yongning from tribal/caste to class societies necessitated structural changes and, therefore, transformations of the kinship systems. Given what is known of the history of conquest and migration, it is likely that matriliney was not a universal kinship system in Lijiang or Yongning at the close of the fourteenth century. However, taking into consideration the region's ancient connections to the Nüguo and the DNA studies by Mattison *et al.*, there is little reason to doubt that matriliney had a significant presence in Lijiang and Yongning before the feudalization of Naxi and Mosuo societies during the Ming period. The feudal lords of Yongning evidently found political advantage in the matrilineal family system because they actively promoted the marriage-less family, not only among the Mosuo clans but also among the Pumi people living in Yongning, through taxation, ritual, and mythical-moral edicts about the indivisible family and harmonious relations, as exemplified in the proverbs recorded by Lamu Gatusa and reproduced in this issue. To maintain the legitimacy of their own rule, however, the chieftains themselves married.

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28 Karl Debreczeny, 'Dabaojigong and the Regional Tradition of Ming Sino-Tibetan Painting in the Kingdom of Lijiang', in *Buddhism between Tibet and China*, ed. Matthew Kapstein (Somerville MA: Wisdom Publications, 2009).

29 *Naxizu Jian Shi*, 31.

30 In the code of law of Genghis Khan, it is decreed that women were to do men's work whilst men were at the front. Valentin A. Riazanovskii, *Customary Law of the Mongol Tribes (Mongols, Buriats, Kalmucks)* (Kharbin: Art Printing House, 1929), 58.

31 For more details, see *Naxizu jian shi* and Rock 1947.

32 The caste and slave system of neighbouring Nuosu was abolished in that same year. See Alan Winington, *The Slaves of the Cool Mountains* (Berlin: Seven Seas Publishers, 1962), for a first-hand account of the reforms and a remarkable example of applied anthropology.

In Lijiang, on the other hand, elite clans and the families who lived closest to the centres of administrative powers came under a politically restrictive system of marriage alliances governed by patrilateral cross-cousin marriage prescription. In former publications, I pointed to evidence of this marriage prescription in the successions of the Mu chiefs of the Ming and Qing periods (sixteenth-eighteenth centuries) as well as in Naxi Dongba mythology. I posited that the shift from bilateral marriage alliances to patrilateral cross-cousin marriage would have broken the rules of caste endogamy, allowing marriage alliances between White and Black clans, and with this, restructuring the tribal caste system into the feudal class system.<sup>33</sup> However, another structural consequence (or a side-effect?) of this marriage prescription is that patrilateral cross-cousin marriage resulted in a parallel descent system that effectively excluded Naxi women from Naxi patriline. Among the Naxi, as the proverb goes, 'bone begets bone and flesh begets flesh' (bone is the enduring ancestral principle, flesh belongs to the mortal body). In Naxi Dongba religious texts dedicated to the Sacrifice to Heaven, it is written:

As the father walks so the son follows in his footsteps, as the mother walks in the old valley, so does the daughter, so that the custom may not be lost. As the grand-father sacrificed to Heaven, so does the grand-child; as the father sacrificed to Heaven, so does the son. The grandfather teaches the grand-child, and the father the son. It is not the custom for a woman to climb up to the roof of the house.<sup>34</sup>

With this final sentence, the logic of kinship enters the ritual sphere. Naxi and Mosuo houses are representations of the universe, and the roof of the house is a cosmic space: it is between earth and heaven, between people and their ancestors. Naxi tradition forbade women from climbing on the roof of the house because they were excluded from the rituals associated with ancestral cults, including the rituals of the Sacrifice to Heaven. The latter exclusion was all the more salient given that it is during the Sacrifice to Heaven that Naxi sacrifice to their original matriline, to the Celestial father and mother of the Celestial woman who married the earthly man, and from whom the Naxi are descended. In fact, Naxi women were not only excluded from climbing onto the roof, they were ritually confined to the lower levels of the house. Thus, the position of Naxi women in pre-Revolution Lijiang (and beyond) was in sharp contrast to that of Mosuo women who, in their own homes, sit at the high hearth in the place of honour, whether they are heading matrilineal or patrilineal households. It was also in sharp contrast with the position of women in other Sino-Tibetan regions, although there are a few striking similarities between Qiang and Naxi women: both are preferably older than their husbands and both suffer from degrees of ritual defilement that proscribe them from ritual activities (Darragon).

