

The Matriarchal Societies' Case

—How Chinese Data about the Dong Nuguo Could Entice Western Scholars to Re-Open It.

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Abstract - My 15 year research of the star-shaped towers of the Tibetan-Qiang-Yi Corridor has lead me to study and research, in ancient Chinese texts, the clues about an ancient matriarchal society, the “Dong Nuguo”, documented until the Tang Dynasty. Surprisingly the matriarchal quality of this ancient society had never been evaluated in depth by scholars. Chinese scholars until recently somewhat took for granted a matriarchal past and Western scholars mostly favoured the “Timeless Patriarchy” and “Nuclear Family” theories. Archaeological findings are rather inconclusive. This paper will explain these opposite Western and Chinese attitudes and their reasons to be as well as my reasons for believing that the data found in the Chinese Annals and other ancient texts is probably sufficient to establish that this society did in fact exist. This paper will also briefly explain how new findings in anthropology and animal biology demonstrate that the nuclear family model is far from universal; and that the latest neuroscience support intersex brain. I will consequently argue that men and women have the same potential leadership qualities required for the existence of societies where women were in power, and that time has come to re-open the case of the matriarchal societies —a topic that has been taboo, in western anthropological circles, for at least 50 years.

Key terms - Matriarchy, Matrilineal, Tibetan-Qiang-Yi Corridor of southwest China, Dong Nuguo.

I. Introduction

In 2009, I felt that my research, started in 1998, about the Star-shaped Towers of the Tibetan-Qiang-Yi Corridor¹ of south-west China was nearly completed. Then Francesco Bandarin (UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture), on my invitation, finally came to visit the towers, a timely highpoint for his unfaltering support of my “Towers Project” since 2003. As we were traveling he explained that, to

Succeed in getting the towers of the different regions listed as serial Cultural Landscapes, it was needed to ascertain that they had in common, not only similar towers, but also common cultural markers. Consequently these cultural markers needed

to be researched and documented, indirectly implying that I should start to work on it. At the time little did I know that this research was to lead me to argue in favour of the “veracity” of the existence of a genuine ancient matriarchy, located in a towers’ region and documented in the Chinese Annals. As this very society, which was to collapse after 742, certainly was not a “patriarchal ideological construct”, this in turn led me to question the western belief of the “Myth of Matriarchy” as “but the tool to keep woman bound to her place” (J. Bamberger, 1974) and also to look into other narratives, proven today to be unquestionably inventions, as those of Pandora and Eve. These two similar Creation Myths were definitively crafted to reinforce the same two postulates: firstly, as women cannot control their curiosity (also a metaphor for unbridled sexual desire) they will bring misfortune to men, and secondly, “women possessing knowledge is bad”. These two misogynist postulates are obviously unacceptable today; but if we are to believe the theory of “Patriarchy since the Beginning of Times”, that is of women having always been dominated by men, then why are such powerful and widespread legends needed to keep women subservient? Slavery has also existed in diverse cultures since immemorial times, but no recurrent cross-cultural myth has been invented to justify it. This reasoning, added to the latest findings in neuroscience and my first-hand experience of existing matrilineal societies, convinced me that, at least in some contexts and at some times, some societies had existed in which women had been makers and not only bearers.

My investigation of the ancient star-shaped towers of the Tibetan-Qiang-Yi Corridor had led me to stumble upon records about an ancient queendom (Darragon, 2005), and, as I stated researching it, I realized that I was possibly in the unique position, of a westerner living in Sichuan, to prove to the western academic circles that “matriarchy” was not a myth since at least one matriarchal society had existed in time to be documented in historical records.

II. Different Cultural Markers of the Tibetan-Qiang-Yi Corridor Towers regions

The most obvious and also most powerful cultural marker of the towers regions is the fact that all the native languages belong to the Qiangic language family.

