

Current Situation of Marriage among Mosuo People in Ninglang County, Yunnan Province

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Abstract

Walking marriage is a unique form of marriage among ethnic minorities in southwestern China. It refers to the practice of a man not marrying a woman and not marrying a man. Through visits from dusk to dawn, both men and women combine to produce and consume in their respective matrilineal households, assuming the obligation to raise offspring. The two parties of walking marriage do not monopolize each other in terms of sexual and economic relationships. The custom of walking marriage is mainly distributed in some southwestern regions of China. This article mainly introduces the walking marriage customs of the Mosuo people in Ninglang County, which is around Lugu Lake at the border of Sichuan and Yunnan.

Keywords

Walking marriage, Mosuo People, Lugu Lake.

1. Introduction

Lugu Lake, where Mosuo people have lived for generations, is surrounded by green mountains on all sides, and the willows along the lake gently sway, as if telling an ancient story. Here couples twilight to the morning return, free and bold to follow the love of their hearts; their feelings unrestrained, free and romantic. The village director from Lugu Lake Lushui village has used a sentence to summarize the feelings of outsiders to this place: "They say Mosuo is the Garden of Eden, is Adam and Eve live."



Picture 1: View of Lugu Lake | Source: Jenny Xu

The Mosuo people living in Yunnan Province are famous for their matrilineal culture and their unique form of marriage, the "walking marriage". This has not only attracted many experts to visit, but also a large number of tourists. However, foreign tourists often have a lot of prejudice against walking marriage. A man who came to visit once mentioned: "I came here 17 years ago, I know that marriage, is the man climbed the window to climb to the woman's home, climbed on the end of no matter, the children do not have to care, you can just go to the marriage. Probably the tour guides and outside rumors."

2. Walking marriage of Mosuo people

The secretary of Lushui Village recalled a tourist attracted to come by the prejudice of walking marriage, and summed up rather humorously, "People look at the walking marriage and come to this place, saying tonight I'm going to walk the marriage. In the end, when he couldn't walk to the wedding, he went back and cursed his mother."

Walking marriage, also known as "Axia heterosexual marriage", has a long history in the Mosuo people, and with the Mosuo people's matrilineal family at the same time, complement each other, and progress together. Museum staff said that when the ancestors of the Mosuo people from Gansu all the way to the south, their living conditions are difficult and harsh. A pair of lovers love each other, they do not have enough resources to support their own small families, they stayed separately in their respective mothers' extended family, the child was born with the mother's surname, raised by the mother. This form of marriage in the Mosuo people after the settlement and because of the continuation of the high productivity of the extended family and preserved, is the Mosuo people to adapt to the needs of the times and the environment of the product. Through time, such families and marriages have become more and more perfect.



Picture 2: A group photo of the matrilineal extended family of the Mosuo people in Lushui Village | Photo credit: Mosuo Stories

Walking marriage is a common form of marriage among the Mosuo people. In a traditional marriage, men and women work in their respective extended families during the day. At night, the man spends the night at the woman's home after the family has gone to sleep, and then leaves early the next morning before the woman's family wakes up to return to their own home. The children of both parties are raised by the mother's extended family and take the mother's name. The biological father is obliged to take care of the child and will see the child at festivals and give him gifts or money. The day-to-day upbringing of the child is primarily the responsibility of both men and women in the mother's family. [1]

Moreover, Mosuo people have a complete set of procedures for marriage. In the traditional marriage, couples meet and fall in love and then get married in secret, not known to others. After the relationship is gradually stabilized, the man's family brings salt and tea to the woman's family as a potlatch gift, so that the two families can confirm the couple's marriage. When the woman has given birth to a child for about a month, the woman's family will invite every family in the village to a full moon feast. Among them, the man's uncles and amahs will be invited and the relationship will be formalized at the banquet.



Picture 3: Pork fat, a Mosuo specialty, served at the full moon feast | Photo: Faraway Traveler

The culture of shyness is one of the characteristics of walking marriages which makes most of the locals tend to shy away from talking about their marriages. Most of them abstain from talking about the subject between the sexes in the family or with outsiders. When developing a relationship, the man will sneak out of the house at night to meet the woman in private. Due to shyness, in the morning, the man then has to pretend that he has slept at home all night to avoid letting people in his own family or the woman's family find out about the secret marriage walk. [2]

In addition to going marriage, the Mosuo have two other forms of marriage, which are flexible and changeable depending on their respective needs and family structure. One form of marriage

is the large family formed through marriage due to the lack of laborers, which is called "Axia cohabitation marriage". According to the Mosuo Museum, if a family lacks male labor, an adult woman and her male partner in the family will, through consultation between the two families and their personal wishes, allow the man to live in the woman's family and become a member of the woman's family; and vice versa.^[1] In another model of marriage, the "Asha marriage", an adult man and woman may decide to separate from their respective matrilineal extended families and form a small monogamous family on their own.

3. Characteristics of walking marriages

Compared to marriages in most regions, go-go marriages have a number of advantages.

First of all, the man and the woman in a go-go marriage have the right to choose their other half completely freely. Even if the parents know about their children's relationship status in advance, they do not ask anything, but support their children silently behind the scenes. A doctor of anthropology from Nankai University has said, "Older women in go-go marriages are proud of the fact that they can have free marital dominion."