The Naxi feudal system was abolished in 1723 by the Qing emperor; Naxi feudal lords were removed from office and replaced by Imperial administrators, who, as Yang Fuquan describes, instituted Chinese marriage rituals and marriage rules and strict requirements of patrilineal successions upon the Naxi. Chinese marriage rules, however, did not cancel out the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage prescription. This Naxi marriage custom, which was initiated among the elite families of Ming dynasty Lijiang, was still in place among Naxi commoners at the establishment of

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33 Mathieu 2003, Chapter VII.

34 Joseph F. Rock, 'The Muan-pbo Ceremony or the Sacrifice to Heaven as Practiced by the Na-khi', *Monumenta Serica* 13 (1948), 88.

the People's Republic of China in 1949. Indeed, aspects of the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage system were not entirely incompatible with Confucian patrilineal ideals.

### ***Mother-right in Lijiang and Yongning during the Qing dynasty and the Republics (1912-1949 and 1949 onwards)***

From 1723 onwards, the Qing administrators of Lijiang issued several decrees in an attempt to Confucianize Naxi society: the Naxi were expected to adopt Chinese dress, burial, and marriage rites and taboos (Yang). These reforms signalled great cultural change for they were designed to foster, not only Confucianisation but assimilation through inter-marriage between Naxi women and Han immigrants. This Qing policy was strongly resented as well as resisted by the Naxi.<sup>35</sup> There is little reason to underestimate not only the connections between these events and the Naxi love suicide custom as discussed by Yang Fuquan, but also the connections between love suicide and traditional Naxi marriage arrangements. For the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage prescription would have played a significant role in regulating Naxi-Han intermarriages insofar as it guaranteed the reciprocal exchange of daughters between indigenous Naxi families as well as between native Naxi and assimilated Naxi families descended from Han migrants.<sup>36</sup>

Love suicide had Naxi cultural roots, for it was mandated as well as sanctioned by the Naxi Dongba religion. More than likely, the behaviour also had deep historical roots, for it was not unknown among the neighbouring Nuosu, with whom the Naxi shared a number of customs, aspects of language, and a common past in the Nanzhao kingdom. Prior to the abolishment of the caste system in 1956, the Nuosu had a flexible approach to female pre-marital chastity but they strictly forbade female hypogamy and suicide was a mandatory sentence for lovers who broke the rules of caste endogamy.<sup>37</sup> Seen from this perspective, love suicide amongst the Naxi can be understood not only as an act of despair and resistance, but also as a juridical boundary, for suicide was a death sentence. Indeed, if illicit lovers had been allowed to break betrothal promises, they would not have committed suicide, but if illicit lovers had been allowed to break betrothal premises, the Naxi would not have been under the edict of a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage prescription.

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35 In personal communication (1991), Naxi scholars Guo Dalie, and the late He Zhiwu explained to me that the Naxi were fiercely opposed to Han inter-marriage. This is confirmed by eye-witness Peter Goullart in *Forgotten Kingdom* (London: John Murray, 1957), 173-4. Interestingly, Chavannes notes that the Mu overlords themselves always married Indigenous women. Édouard Chavannes, 'Documents historiques et géographiques relatifs à Li-kiang' in Jacques Bacot and Édouard Chavannes, *Les Mo-so. Ethnographie des Mo-so, leurs religions, leur langue et leur écriture* (Leiden: Brill, 1913), 127-140, p. 120

36 Assimilated people (people who married into the Naxi) belonged to their own faction for the Sacrifice to Heaven ritual (*Shai*). See Charles McKhann, *Fleshing Out the Bones: kinship and cosmology in the Maqxi religion*, PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, United States, 1992, for the details of this ritual in contemporary times.