Another quite obvious cultural marker is the sacred three-legged stove called “guozhuang” in Chinese. In the towers

¹ This area is usually called “Sino-Tibetan Marches” or Tribal Corridor by western scholars, and “Zang-Yi Zou Lang” by Chinese scholars. I hereby define the term I use of “Tibetan-Qiang-Yi Corridor” as the mountainous regions where the languages spoken belong to at least two of the three following languages families : Tibetan, Qiangic or Yi.

areas, this artefact has specific taboos and symbolism which result in a tripartite division of indoor space quite unique to these areas. It is different from the quite universal sacredness of the fireplace and/or the sacredness of the fire itself. Of course the simplest, most stable and consequently possibly the oldest kind of cooking fire is obviously composed of 3 stones, but what is important in this case is more the symbolism attached each leg, than the shape of the artefact.

Another possible cultural marker is the existence, past and present, of matrilineal and/or matrifocal societies. Today's these kinds of societies are not limited to the star-shaped towers regions. They are in fact found in very small numbers all around the world. But many of them, and some of the most matricentric oriented ones, are found in the broad Himalayan region, possibly because this is still one of the most remote regions of the globe. But for all their remoteness, these regions are located between India, historical China and historical Tibet, all of which are strongly patriarchal societies, the two former having been as such for thousands of years.

III. Today's Western anthropology thorniest topic: Matricentric societies versus "Nuclear Family" model

Today, in western academic circles, the existence of matricentric societies is probably anthropology's thorniest topic. That is because our modern westernized world (based on trade and private property) as well as current monotheistic religions are strongly patriarchal and built around the alleged "natural and universal" ideal of the nuclear family : a father, a mother and their children (in case of Islam and Mormon faiths there can be more than one mother)

The "Nuclear Family" does appear to make perfect sense, from an evolutionary point of view, based mainly on Darwinian evolutionary law of the "survival of the fittest" and Levi-Strauss "alliance theory" (exchange of women between different clans). Still, both systems were conceived by only taking in consideration males' reproductive strategies, females were only "bearers" and appeared to have no role in shaping societies.

Obviously it is acknowledged that, in the modern western world, women have a fair amount of freedom and choice as they have been given education and the right to vote. But these provisions were somewhat reluctantly bestowed upon women mostly by men, based on the respect of "human rights" and not because they were justified by nature, science or any legacy of the past.

Stating in the 60's, and possibly as a backlash against the second wave of feminism and against also the new highly capable women archaeologists and anthropologists as Marija Gambutas who were writing with a "female voice", discussions regarding the reality of matriarchy became a "taboo" topic in western anthropological circles. "Timeless Patriarchy", with either a nuclear family or eventually polygamy, was becoming the new doctrine, and as C. Eller acknowledged, scholars who did not adhere to it were subjected to "*the jeers of most of their colleagues*". Max Dashu adds "*it was made quite clear that certain questions were not to be asked. The negation was*

so pervasive as to be doctrinal, a trigger for shouting-down rather than reasonable discussion". At the same time, the countless similar "Venus Figurines" that had been produced during 35.000 years all over Eurasia became considered as "primeval pornography"; any mentions of ancient texts describing promiscuous "free-love" societies of the past were labelled as "erotic myths" dreamed by the patriarchal society; the innumerable and broadly dispersed examples of non-nuclear families that had been carefully documented (J-F Lafiteau 1723; A. Giraud-Telon Fils, 1867; Morgan L, 1977; R. Briffault, 1927; K.Gough and M. Schneider, 1961 and many others) were regarded as rare aberrant deviations of the "nuclear family" norm.

But in fact, both around the world and in today's western societies, the "natural and universal" character of the "Nuclear Family" model is under definite stress:

1--In the western world single parents families are galore and same sex parent families are being legalised,
2--in the developing world polyandry in Himalayan regions as well as traditional "females-husbands" and "male-daughters" in Africa are making a comeback (C. Fluerh-Lobban personal communication; I. Amadiume 1988 and 1997), a few matrilineal societies have successfully adapted to the market economy (as that of the Island of Manicoy, E. Kattner, 1996), while a couple of "visiting relationships" societies --in which marriage does not even exist- are enduring (Cai, H., 2001. C. Mathieu, 2003; F. Darragon, 2005; Shih, C.K., 2010).

