

**Location:** A 1991 study numbered 40,000 Mosuo,<sup>1</sup> living on both sides of the Sichuan-Yunnan border. The Mosuo are primarily concentrated around the shores of beautiful Lugu Lake. Lugu is one of the highest inhabited lake areas in China, at an altitude of 2,685 meters (8,800 ft.) above sea level. Lion Mountain, home to the goddess Gammu, the chief Mosuo deity, rises majestically over the northern shore. No roads led to the lake until 1982. Before that time the Mosuo area was only accessible by foot or on horseback. Still today the whole area is snowbound and cut off from the rest of the world for months at a time during winter.

**Identity:** The Mosuo have been officially included as part of the Naxi nationality. The Mosuo deeply resent this and despise being called Naxi. The two groups have a different language, religion, and culture.

**Language:** Although distantly related to the Naxi, Mosuo speakers are not able to communicate with them and generally revert to Chinese. An earlier visitor found it “impossible to converse with these people, for their language is more than a mere dialect of the Lijiang Naxi.”<sup>2</sup>

**History:** According to Mosuo legends, the ancestors of today’s Naxi and Mosuo migrated down from the Tibetan Plateau about 1,000 years ago.<sup>3</sup> Part of the group stopped at Lugu Lake and became today’s Mosuo people, while the remainder continued south until they reached Lijiang where

today they are the Naxi. After many centuries of separation, the two groups have developed major ethnolinguistic differences.

**Customs:** The Mosuo have a matriarchal and matrilineal society. The *azhu* system means all property and assets are transferred to the female side of the family, from mother to youngest daughter. Even the family name is passed down from the mother. Instead of taking a husband, Mosuo women are able to have “walk-in” relationships. Men are only allowed to visit their lovers at night. They must leave the woman’s house early the next morning and return to their mother’s home. If a child is born, the responsibility to raise the child is borne by the mother and her brothers. Often the identity of the father is not known at all. Despite pressure from the government to discontinue the *azhu* system, a 1994 study revealed 60% of the Mosuo still conform to this way of life.<sup>4</sup>

**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism has a strong grip on the Mosuo. Altars of white stones are piled in pyramid formations on every corner and outside most homes. “Because the Mosuo have no written language,

shamans had to memorize the equivalent of 71 volumes of text and recited them word for word during funerals, births and other events. From the first utterance to the last, a master’s recitation took up to 60 hours.”<sup>5</sup>

**Christianity:** There had never been a known Mosuo believer until recently, when a Mosuo family came to Christ under quite extraordinary, supernatural circumstances.<sup>6</sup> This family shared the gospel with their friends and neighbors, so that today there are about 20 Mosuo believers who meet together, of whom “five are strong Christians.”<sup>7</sup>



Paul Hattaway



**Population in China:**

40,000 (1991)  
46,000 (2000)  
53,700 (2010)

**Location:** Sichuan, Yunnan  
**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism  
**Christians:** 20

## Overview of the Mosuo

**Countries:** China

**Pronunciation:** “Mo-sor”

**Other Names:** Mossos, Moso, Lushi, Hli-khin, Musu, Moxie, Mo-hsieh, Jang

**Population Source:** 40,000 (1991 Shi Yuoyi); Out of a total Naxi population of 278,009 (1990 census)

**Location:** *Yunnan-Sichuan:* Lugu Lake, where Ninglang County, Yunnan, and Yanyuan County, Sichuan, meet

**Status:**

Officially included under Naxi

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lolo, Northern Lolo, Naxi, Eastern Naxi

**Dialects:** 0

**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism, Polytheism, Shamnism, Christianity

**Christians:** 20

**Scripture:** None

**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** Mosuo #04807

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** None