37 See Vicomte Henri M.G. D'Ollone, *In Forbidden China: The D'Ollone Mission (1906-1909)* (London: Fisher and Unwin, 1912), 62; Lin Yueh-hua, *The Lolo of Liangshan* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1947), 70; Song Enchang, 'Xiao Liangshan Yizu Hunyin He Xisu Diaocha' [Research into the customs and marriages of the Yi nationality of Xiao Liangshan], in *Yunnan Minzu Minsu He Zongjiao Diaocha* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1985), 21; and Samuel Pollard, *In Unknown China. A record of the observations, adventures and experiences of a pioneer missionary during a prolonged sojourn amongst the wild and unknown Nosu tribe of western China* (London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1921), 187.

This said, strict marriage arrangements alone cannot explain the fact that love suicide among the Naxi was not only an alarming social problem, but as Yang Fuquan writes, a cultural phenomenon, a unique Naxi custom, imbued with - as well as driven by - shame and romantic yearning. Strict betrothal arrangements and the patrilineal cross-cousin prescription would not have provoked such alarming rates of suicide if Naxi society had had the means of accommodating illegitimate children, as did other communities of the Sino-Tibetan borderland. However, as explained by Peter Goullart, who worked and lived in Lijiang for ten years prior to the Communist revolution, the dynamic operated as follows: amongst the Naxi, "... a bastard was a disgrace of unparalleled proportions. The girl would be killed by her parents anyway, and the only escape was suicide in which her lover was honour bound to join."<sup>38</sup> There were many social and cultural layers that enabled this tragic custom, however, as indicated by Yang Fuquan, the immediate cause of suicide was unwed pregnancy. There was no place in Lijiang society for children born outside of the legitimate marriage arrangements, and, therefore, no place for their mothers.<sup>39</sup>

From this perspective, the forced adoption of Confucian values provides the best explanation for the tragic Naxi custom, as Yang argues. However, these Confucian values never reached Naxi families who dwelt in the more remote mountainous regions beyond the centres of administrative and political power, such as, for example, the people of Fengke, who live directly opposite Mosuo territories on the western shore of the Yangtze River. Like the Naxi of the Lijiang plain, Fengke Naxi were (are) patrilineal. In Fengke, women and wives' families had low ritual status, and were ritually confined to the lower levels of the house. However, post-1723, Fengke women continued to wear their traditional skirts and they did not commit love suicide. In Fengke, the Naxi did not adopt ideas of female chastity before or after marriage. Thus women and men conducted visiting relationships (as they still do today and as women and men in Yongning and in Zhaba also do). And unlike what happened in Lijiang, in Fengke, children who were born out of free love relationships could either accompany their mothers to their husbands' families whether their husbands were or were not the children's fathers. Children could also remain with their mothers' natal families.

None of the Naxi's ethnic neighbours and none of the Naxi who live in the more remote regions of Lijiang placed undue value on female monogamy, female chastity, or the legitimacy of children (Yang, Darragon). From the Confucian perspective, however, female chastity and the regulation of female pollution were paramount virtues because they were entirely entwined with strictly exclusive ideas of paternal legitimacy. These notions were grafted onto the cultural fabric of Lijiang with disastrous consequences for women and for Naxi matriculture.

### ***Religion and gender transformations in the Sino-Tibetan borderland***

This historical overview, broad and scant as it must be, would be incomplete if it were to ignore the possible role of religion in the transformation of gender in the cultures of northern Yunnan. Religion, like kinship and ethnicity, is here diverse, layered, and complex. Up until the seventeenth century, Bon seems to have held a significant place among the peoples of Lijiang and Yongning: the

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38 Goullart, 154.

39 Joseph F. Rock, 'The Romance of Ka-ma-gyu-mi-gkyi', *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 39 (1939), Hanoi.

local historical record maintains that prior to their conversion to Buddhism, the people of northern Yunnan and southern Sichuan practiced 'the Black Bon', and the Mu's own claims to sacred kingship were steeped in Bon symbolism.<sup>40</sup> However, it is unlikely that Bon held an exclusive position among the tribes of northern Yunnan prior to the Buddhist conversion of elite families. Indian and Chinese Buddhism, along with Taoism and a local shamanic tradition, all had the favour of Nanzhao, and the Mongols also practised their own shamanism. The first Chinese Buddhist temple was constructed in Lijiang during the Yuan period (1279-1368) and, during the Ming period, Naxi leaders founded Taoist, Chinese Buddhist, and Tibetan Buddhist temples. In the sixteenth century, Tibetan Buddhists of both Red and Yellow Hats were also active in Yongning.<sup>41</sup>