It is true that, Levi-Strauss structuralist "circulation of women" theory neatly explains the very strong and quite universal incest taboo of human societies while, from a Darwinian evolution stand point, nuclear family and or polygamy appears the more efficient reproductive strategy. Levi-Strauss' research and documentation are monumental but structuralism being "the search for the underlying patterns of thought in all forms of human activity", Levi-Strauss' conclusions are intrinsically a kind of simplification. Today Darwin's evolution theory is still valid in its broad lines (and impressively enough, it did led Darwin to predict, as early as 1871 and based on the concept of genealogical branching of a single evolutionary tree, the "Out of Africa" theory) but, here again and as always, generalisation implies simplification.

In fact the real situation is everything but "simple", mainly because of two reasons.

- Firstly because, even if male coercion does happen, female choice exists and counts, both among humans and animals (A. Blackwell, 1875; C. Royer, 1870 and 1875, Briffault 1927, Hrdy,1977 and 1981, 1984, 1999; many others recently)

- Secondly, as proven by new findings in animal biology, because pairing and association, even when part of a reproductive strategy, are not always about sex, as well as sex is not solely for reproduction purposes (C. Packer and A. E. Pusey, 1983; Hrdy - 1981, 1984, 1999; Waal, B.M. de, 1995; Carel van Schaik, 1996; B. Bagemihl, 1999 and many others recently). More refined and precise anthropological studies assert that there are still existing societies in which sibling

kinship primacy over pair-bonding is still the norm (J. Gan-Chaudhuri, 1980; Cai, H., 2001. C. Mathieu, 2003; F. Darragon, 2005; Shih, C.K., 2010;)

IV. The Nüguo (“Women’s Kingdom”) bordering Tibet in ancient texts, as viewed by westerners

From the earliest of my field trips in the towers regions I had heard what I then believed to be legends about local ancient queendoms. Later, I had been surprised to learn that, in ancient Chinese Annals, many of the mentions about the towers were in fact linked to the Dong Nüguo, the Nüguo or Xi Nüguo (since the references stretch over hundreds of years, it could have been one single queendom that later on split into two -Pelliot, posthumous publication, 1961- hence the slightly different names). That had led me to ask our foundation’s employees as well as some of Sichuan University Sichuan students to help me research the precise clues in Chinese ancient texts. Many western travellers and/or ethnologists of the late 19th and early 20th had cited the Nüguo of the Tribal Corridor, based on both stories told by local people and the study of Chinese Annals. None had been especially preoccupied with asserting its matriarchal quality at a time when nobody questioned the existence of matricentric societies (see Section 5). As I mentioned in my 2005 book, Paul Pelliot, in his notes on Marco Polo written in 1940, had already dedicated 30 pages to this “Women’s Kingdom”, added to another 10 pages dealing with the probably imaginary ones located far from the Sino-Tibetan Marches. Interestingly enough we now know that an “imaginary one” located south of India turned out to be Manicoy Island, still mostly matrilineal, albeit Muslim, today. In her 2003 book about the Lugu Lake Mosuo matrilineal society (also located in the Sino-Tibetan Marches), anthropologist and sinologist Prof. C. Mathieu clearly states that her book, when briefly referring to the Dong Nüguo, “*also makes the point that anthropological theory needs to take seriously the idea that matriarchal societies can exist and have existed*”. In the last decade, studies by westerners have defined the trade relations (H. Bielenstein, 2005) as well as the possible boundaries of the Dong (=eastern) and Xi (= western) Nüguos (P. Denwood, 2008 and B. Zeisler, 2011, both of whom relied not only on Chinese texts but also on other ancient texts written in Arabic, Sanskrit, Khotanese, Persian and Tibetan). Texts in Tibetan concerning this topic are few because the Tibetan Empire invaded these regions and transformed the Dong Nüguo “queendom” into a “kingdom” between 742 and 793, shortly after the Tibetan script was invented. In a 1996 article, Jennifer W Jay, an ethnic Chinese living in Canada, had considered the possible existence of matriarchal societies at the time of the Tang dynasty, in China, Tibet, Japan and Korea but, she had shied of asserting that the Dong Nüguo was in fact a matriarchal society.

