

China

## Lugu Lake: The kingdom of women

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**No husband, only lovers ! Living in the southwest of China, the Mosuo have the reputation of practicing adultery freely and as they please. A journey into a matrilineal society, unique in the world, where the women call the tune.**

*“Welcome to the land of the Mosuo. Here, women have only lovers, no husband!”* announces Wazhua, the driver of our minibus. After an exhausting six hour ride, the gaze peers out to drink in, finally, the immense and pure water of Lugu Lake. On the edge of the Himalayas, fixed at 2700 metres altitude, in a setting of mountains, the lake stretches its turquoise waters over surface area of 48km<sup>2</sup> in the southwest of China, between the provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan, on the border with Tibet.

On its banks, shared by some twenty villages of wood houses, the Mosuo form a community of only 30,000 souls. A trifle compared to the 1.4 billion Chinese and yet... Their way of life has dismayed more than one local government and their sexual freedom attracts curious people from around the world. Because, amongst the Mosuo, couples do not marry. Nor do they live together. Women can have a series of lovers during their lifetime and have several children from different fathers, without ever shocking anyone here. It does not matter who the father is, none of them live with their children. *“The Mosuo believe that the lover only waters with his sperm a fetus that already exists in the woman's womb, a bit like a gardener!”*, explains Namu, a Mosuo singer who has become very famous in China.

But what makes the Mosuo a particularly exceptional people is their practice of the *zou hun*, the “walking marriage”. So, every night, the Mosuo men come discreetly to the girls' windows. If the girls are in the mood to receive them, they open the door and let their lover slip between their sheets. But the clandestine visitor must imperatively disappear by dawn to return... to his mother's house. A well-accepted practice, because Mosuo tradition will have it that sons and daughters remain living with their mother and grandmother. The ideal family is the one that never separates.

Men “gardeners”, women who “carry the seed” and call the tune... Unique, the Mosuo society is one of the world's rare matrilineal societies. Here, the women pass down their name and heritage. They manage the families. They own the land. For this reason, the Chinese have nicknamed Lugu Lake the “kingdom of women”.

But many things have changed around the lake. Tourism has made a spectacular leap, and with this opening up, local traditions crumble. For most of the younger generation, the walking marriage practiced by their parents is old-fashioned, the western model makes them dream. Except for those who still live in more isolated villages, only a few hundred kilometers far away from the lake. There, the Mosuo have preserved all their traditions.

The pictures of this survey can be found on :  
**[www.carolinechapeaux.com/china](http://www.carolinechapeaux.com/china)**

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