In the seventeenth century, religious conflicts between Bonpos, Karmapa Buddhists, and Gelugpa Buddhists (the latter under allied Tibetan and Mongol military power) engulfed the Sino-Tibetan borderland. The Lijiang chief Mu Zeng converted to Karmapa in 1600 and waged what is still remembered today as a cruel war against the Gelugpa converts in his outlying Muli territories.<sup>42</sup> In 1700, the Yongning chief officially converted to Gelugpa along with all his subjects.<sup>43</sup> With this, the people of Lijiang and Yongning were now in opposing religious camps. When, two decades later (in 1723), Lijiang was annexed into the Imperial administration, the Naxi retained their religious eclecticism – although Gelugpa, the church of the Tibetan theocracy and of the Yongning Mosuo, never gained a presence in Lijiang.

Meanwhile, Bon virtually disappeared from the region except in Zuosuo in Sichuan (in which a unique Bon temple may still be found today), where the above-mentioned La clan refused to convert to Buddhism and seceded from Yongning with Imperial approval. Indigenised Bon elements also survived in the religious traditions of the Naxi Dongba and Mosuo Daba religions, but even these smaller traditions were not left untouched, for both have evidently undergone substantial gender transformations. From the Dongba manuscripts and Daba oral literature, we learn that, in a past distant enough to have left no trace in real life but not so distant as to have been entirely forgotten, Naxi and Mosuo rituals were conducted by a female and male pair of religious specialists: the *Pa* and *Pu*, respectively. Such female-male ritual pairs were not unique to the Naxi and the Mosuo: they are a central feature of Mongolian shamanism<sup>44</sup> and of the Nuosu Bimo religious tradition. In the Dongba manuscripts, the female *Pa* is described as the 'intelligent one' (the diviner who sees the ghosts) and the male *Pu* as 'the capable one' (who chants the liturgy).

When and how the female-male ritual specialists of Lijiang and Yongning made way for single male priests is not known. Still, we can postulate that in both Yongning and Lijiang, this change is linked to the conversion of the ruling elites to Tibetan Buddhism and the final departure of Bon from this

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40 For Dongba art and iconography, see Christine Mathieu, 'The Bon in Naxi History', in *Asian Horizons: Giuseppe Tucci's Buddhist, Indian, Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, eds. Andrea Di Castsro and David Templeman (Melbourne: Monash University and Rome: IIAO, 2015) and Christine Mathieu, 'The Dongba Religion', in *Quentin Roosevelt's China: Ancestral Realms of the Naxi*, eds. Christine Mathieu and Cindy Ho (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Art Publishers and New York: Rubin Museum of Arts, 2011).

41 *Naxizu Jian Shi*; Rock 1947; Debreczeny.

42 See Koen Wellens, *Consecrating the Premi House: Ritual, Community and the State in the Borderlands of East Tibet*, PhD Dissertation, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, Norway, and Rock 1947.

43 Rock 1947, 56.

44 Walther Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 6-9.



region. It is true that the Mosuo chieftains of Yongning had to conform to the patrilineal expectations of the Qing administration in order to maintain the legitimacy of their successions, but as Yang Fuquan points out, the policies of assimilation were not applied to the people on the eastern shores of the Jinshajiang. Yongning remained under indirect rule and Confucianism did not become a part of the cultural landscape in the matrilineal Mosuo society. Yet, even among the matrilineal Mosuo, there are no female ritual specialists but only male Daba priests.