V . Historic of the “Barbarian” Matriarchate Theory in the West

In 1861, J. Bachofen published, in German, his “*Mother*

Right” based on his study of Greek and Roman myths. It was soon followed by a 1877 book in which L. Morgan documented matrilineal American Iroquois tribes, adding to French missionary Lafiteau’s 1723 comments about these same female-dominated tribes.

In part because these writers and other white male theorists saw patriarchy as an evolutionary advance, the whole western world embraced the existence of “barbarian” near-universal Mother Goddess worship linked with ancient promiscuous egalitarian or even matriarchal societies. The “barbarian promiscuity” theory also nicely justified the ongoing colonialism and the missionaries’ efforts to “civilize” local populations.

But in fact neither Bachofen, nor the few others after him, as A. Giraud-Telon Fils in 1867 and Robert Briffault in 1927, had championed universal matriarchate, they were only trying to report information contradicting the picture of universal timeless male domination.

It is first Marx, but mainly Engels who then theorized, in his 1884 “*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*” that human evolution had gone through an universal stage of matriarchate before agriculture and private property brought the domination of women by men which was soon followed by the domination of workers by Capital. As Chinese scholars, then driven by Marxist theories, started to study the social organization of the local populations of what they called the Zang-Yi Corridor, they labelled some of these societies “fossil societies” left over from the alleged matriarchate times (Guo Xiaolin, et al., 1993; Cai, H., 2001; Wang H.L., 2007)

VI. Current Western Arguments for dismissing the existence of Matriarchal societies

Nevertheless, the reason why the overwhelming majority of today’s western scholars believe that matriarchies never existed has little to do with their rejection of Marxism.

First we have to define what “Matriarchy” means. Although various definitions have been proposed, I personally think that this word should be limited to designate a society which is the reverse and mirror image of a patriarchal society in which men are in power. Consequently a matriarchy is a society in which the power, at every level, is mainly in the hands of women.

Now-a-days, such a society does not exist and, as mentioned earlier, it is also generally believed that real matriarchal societies never existed, based on the following arguments:

1) *Today only matrilineal societies do exist.* In matrilineal societies, the basic family unit is composed of the siblings and descendants of one woman instead of those of one heterosexual married couple, still, as in patriarchal societies, power is largely in the hands of males; but those of the uncles and brothers instead of fathers and husbands. These societies’ rulers and/or leaders are usually male.

2) *Archaeological evidence is inconclusive.* Findings and interpretations from the 1960’s by Mellaart about Catal Huyuk (7500 B.C. to 5700 B.C) have been totally discredited. And,

regardless of her prodigious knowledge which allowed her to create the most credible model for Indo-Europeans origins, Marija Gimbutas' generalized "Mother Goddess" theory has been discredited too.

But if no archaeological remains do prove unequivocally that a matriarchy ever existed, they do not prove either that these early societies were patriarchal.

In fact latest findings based on data from bone condition in Catal Huyuk prove that men and women largely ate and drink the same and consequently had the same social status (Holder 2005).

3) *No existing matriarchal society has ever been encountered,* even in populations with no previous contact with white men. Still we have to remember that today's humans are different from humans who lived at the eve of Culture. Today's societies, and even those still without outside contact, are also different from those that existed, let's say 30.000 years ago. All humans have been living for a long time in a world of competition for resources and have adapted to it.

4) *But another underlying and unacknowledged reason* is that, as Lawrence Summers (then President of Harvard University) expressed in 2005: women's brains are different from those of men, as they have, in his words, less capacity "for science and engineering". Although Lawrence Summers did not mention that, it is also believed that women have less leadership qualities.

It is not only that it is just assumed that matriarchal societies never existed because none has been found or allegedly never reliably documented, the truth is, it is believed that matriarchies have never existed because it is "unthinkable" that they would have. And, as Chris Knight (1991) wrote "*we only see what our conceptual grids enable us to see*". But with these words, Chris Knight was in fact elaborating on a quote by Einstein "*It is the theory that decides what we can observe*" and although Einstein was speaking about physics, this quote is unfortunately perfectly adapted to the current situation: today, in the Western world, Matriarchy is not really part of the anthropological debate, it has been high jacked by politics.

