

# 60 shadows of matriarchy among the Jino.

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(Quotes from the book: China's last but one matriarchy: The Jino of Yunnan.)

1. Regarding the name "Jino" there are two alternate explanations. Some authors say that in their language "ji" means maternal uncle, and "nuo" means "coming next". So "Jinuo" would mean "descendants of the uncle", a reference that suggests in the near past they lived in a matriarchal society. The maternal uncle, the main man in a family ruled by a woman, is very important in matriarchal societies and the persistence of the uncles' power in the family and society life indicates that in the past family power was shared by sister and brother and not between wife and husband.
2. The uncle holds a very important role in each Jino life. He acts as protagonist in child naming ceremonies, betrothal and marriages; he even has the power to approve a marriage even if it is prevented by the couple's parents (Bai and Zhang 2000: 32). As a protector of his nephew or niece he can take care of children born before marriage, and assist his nephews in case of weakness and sickness, tying a red string in their wrist to protect them and even chewing the food that they will eat when they feel weak
3. In their myth Goddess Amoyaobai created the world and human beings.
4. Amoyaobai is also the goddess that taught civilization to human beings.
5. After the flood the new human beings surged from a gourd. A symbol of the womb.
6. To leave the gourd they needed the help of mother Apierer, who sacrificed her life for the people.
7. There were seven descendants of the couple that survived the flood. Seven is feminine number.
8. They have legends about a widow called Jiezhou who in legendary past established the mythical village of the same name.

9. They send the souls of the dead to the ancestors' land, but they have older traditions about a kind of Kingdom of Goddesses where they send the souls of deceased shamans. As it is well known that shamans must keep the traditions that guarantee their powers, it is possible that this land was older than the place where nowadays the souls of the dead are sent.

10. The earliest Jino settlements were probably two clans which had split from a moiety and then produced the ten or so daughter clans. This suggests that in ancient times the Jino passed through a matriarchal commune stage and probably also a stage of primitive communism in which between five and twenty families lived in a single long-house (Zhu 1989).

11. Zhuoba and zhuosheng leaders (village leaders) surged in this time and were carried by women, called zhoumi youke, "the venerated grandma that loves people".

12. If the Jino migrated from northwest Yunnan their legends seem to fit better... because in this area the most powerful matriarchal tendencies are found. It is the home of the Moso matriarchal tribe

13. It seems that the Jino are a Tibetan Burman matriarchal tribe which paired with a group of Zhuge Liang soldiers.

14. Each of the three Jino branches was led in mythic-historical times by an ancestral mother.

15. Milijide, the ancestral mother of the Axi clan, is credited by establishing Situ village and giving names to mountains and valleys. As classical cultural heroes she knew where to find animals and taught the people to hunt and to gather edible herbs. She was considered a daughter of the Goddess of the Earth, she was the first shamaness with the ability to travel underground and to change the day into night and the clever inventor that for the first time used bamboo tubes to bring water from the mountain springs, and stone to sharpen knives.

16. Menbushade, whose name can be translated as "the fore-mother without father" was the ancestral mother of the Aha clan. She was also an inventor, priestess and protector of the sacred objects of the clan, especially the tripod, who is venerated in their main festivals, and she established their first matriarchal village.

17. “In the past all the clan leaders were women. They were the wisest shamans; they can divine and tell enchantments, they invented the stone knife, domesticated plants, and clothes...They were not goddesses but human beings as we” (Cheng 1993: 5).

18. The origin of political power in East Asia seems to be closely linked with the leadership exerted by female shamans. Sarah Nelson (2008) provides many instances when the origin of the big kingdoms and empires of East Asia is linked to the power of female shamans.

19. Up until today the oldest woman is called Amo or mother of the village.

20. Consanguineous marriages were common in the past (Cheng Ping 1993: 3).

21. The circumstances which led to the establishing of the village is remembered in some villages' name, as Badou or “the place where we stopped because mother's breast ached”, Babou or “the village built by our foremother”, Bagui or “the village inhabited by the young women without fathers”, Shaoniu or “the village of girls without fathers” as legends say it was established by a girl who has no father, Aema or “the low village of the women without fathers” (Zhao 1995).

22. The leaders of the village would be called “mothers”, or even youka or grandmother in some places, even when their gender changed in an unknown historical moment.

23. These mothers will be assisted by a council of seven members (the feminine number among the Jino and other cultures).

24. Shamans and witches are able to get their powers only thanks to their relationship with goddesses.

25. When they build a new house, the ceremony of carrying the first fire is performed by an old woman 70 or 80 years old.

26. Jiekaxi was another revered ancestress that taught them to distinguish edible plants (Wang 2004: 35).

27. **Kingdom of the 800 maid.** Almost nothing is known about this kingdom or its hypothetical situation, but due to the fact that the Mongols traveled through this area in their way to conquer Burma and the Jino could be one

(maybe not the unique) of the matriarchal societies there, it is possible that these Kingdom of the 800 maids referred to vague news received by the Mongol generals about matriarchal peoples living beyond the mountains through which they opened their way.

28. The Jino have several myths that narrate how the matriarchal society was transformed into a patriarchal one, transition that the experts consider happened about 300 years ago.

29. Their former matriarchal society kept, however, some of its main characteristics until 1950s, when they still had ancestors, name and foremothers in common, as well as cemetery, cult and ceremonies related to the same ancestress.