Yongning and Lijiang have this in common: the ruling clans on both sides of the Jianshajiang were influenced by sects of Tibetan Buddhism which did not favour gender parity. According to the Tibetan Buddhist historical tradition, King Songtsen Gampo requested of his converted Buddhist subjects 'not to listen to the words of women'.<sup>45</sup> Placed among the sixteen primary moral virtues, it is reasonable to assume that this injunction extended to female diviners. In 1700, in the wake of religious conflict that had raged on his frontiers, the Yongning overlord and all of his subjects officially converted to Gelugpa Buddhism. By 1700, Tibetan Buddhism had enjoyed a long presence in Yongning, for Chinese scholars date the construction of the Gelugpa Zhamie temple of Yongning to 1556.<sup>46</sup> This is also the period when, according to the Daba genealogy of the Yongning chiefs, mid-sixteenth-century Mosuo chiefs discarded their traditional names and adopted Tibetan names.<sup>47</sup> It may well be that Buddhist influence affected gender relations in Yongning before 1700 and the official conversion of the Mosuo chieftain. As we saw above, in 1700 the La clan seceded from Yongning and retained Bon faith and practice in Zuosuo. However, according to Lamu Gatusa, in Zuosuo, the Daba religion is identical to what it is in Yongning, and there are no female diviners in Zuosuo.<sup>48</sup>

Wherever the Dongba religion is found in northern Yunnan, there are only single male priests and no gender-paired ritual specialists – even in places that were governed by Lijiang before its integration into the Qing administration. Naxi leader Mu Zeng converted to Karmapa Buddhism in 1600, and Chinese scholars date the construction of the first Karmapa temple in Lijiang to 1627 CE. Seen in this light, it seems reasonable to speculate that the transformation of gender roles in the Naxi Dongba religion was connected to the increasing influence of Buddhism in the Lijiang basin, and was very possibly initiated before the reforms of 1723 and the Confucianisation of the Naxi. But then again, historical events are complex: Lijiang remained religiously eclectic and Tibetan Buddhism never gained the same degree of influence among the Naxi as it did among the Mosuo. Although Karmapa Buddhists enjoyed the ongoing support of Qing emperors – the latter sponsoring the construction of several temples among the Naxi after the administrative reforms of 1723 – by the twentieth century, Tibetan Buddhist influence in Lijiang was negligible.

Furthermore, a Dongba ritual practice suggests that full transformation from a female-male ritual pair to the single male priest was only accomplished in the Lijiang basin during the course of the

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45 Shih-Yü Yü Li, 'Tibetan Folk-Law', in *Folk Law: Essays in the Theory of Lex Non Scripta*, eds. Alison Dundes Renteln and Alan Dundes (New York and London: Garland, 1994), 514; Das, 33.

46 Shih Chuan-kang, *The Yongning Moso: Sexual Union, Household Organization, Ethnicity and Gender in a Matrilineal Duolocal Society in Southwest China*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Stanford University, United States, 1993, 181 (on file with University Microfilms International).

47 Mathieu 2003, 396-405. Note that alongside this Daba genealogy, Ah chiefs also kept official genealogical records, as required by the Imperial administration.

48 Personal communication, Kunming, 2011.

eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. When Dongbas conduct a ritual, priests always recite the genealogies of teachers who preceded them, all the way back to the establishing founder of the ritual that every Dongba after him attempts to reproduce. According to He Pingzheng and Li Jingsheng of the Dongba Research Institute, the longer genealogies of the 1990s included fifteen teacher-ancestors, but He and Li knew of a genealogy with twenty-five teacher-ancestors.<sup>49</sup> These genealogies suggest that the institution of single male priests may have originated during the sixteenth century and that it expanded over the course of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In other words, where Buddhism may have initiated a reform of the gendered ritual system amongst converts of the Sino-Tibetan borderland, Confucianism likely played a role in transforming the Naxi religious system. As relayed by Yang Fuquan, Qing administrators not only promoted notions of female chastity and extreme notions about the polluting powers of women, they proscribed Naxi women from temple worship. It is possible that by discouraging the participation of women from organised religion, the Confucian administrators fostered their exclusion from all ritual activities.