In fact, once straightforward colonialism and native's conversion to Christianity had been abandoned, the concept of "Barbarian Matriarchate" could be abandoned too.

VII. New scientific findings and why I believe that matriarchal societies did exist

A. My personal experience in the field

I am myself a fairly atypical women, often said to think and act as a man, and I was not ready to accept without a fight that women were genetically programmed to be ruled by men. I speak many languages and I have lived in many different countries around the world. For the last 15 years have been sharing the lives of many local inhabitants of the towers region's (I even own a house in Danba County, it overlooks the locally called "Queen's River"). And I through my personal experience I could see that, in that broader region of the Himalayas, many man-woman relationships and customs

were widely "atypical" if judged by nowadays standards. That was even more surprising because these people have been exposed to globalisation: although these regions were fairly remote until recently, the construction of bridges, roads and tunnels has now made them important tourist destinations; cellular phones are ubiquitous in the local population. The fact that social customs remained largely unchanged indicates some deeply ingrained beliefs.

B. The Dong Nüguo data is compelling even if some problems remain to be solved by further study

I also found the data regarding the Dong Nüguo quite compelling. And as explained above, although only one western scholar (P. Pelliot, in the 1940's) has studied Dong Nüguo specific matriarchal characteristics, all the scholars who have studied the Chinese Annals from another angle never doubted that these countries existed. The Chinese Annals, at least from the Sui Dynasty on, were serious books, not inclined to report legends, and texts describing in detail the numerous occasions in which the "Kingdom of Women" paid tribute to the Emperor cannot be labelled as "patriarchal ideological constructs".

Chinese scholars obviously know about this ancient "kingdom" which is repeatedly described as one not only ruled by queens but also where women were in power and men held in little esteem; men had no decision making role, being occupied as agriculturists and soldiers. Historian Ren Xinjian, archaeologist Wang Lumao, ethnologists Li Xingxing, Jiang Jiaming, Shi Shuo and a few others did research different aspects of the Dong Nüguo and none of them doubt of its existence. Unfortunately in Chinese the terms of 母系氏族社会 (= "mother clan society") and 母权制社会 (= "mother power control society") are not very precise and are often regarded as interchangeable, in consequence, as far as I know, no Chinese scholar has never really bothered to ascertain Dong Nüguo's matriarchal quality. Contrarily to western scholars, most of the Chinese scholars also believe in a fairly matriarchal past. Not only, as explained earlier, were they influenced by Marxism, but in fact quite a bit of data regarding ancient China would seem to indicate, if not a really matriarchal early situation, certainly a matrilineal situation in which women had an important influence. As described by M.S. Frost in her 1982 thesis "*Chinese Matriarchy*", there are many such clues in legends and in Chinese characters: the radical 女 "Nü" (= woman) is very often used but the radical 男 "Nan" (=man) is extremely rare. The most renowned example is "xing" 姓, today's word for "family name". 姓 is composed of the radical Nü 女 (=woman) added to Sheng 生, which meaning encompasses both life and birth. In the past this word "xing" also meant "family". (M. Granet, 1920). The Chinese texts often recalled that barbarians "only knew their mothers and not their fathers", and that, in some ethnic groups "women are superior" (Cai, H., 2001). But the Chinese themselves in a further away past also only knew their mothers; so did most of the legendary culture-heroes such as Huangdi and Shennong,

said to be products of miraculous conception, possessing a mother but not a father (M. Granet 1919, 1926, 1929)

Other clues indicating a rather influential position of women at the eve of the Chinese civilization are the famous “Yin- Yang”, known as a Daoist symbol of complementary equal forces, interacting to form the dynamic system of life but which concept is engrained in the earliest Chinese philosophy, as well as the legend of Xi Wangmu the “Queen/divine Mother of the West” whose name is first found on oracle bone inscription dating from 1500 BC.

