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China's last but one matriarchy: The Jino of Yunnan

Mr Pedro Ceinos Arcones

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Hidden in the tropical mountains of China’s southern border lives one of the most interesting Chinese minorities: The Jino nationality. With a population of only 21,000 people they are one of the less known ethnic groups in China, who in the past were often confused with the surrounding minorities. The study of their culture started only in the last decades of the 20th century and showed the world an ethnic group characterized for the strength with which they preserved their matriarchal tendencies and their surprising adaptability to their tropical environment. The shadow of their former matriarchy, and of their goddesses, was found everywhere in the Jino life and culture, as a giant umbrella that covered their main activities, especially prominent in their myths and legends, as well as in the spiritual life that directed their everyday activities: farming and hunting, house building, village ceremonies and rituals performed by their main religious specialists. The apparent simplicity of this original society slowly revealed a complex technology developed by hundreds of years of adaptation to their particular environment, a technology that allowed them to continuously inhabit lands that otherwise would have been fit for habitation only for a short time. At the heart of this technology was a reverential respect for the mother earth, embodied especially as the Goddess of the Fields and the Lady of the Beasts, and a common exhaustive knowledge of the different kinds of soils, their responses to the changing climatic conditions, to the seasonal weather oscillations, and to different rice varieties. Their ideas about the characteristics of their soils basically correspond with modern geological classifications; their calendar of 11 months (designed to remember the main steps in the creation process of the goddess Amoyaobai) fits perfectly with their agricultural activities; their knowledge of more than 100 varieties of rice allowed them to optimally use every natural resource.

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