Secondly, there is pure love between men and women in walking marriages. The parties in go-go marriages rely only on emotional interactions, and the other party's family, property, and status have nothing to do with them. They never care about each other's education or money, but decide to come together because they truly love each other. Buga Dashma - is living in the village of Warabi brewing non-heritage cultural heritage, her own walk of marriage began because of pure love: "work together, he cares about me, once to help, twice to help there is a little bit of goodwill. My husband can't read or write, pretty or not pretty no meaning, he just need a good conscience." In this way, this go-go marriage, sustained only by love, lasted for about forty years.

Furthermore, the relationship between the man and the woman under a go-go marriage will be more stable compared to contemporary marriages. Since couples live apart and see each other only for a short period of time, every minute and second together is especially precious, so both parties will present their best side to each other. Both partners will still live in their respective extended families after the couple's relationship is confirmed. Mosuo men lead a life pattern of visiting their loved ones at night and returning home to labor during the day. In the short time they see each other, there are few trivial worries in their lives: quarrels caused by the mother-in-law-daughter-in-law relationship, the desire for control within the family, and friction between husband and wife over trivial matters. And because of this freedom, says Dr. Anthropologist at Nankai University, "there is a strong sense of 'breathing' (spatiality) in the extended Mosuo family."

However, walking marriages also have some disadvantages.

First, the freedom in go-go marriage tends to make some people view marriage too casually. There are no other bonds and burdens between a man and a woman except the moral condemnation and people's scorn after cheating. As a result, some people may change their hearts at will, making them become too free and open-minded, and their love and loyalty to the other party is maintained by self-will. As Ruru Pimabuchi, an amah from Wanabi village, said, "Marriage is good because both parties must be responsible for the marriage. Walking marriages are so free that both parties can be irresponsible."

Secondly, there is a hidden risk of consanguineous marriages. The local anthropologist who did the research mentioned, "Only the elders in the family know the blood relationship between the Asha. But because walking marriages are shy cultures that avoid elders, they may run into consanguineous marriages." Even if both families will avoid such things after learning about the situation during the marriage talks, there will always be Mosuo couples who have difficulty in

parting with the relationship. Because of the "free love" that the marriage system emphasizes, the family will eventually only acquiesce to their choice and send their blessings.

4. Changes in Going Marriage

Nevertheless, in recent years, the proportion of Mosuo people choosing to marry on the road is gradually decreasing. Most of the locals in Lushui Village said that the proportion of those who are still married today accounts for 70-80% of the village, and those who are at home after 90 years are basically still married. Experienced walking marriage of non-heritage textile culture inheritors - Buga Dashma, for this situation can not help but sigh: "the situation has changed, life has become better, do not need the strength of the extended family, walking marriage is slowly reduced, we all rely on their own skills."

On the one hand, many people are choosing to leave the extended family and start small families of their own.



Picture 4: Tourists and Mosuo people at Lugu Lake | Photo:BBC Travel: China's 'Kingdom of Women'

The reasons for this are, firstly, the influence of mainstream culture has led to a decrease in the number of people going out to get married. More and more young people are getting out of the mountains, and seeing more and more new things in the outside world, some young people's mentality will also change. Duoji curator also said, "For their own national culture, many young people now do not know much about it, can not distinguish between what they have and what is outside, and then conform to the mainstream culture."

At the same time, economic development has led to an increase in young people's income, resulting in a reduced sense of need for extended family among some. Referring to the importance of the extended family, museum interpreter Aniu said, "In the old days, in the most difficult era, the living standard of the Mosuo matrilineal extended family would be far beyond that of other ethnic groups. A small family would not be conducive to development. When you grow up and get married, you separate your family and do everything by yourself It is not necessarily able to develop This strength of the extended family, working together in unity, makes it easy to do either thing. Because it is survival and development." But today, with the economy growing and people's incomes increasing, many people can form a small family on their own and do not need the support of an extended family. As a result, some people feel less need for extended family.



Picture 5: Mosuo ama reminisces about her former life | Photo: Documentary "Dorje's Story
Secondly, the practice of going out of wedlock has also been affected by legal and institutional reforms.

For instance, because of changes in national policy, going out of wedlock has slowly changed from "no license" to a situation where a license is required. Because in daily life, for example, without a marriage license, the child cannot be registered in the household. However, different people have different views on the marriage license. Some Mosuo people believe that the marriage license is an invisible constraint for them, which is contrary to the "free spirit" of marriage. Duoji curator also said: "Marriage license will play some binding effect, affecting the freedom of love." But there is still another part of the people, such as the village secretary of Lok Shui think: "In fact, nowadays the marriage is just one more process of obtaining a license than before."

5. Conclusion

Compared with the familiar forms of marriage in people's daily life, walking marriage has many differences. In order to better survive, according to the current living environment, economic situation and individual family needs or personal wishes, Mosuo people flexibly choose different family structures and marriage status. "There is no good or bad difference between different marriage forms, after all, each ethnic group has a model that suits them." A man traveling to Lugu Lake summarized it this way.

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