The degree of ritual defilement suffered by Naxi women prior to the Revolution was so extreme as to be virtually unique among the people of the Sino-Tibetan borderland. Among neighbouring people, women's marginalisation from Buddhism did not exclude them from *all* religious activities. As Previato writes, in polyandrous Deqin, women are marginal players in Tibetan Buddhist practice, but they play crucial roles in the rituals dedicated to the *klu* spirits of nature and mountain worship. Among the Mosuo, Buddhism is likewise male dominated, but Mosuo women are in charge of the daily libations offered to the ancestors, and they fully participate in the rituals dedicated to the mountain goddess Gamu, the patron deity of the Mosuo people. In other words, among most Sino-Tibetan people, women are important players in maintaining the vital harmony between the forces of nature and humanity. Consequently, they play significant roles in the rituals dedicated to the fertility, health, and prosperity of their families and their communities. Among the Naxi, even outside of the organised creeds, Naxi women have an inordinately low profile. In the twentieth century Lijiang, when Naxi society arose the interests of Chinese and Western social scientists and government policies had not as yet altered the traditional religious scene, there were only a few women shamans and diviners, called *Sani*. The independent *Sani* did not belong to the organised religions of Buddhism, Taoism and Dongba, and they had such low social status that the word itself is an insult. There were also male independent shaman-diviners in twentieth-century Lijiang called *Leebu*. The *lee* are the Naxi equivalent of the Tibetan *klu*; the *Leebu* are associated with Saddo, the spirit of the tutelary deity of Lijian and its people, Yulonghsan (*Jade Dragon Mountain*). In the twentieth century, the *Leebu* were all men but it is likely that this had not always been the case, for the Naxi word *Leebu* [*leebv*] means nothing other than 'wife of the *lee*'.<sup>50</sup>

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49 Field records, Lijiang 1991. See also Mathieu 2015.

50 See Mathieu 2003, 129-33.

### ***From matriarchy to matriculture?***

Retracing the origins of matricultures in the Sino-Tibetan Marches to the matriarchal Nüguo of the Sui and Tang dynasties, as Darragon does, and indeed, as I also proposed some years ago,<sup>51</sup> it is evident that, as Darragon notes, the matriarchy encountered in the Chinese histories is not compatible with Takamura Itsui's or Heide Göttner-Abendroth's visions of peaceful egalitarian matricentric societies.<sup>52</sup> Just as evidently, Chinese histories report on the customs of the Nüguo from the perspective of the Chinese interior, with the purpose of informing the Chinese emperor. From a patriarchal perspective, it would be easy to construe a gender system in which women had authority among both women and men as a system in which women had authority over men. However, it is worth remembering that ideas about gender roles and the relative position of women and men in Tang dynasty China were not as extremely patriarchal as they became in the following dynasties. As it stands, the historical record explored by Darragon tells us that the Nüguo were frequently at war and that they were neither egalitarian nor gender egalitarian.<sup>53</sup>

Historically, not only the Nüguo but also the greater Sino-Tibetan frontier was frequently at war, and the Nüguo queendom would not have survived if its queens had not been able to exert military power and the crafts of diplomacy. Darragon writes that, post-742 CE, the queens of Nüguo were replaced by kings. In 796 and 797 CE, King Tang Lixi came to the Chinese court in the company of minor monarchs whose small kingdoms had been annexed by the Tibetan Empire. After this, no more is said about the Nüguo in Chinese official records. Still, the Nüguo may not have disappeared altogether, because the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family* of Lijiang and the *Ming History* give reasons to believe that Nüguo clans conquered Lijiang during the tenth century and that they did so under Tibetan Bon auspices.<sup>54</sup>

The following picture emerges: Mou chieftains of the Mo-so kingdom of Lijiang were descended from the Ngue, a clan connected to the Nüguo; they were Bonpos, and they practiced matrilineal succession. After the Mongol conquest of Lijiang, the Ah chiefs shifted Mou rule to patrilineality, and under the Ming emperors, the Mu made further amendments to their successions to satisfy Confucian expectations: They reclaimed their ancient name *Mou* as *Mu* and carried it in Chinese fashion. The Mu kept a record of their legal successions, which is to say, their patriline, which Mu Gong duly officialised in the genealogical chronicles he composed in 1516. Almost thirty years later, however, Mu Gong became aware of just how un-Confucian his ancestral claims could appear.

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51 Mathieu 1997.

52 See Sato's article, this issue, and Heide Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies: Studies on Indigenous Cultures Across the Globe*, trans. Karen Smith (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2012/2013).

