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The native Mosuo people, matriarchal culture, and development processes in the Lugu Lake region: Introduction

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Lugu Lake is a typical plateau lake in Greater Shangri-la in the Hengduan Mountains, located between Ninglang County in northwest Yunnan Province and Yanyuan County in southwest Sichuan Province (27°36′55″–27°47′2″N and 100°43′36″–100°54′20″E) (Figure 1). It is a deep alpine freshwater lake (42–93.5 m deep) with first class water quality, and is 2690.8 m above sea level, the highest lake in the province, with an area of 50.1 km². Lugu Lake region is in the southwest monsoon climate area, with a low latitude altiplano monsoon climate and distinct dry and wet seasons. In this region, vegetation cover is about 45%, and biodiversity is high. There are 37 hydrophilous and 650 terricolous vascular plant species. The submerged plant community is dominated by *Ottelia acuminata* var. *crispa*, which is an important component of the aquatic ecosystem. There are more than 10 species

of fish in the lake, including three rare species, *Schizothorax labrosus*, *S. ninglangensis*, and *S. lugu-huensis*. At present, the Lugu Lake region is one of the places in China which has been least damaged by human disturbance and contains some of the best preserved natural features.

The Mosuo, a branch of the Naxi nationality with a population of about 16,000, are the main ethnic group and are found in scattered lakeside villages. The Mosuo people are matriachal and have their own ways and customs. Girls and their visiting lovers still practice Axia marriage, in which men and women are not bound by common marriage practices, and continue to live in their respective mother's home. Hence, the Lugu Lake region is also known as the Oriental Girls' Land or as a Living Fossil of Human History.

From the 1920s to the 1940s, the famous anthropologist and botanist, Joseph Rock spent much time in this region, leading expeditions and conducting research. In 1947, Rock produced his masterpiece, *The ancient Na-Khi Kingdom of Southwest China*, which made Lugu Lake famous worldwide. Since the 1950s, many Chinese scholars have undertaken much research on the nature, society, nationality and culture in this region. The main research areas are as follows: (1) the relationship between community development and local ecology in terms of the Mosuo people's traditional culture for protecting the environment; (2) environmental

Figure 1 Location of Lugu Lake watershed, China

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and social change; (3) protection and sustainable utilisation of biological diversity; (4) Mosuo women and children and community sustainable development; and (5) anthropological research into the matriarchal culture. All these research areas have produced valuable results, but there has been insufficient systematic research until recently.

The special Mosuo culture and beautiful natural landscape in the Lugu Lake region has abundant tourism resources. Recently, exploitation of tourism resources, tourism and the economy have developed rapidly. These developments have had a substantial influence on local communities, the natural environment and the Mosuo culture, and have led to concerns from many experts in terms of the ecology, economics and sociology. Because of its unique status in China, protection of the ecosystem, cultural heritage and sustainable development of the Lugu Lake region is important for local development and is the subject of intense research. The research is funded mainly through the project 'Synthesis research on sustainable development of Lugu Lake region' with a Key Grant from the Knowledge Innovation Project, Chinese Academy of Sciences (KZCX3-SW-438), and 'Evaluation, theory and management research on ecosystem services for sustainable development' from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 70325002).

The papers included in this special issue on the Lugu Lake region aim to develop systemic research on various domains, including protection of the local ecological environment, utilising of natural resources, developing the local society and economy, exploiting tourism and protecting Mosuo traditional culture. The objectives of the research are to provide sustainable development strategies for this special region and to find a scientific way to retain the balance between the environment, tourism development and protection and development

of Mosuo traditional culture. This study contains four main research areas:

1. Protection of the eco-environment through: protection of water quality in Lugu Lake, pollution control schemes for residual wastewater and solid wastes, scientific development plans for agriculture and research on SLCP (Slope Land Conservation Programme) and NFCP (Natural Forest Conservation Programme).
2. Protection and development of tourism resources. Within the watershed of Lugu Lake, this study will find scientific countermeasures and produce plans for the division of functions for the scenic areas, including distribution of buildings, plans for construction of infrastructure and standardising tourism industry facilities.
3. Protection and development of the Mosuo culture. Based on intensive analysis of the impacts of tourism and communication with the outside world on the Mosuo traditional culture, this study has several purposes including developing tourism items with distinct national features in order to improve the self-confidence of local people in relation to their culture and traditions.
4. Sustainable development strategies. Coupled with the above research, we will create integrated plans and strategies for the sustainable development of the Lugu Lake watershed.

Through this special issue, we hope the research achievements with respect to Lugu Lake will be presented to a worldwide readership. We also hope that our efforts will provide some understanding of how sustainable development can be achieved in other minority communities with unique cultures worldwide.