In his travels during the 13th century Marco Polo describes a region in which minority people would gladly offer their obliging wives and sisters to strangers.

Sometime after 742, the “queendom” started, as written in the annals, to be ruled by kings, and consequently became a kingdom. In 793, the king was named Tang Lisi (汤立思) and there are no references about the “Kingdom of Women” after the Tang dynasty.

However “kingdoms” of the then called Sino-Tibetan Marches usually ruled by queens are often mentioned in historical and ethnological records, and that until the 20th century. Quite a few westerners traveling through the Jiarong towers territories actually did meet the last queen of Somo, one of the famed “18 kingdoms of Jiarong”. In the 1940’s, the one before last “Tusi” (“土司” = local chief) of Badi (also one of the “18 kingdoms of Jiarong”), was a woman. Christine Mathieu also remarks that, around the Lijiang region, many chiefs were women until 1736 as listed in the Yezhi chiefs genealogical records. C. Mathieu did not personally research the Dong Nüguo in Chinese ancient texts but relied on segments of translations by renowned scholars as W. Rockhill and A. Stein. Never the less her contribution is important as she noticed that the clan name of one Dong Nüguo’s queen “E” (俄) was that of a clan name of the Mosuo. Furthermore she argues very convincingly, as also did Shih Chuan Kang, that the Mosuo’s Creation Myth is a ‘gynocentric tale’ and that of a society where men were held in little esteem. These and other clues lead her to propose that the Mosuo could be the descendants of the Dong Nüguo aristocrats. In my 2005 book, I briefly argue that the Zhaba people, who are a matrilineal people practicing “visiting relationships” (走婚) and who still have towers, could also be descendants of the Dong Nüguo.

Unfortunately it does appear that the Nüguo(s) of the Tibetan-Qiang-Yi Corridor have left no archaeological remains. Even if nine and six story Dong Nüguo towers were repeatedly described in the Chinese Annals, none of the towers standing today in Sichuan dates from that period. I have used carbon-dating to date 57 of such towers and Sichuan oldest still standing towers are 900 years old at most. In south-eastern TAR., in the sparingly populated and high altitude ancient kingdoms of Nyangpo and Kongpo, where such towers are also found, I have dated another 25 towers. The oldest one, - around 1600 years old- still stands at 4000 m of altitude because, in very remote areas, people have had no incentive to destroy crumbling ancient towers to re-use their building materials. Towers were also mentioned 2000 years ago in

other parts of Sichuan and they have also been replaced by more recent ones. Burial practices of the Nüguo(s) were also described in the Tang and Sui Annals, but as these people were described as being of Qiang origins and it has been profusely documented that ancient Qiang burnt their dead, consequently more research is needed on that point.

C. Even ancient Greek texts prove that the nuclear family was not always the norm in prehistoric and archaic Greece

Even if the “Amazons” could be dismissed as a myth because the first mention about them was in the Illiad (an epic poem written around 800 BC, describing alleged events which had taken place 400 years earlier) a little bit of research rapidly resulted in unearthing that a non-patriarchal past was not limited to ancient China.

Sparta (900’s to 192 BC), was a prominent city-state in ancient Greece, and both contemporary Xenophon (c. 430 to 354 BC) and Plutarch clearly stated that in Sparta married women could make love with other men than her husband. Greek texts indubitably describe the otherwise very much admired Sparta society as being promiscuous and also one in which women were educated, well-nourished and free to wander and speak their mind. Plato and Aristophanes also write (both around 400 BC) about past “communal property and community of wives” and mention that “Greeks once lived as barbarians live today” (R.F. Willetts, 1954).