30. After divorce, women can take with them their property and their children.

31. When the children get sick, only the mothers can sacrifice to the spirits to call their soul.

32. If the experts date the patriarchal transformation of the Jino society to have occurred around 300 years ago, we will see that it coincided with a tumultuous period in regional history, that must be framed in the efforts of the emperor Yongzheng to obtain an effective control of the border and minority regions, which led Chinese traders and migrants to an increasing contact with the Jino.

33. Sometimes Dai local chiefs established alliances with the heads of Jino clans or villages through marriage with Jino women... These notices of marriages between local princesses and foreign kings could be related with Tibeto-Burman tradition of the transmission of the political power through the marriage with the daughter of the chiefs.

34. Marriages between Jino “princesses” and Dai local chiefs must have occurred at a time when most of the Jino villages were possibly governed by the oldest matriarch.

35. Goddesses occupy the main positions in Jino mythology and religion, but they have no images or temples to focus their cult. All of their three main deities are goddesses:

36. Sacred to all the Jino are the three goddesses of the shellfish. These deities are represented as shells, symbols of the female sex.

37. Below these main goddesses there is a legion of minor goddesses governing almost every natural phenomena and geographic accident.

38. In this world full of spiritual beings humans encounter with goddesses are not feared but actively sought.

39. If a hunter gets any animal is because the goddess of hunt gives it to him; so, to get hunt it is natural that the hunter establishes a love relation with the goddess.

40. Jino relationship with the Goddess of the Grain, Zhaogaomizhe, basic to their feeding and survival, is directed by women.

41. Founding mothers were later deified as village deities, and their spirit said to inhabit the village deity pillar, from where they extended their protection to their offspring, and where they are worshipped in their main ceremonies or during difficult situations.

42. Maybe as a remnant of their former matriarchy the name of many villages contains the meaning of mother or woman.

43. The zhuoba, the eldest person of the main clan in the village, occupies the highest position. His title means “mother of the village”, and the sacred female drum used at all village sacrifices and festivals is stored in his house.

44. The village deity is a deification of the foundational mother.

45. The village deity is the ancestor of the zhuoba. As most of the Jino villages were established by women, this title “mother of the village” assigned to the zhuoba takes sense when we consider that these ancestral mothers transmitted their title and leadership to the elder of their daughters until the time when men took the title and office.

46. The mother clan of the village had ritual and political preeminence over the father clan.

47. The fact that the elder's council has seven members suggests that in the past it was an institution of the matriarchal clan society, when villagers were governed by the seven eldest women directed by the mother of the village.

48. It could not be discarded that in the past the Jino lived in matriarchal long-houses.

49. As a family is protected under the house roof so women (maybe as traditional family chiefs) are protected under their hat, with the same shape.

50. Sometimes they also wear a kind of triangle-shaped cloth apron, a symbol of the women subjection to male power.

51. Though spending the night together puts a couple on the way to marriage, they can separate if they want and choose a new lover. These years relationship seems the walking marriage famous among the Moso with a complete freedom to choose their lovers. The main difference is that here, after the period of free love the young couple is supposed to (but will not necessarily) marry, when the woman will become part of a family directed by the husband.

52. In some Jino villages after the proposal of marriage to the bride's parents, "the young man must first go to live in the young woman's home for one to three years of "trial" marriage. This "trial marriage" is a remnant of past matrilocality, when after marriage the husband moved to live in his wife's home.

53. They address their relations according to generations, not sex. Grandson and granddaughters are all called *lirao*; sons and daughters, nephews and nieces all are called *raozuo*. Gender-free terms of address reflect that in the past people of the same generation could marry each other (Song 2007).

54. Sons and daughters are desired equally. To have daughters is as valuable as having sons, though in some areas they think that daughters are better, and girls are educated in their traditions by grandmothers (Cheng 1993; Du 1991: 417).

55. One of the main aims of the wedding ceremony is to carry the soul, spirit, energy and the meat of the bride to the bridegroom's house, to accept that the name of her children will follow the name of her husband. As soon as the bride arrives at the groom's house there are some ceremonies carried out which fix her there. Her bone, however, remains with her uncle, meaning that she keeps

an important link with her house, which will be used in case of divorce (Du 2008: 181).

56. The husband is the head of the family and enjoys a higher position inside it. But the wife is not discriminated against and her role is higher in some social, productive, ritual and homely matters.

57. Though the wife moves to her husband's house she is not separated from her own family, since people marry from inside the village. A piece of cloth symbolizes the equal position of women in the family.

58. As the proverbs show: “mother runs the house” or “only the mother has the right to sacrifice hens to give its soul to the sick children.” This is a remnant of the traditional power of the female elders’ council in the matriarchal times.

59. They often say Abu Pila and Amo Pile. Abu means father, and Pila means a host that is often out, while Amo means mother, and Pile means hostess at home.

60. In the past, when children felt ill, shaman would be invited to dispel evil spirits. Traditionally, mothers must be at home in order for the ritual to be effective because only mothers had the right to “tie up the souls” of the children.

61. Before sowing the seed the Jino make a ceremony to call the Deity of Grain, when women of each family go the fields to sow the grain, and go back home. Then the main woman of each family, dressed in her best attires, meet in a cross-road where they will call together to the Deity of Grain. When they finish this ritual call they go back home, where each family would sacrifice a chicken that will be offered, with wine, rice, tea to the grain deity while they pray to have enough food for the coming year.

All these quotes are from my book: China’s last but one matriarchy: The Jino of Yunnan.