53 See William W. Rockhill, *In the Land of the Lamas: Notes of a Journey Through China, Mongolia, and Tibet* (New York: Century Company, 1891), 337-40, for a translation of the relevant passage of the *Sui Shu* (Bk. 83); also noted in Darragon (this issue).

54 In the ninth and tenth centuries, the kingdom of Tibet was embroiled in religious conflicts between Bonpos and Buddhists. The Tibetan historical record relates that a Bon mission was sent from the Tibetan interior to the country of Jang (Qiang) in the ninth century. Guo Dalie, 'Lun Naxizu Dongba Jiao Yu Zangzu Ben Jiao Guanxi', [On the Naxi Dongba and its relation to the Tibetan Bon], Internal publication, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, 1993; Helmut Hoffman, *The Religions of Tibet* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), 96; Joseph F. Rock, 'The Zhima Funeral Ceremony of the Na-khi of Southwestern China', *Studia Instituti Anthropos*, IX (1955), 4; Mathieu 2015.

In 1545, under the guidance of his friend, the famous Confucian scholar Yang Shen, Mu Gong revised his genealogy and produced a *second* chronicle. This second chronicle contained a new genealogy which had the curious disadvantage of being several centuries shorter than the genealogy compiled in 1516, while having the obvious advantage of listing all of Mu Gong's patrilineal ancestors and only those.<sup>55</sup> In this second chronicle, Mu Gong removed all traces of his Nanzhao and Mou ancestors, and gave his first historic ancestor as Nian-Bao Ah-Cong who was named as Mou-Bao Ah-Cong in the first chronicle (the first ancestor from the time of the Mongol conquest). But this second chronicle contained other important changes.

Conscious of remaining historically correct, Mu Gong's friend and mentor, Yang Shen, added a preface to this chronicle in which *he* listed the Mu's ancestors of the Nanzhao and Song periods. In Yang Shen's list, however, all the names prior to the appearance of the patronym Mu were expunged of the first and third syllables, and thus purged of all the clan names of mothers and wives. La-Gu Pu-Meng was now given as Gu-Meng, Pu-Meng Pu-Wang as Meng-Wang, Mou-Ju Mou-Xi is Ju-Xi, and so forth. And whereas Mu Gong renamed Mou-Ba Ah-Cong Nian-Bao Ah-Cong, Yang Shen renamed him Mai Cong.<sup>56</sup> In fact, Yang Shen and Mu Gong seem to have been especially eager to delete the Mou dynasty from the Mu family's genealogy, and with this all trace of matrilineal and matrilineal successions. In all appearance, they succeeded so completely that in the twentieth century, the ethnonym Mo-so, which heralded the matrilineal Mou successions, was thoroughly despised in Lijiang and none of the Mu descendants could explain the discrepancies between Mu Gong's two chronicles. But then again, one should not conclude from this that the feudal period put an end to mother-right among the Naxi's ancestors. In fact, the historical record shows that it fell not to the Mu feudal lords but to the Qing administrators to deliver the final blow to matrilineality in Lijiang.

Matriarchal-matrilineal tribes remained in Yezhi (a territory of the Lijiang prefecture) a decade after the 1723 abolition of the Lijiang feudal domain, and almost two centuries after Mu Gong and Yang Shen produced the second (Confucianised) genealogy. Written in 1918, the genealogical records of the Yezhi chiefs relate that in 1737 and 1738, the chieftain He Niang and her lieutenant Zhi Min (also her daughter-in-law), formally requested from the Emperor that their "tribal system be replaced by a Chinese system". After this, their descendants carried the patronym Wang in Chinese fashion. The transition to Chinese patrilineality, however, appears to have not gone entirely smoothly, for the same records confirm that later chief Wang Ah-Zhi inherited her position 'like her mother' and mentions no associated. The Yezhi genealogy also shows that, over time, Wangs succeeded each other from brother to brother as well as from father to son, that they adopted sons-in-law, and sent some of their own sons to marry uxorilocally.<sup>57</sup>

And so, in the end, the cumulative effect of feudal and Imperial reforms effectively ended matrilineality among the Naxi. And yet, through the centuries of gender marginalisation and oppression, something of the ancient matriarchal spirit survived. While Naxi women were excluded from ritual, they remained central to the economic life of their households and their community. In the 1990s, the late Naxi scholar He Zhiwu and others confirmed that in pre-

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55 Mathieu, 2003, 2011, and 2015.