D. Latest Neuroscience findings: the brain is intersex

For a long time scientists have known that some regions of the brain were related to certain kinds of tasks. But in the two last decades various new technologies have allowed neuroscientists to actually see “in images” which part of the brain does what for the studied individual. This has definitively been of great help to cure patients. Nevertheless, because each individual builds his own brain in his own way, depending of his genetic abilities, of his needs and of its experiences, each brain is different and uses its own unique path to achieve the required results. Studies prove that, in fact each brain is, especially for the regions involved in higher functions, a “heterogeneous male/female mosaic”, making it intersex (A. Fausto-Sterling, 1992; D.Joel, 2011); and neither males nor females are genetically hard-wired for any specific role or task (S. and H. Rose ed. Alas, 2000; C. Vidal, 2007; L.J. Rogers, 2010; A.Kaiser, 2010; C. Vidal 2012;)

Brain plasticity also allows for tremendous changes until late in life (P. Bach-y-Rita. 1967 and other publications until 2006; Draganski et al, 2006; N. Doidge, 2007; W.Chaney, 2007; C. Vidal, 2009; S.K. Nagel et al, 2009; and many others). Even genetically identical twins develop brain difference over time (C. Plass, 2005; G. Kempermann, 2013).

But brain imaging is also very expensive, so sample size is small and consequently totally unrepresentative. This has led to some ethic-lacking media to report erroneous findings describing the male brain as being notably different from the female brain. Some scientists have strongly criticized these publications (C. Fine, 2010; R. Jordan Young, 2010; C. Vidal, 2012). It cannot be argued, by any means, that very small

samples are a representative group of humanity (H. Pashler et al, 2008). (S. K. Ihnen et al., 2009; A. Kaiser et al., 2009; D.Joel, 2011; C. Kraus, 2012).

Whenever mega-analysis have been carried out (this is difficult because different countries have different standards) the difference between individuals is so great that it dwarfed differences based on gender (A. Feingold, 1994; Voyer, et al, 1995; D.F. Halpern, 2000, and 2004; J. Archer, 2004; R. Barnett & C. Rivers, 2004; J. S. Hyde, 2005; I. E. Sommer ed. 2004, 2008 and 2009; C. Fine, 2010; R. Jordan Young, 2010; C. Vidal, 2012; I. Dussauge & A. Kaiser, 2012).

Neuroscience and comparative gender studies in different countries with different educational systems have largely proven now that the brains of new-born boys and new-born girls have the same potential. (C.Vidal 2005, 2006, 2007, 2012; L. Eliot 2000, 2009; C. Fine 2010; D. Joel 2012; C. Kraus 2012). Zhang has demonstrated that less than 2 generations –of Communist experiment- had been sufficient to blur the gender gap –in competitive inclination- between Han, Yi and Mosou populations (Y. J. Zhang 2012). As a matter of fact today, in the industrial world, women obtain more bachelor degrees, and obtain them sooner, than males; true, physic and engineering degrees are still mostly obtained by males...but for how long?

VIII. Conclusion

In the 21st century the existence of a “taboo” topic in anthropology is inadmissible, even more so when this topic, the possible existence of matriarchal societies, concerns the history of all the women, half of the world population.

Societies are the product of the brains of the individuals composing it. And as each individual builds his own brain in his own way, each group of individuals is also unique. Humans’ needs and experiences are broadly influenced by the culture in which they are raised, still because of language, one successful culture can influence another. There is no doubt that patriarchal societies are better adapted to conquest, and this has led to the demise of other type of societies, bar in the most remote areas as high mountains and islands. I do not believe in a universal matriarchate stage of human evolution; still there must have been quite a number of ancient societies in which women held power. Otherwise the conquering patriarchal societies would not have felt the necessity to invent innumerable and cross-cultural myths to coerce women in their new position of inferiority.

As neuroscience supports the “intersex brain”, the last barrier against the existence of matriarchy has been removed. It is now proven that women are not genetically “hard-wired” and that should lead to reconsider the women’s roles in defining early societies which consequently could have been matriarchal, egalitarian, patriarchal or any combination of thereof. Thousands of new books are coming out every year, new ideas, new interpretations and new voices are being heard coming from all corners of the Planet, replacing views often deformed by racism, colonialism and androcentrism.

Consequently time has come for the western scholars to re-open the question of matriarchal societies and a careful assessment of the written evidence about the Nüguo(s), by both Western and Chinese scholars would go a long way in establishing the truth. I hope that this presentation will be a first step in that direction.

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