56 Rock 1947 and Mathieu 2003, 49.

57 Rock 1947, 308-13

Revolutionary society, the domestic and ritual status of Naxi women in no way reflected their dominant economic role or the strength and independence of their temperament. Indeed, in pre-Revolution Lijiang, women ran household finances along with the markets, butcher shops and wine shops. For Joseph Rock and Peter Goullart, long-term residents of northern Yunnan before the Communist revolution, Naxi women were at once chattel and Amazons. But it came as no surprise to either Rock or Goullart that Naxi women should have rallied enthusiastically to the Communist promise of gender equality and spearheaded the revolution in Lijiang.<sup>58</sup>

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, between the 1950s and the late 1970s, government policies implemented sweeping social and economic reforms in southwestern China. In Lijiang, arranged marriage was abolished and replaced by free-choice marriage, and the Naxi love suicide custom disappeared with these reforms. The Mosuo and other marriage-less people of the Sino-Tibetan marches were, for their part, pressured to abandon their customs of free-love and to adopt monogamous marriage. As everywhere else in China at this time, domestic households were dismantled and brought into the system of collectivisation. But when these policies were rolled back during the 1980s, many people in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands returned to their former way of life and their marriage-less families.

Recent statistics provided by Mattison *et al* in this issue show that in Yongning, neolocal households now account for 27.8% of all households, and patrilocal households for 22.9%. It is interesting to compare these statistics with those collected in Yongning by Chinese social scientists between 1958 and 1962, which is to say shortly after the abolition of the feudal system in 1956. In some parts of Yongning about half the households surveyed were said to reckon descent in a mixed matrilineal-patrilineal manner and around 6% patrilineally.<sup>59</sup> These mixed genealogies were at the time described as 'patriarchal-matriarchal' and understood as evidence of the inevitable evolution of Mosuo society towards patrilineality and patriarchy, along the lines of Engels and Marx's socio-evolutionist theory and according to the laws of historical materialism.

In the 1990s, however, Chinese colleagues in Kunming were no longer convinced of this particular aspect of historical materialism. In conversation, they reflected that despite several decades of government campaigns, widespread education in the common language (Chinese Putonghua), national studies, and a common moral education, the Mosuo were attached to their marriage-less families because they perceived definitive advantages in this way of life. Note that these reflections were made before mass tourism transformed the economy of the Yongning basin. Three decades later, evidently, the opportunities and demands of the tourist industry, information technology, the market economy, mass culture, and environmental degradation are posing new challenges to the continuities of traditional lives.

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58 Goullart; Sydney D. White, *Medical Discourses, Naxi Identities, and the State: transformations in Socialist China*, PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley, United States, 1993, Chapter 8, 'Fame and Sacrifice.'

59 See *Ninglang Yizu Zizhixian Yongning Naxizu Shehui Ji Muxizhi Diaocha* [Research into the social and matrilineal system of the Naxi nationality of Yongning, Ninglang Yi Autonomous County], Vol. 2 (Kunming, Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1988), 42-3 and 291-4; Yan Ruxian and Song Zhaolin, *Yongning Naxizu de Muxi Zhi* [The Matrilineal System of the Naxi Nationality in Yongning] (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1983); *Yongning Naxizu de Muxi Zhi* [The matrilineal system of the Naxi nationality in Yongning] (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1983).

Takamure Itsui believed that aspects of the old Japanese matricultural world had endured in Shinto magico-religious rituals, and that a thousand years of Imperial patriarchal policies had not entirely destroyed fundamental aspects of the ancient society (Sato, this issue). The matricultures of the Sino-Tibetan marches were put to the test of centuries of political, religious and economic development. Seen in context of a two-millennia-long history, the contributions in this collection would lead one to believe, as Takamure hoped, that matriculture is resilient and that it has a future.

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