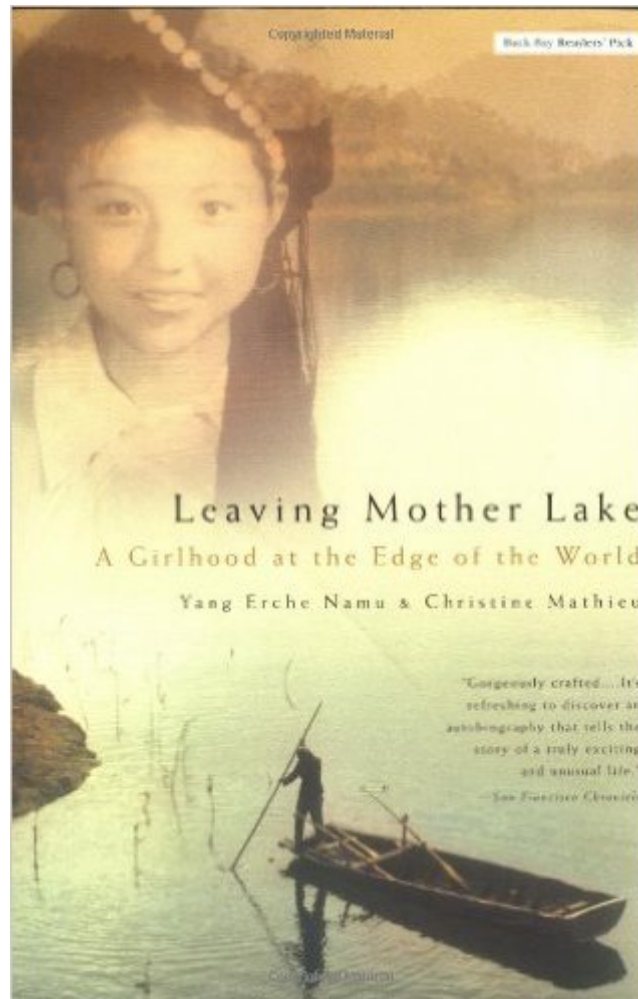


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Leaving Mother Lake: A Girlhood At The Edge Of The World



Synopsis

- The hardcover edition of LEAVING MOTHER LAKE debuted at #3 on the San Francisco Chronicle's bestseller list.- A revelation of a culture virtually unknown in the West, a contemporary society in which women enjoy true sexual and economic freedom.- A huge international success, with rights sold in England, Finland, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Spain, and Sweden.- Hardcover ISBN: 0-316-12471-0

Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Back Bay Books; Reprint edition (February 10, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0316735493

ISBN-13: 978-0316735490

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (56 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #265,062 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #123 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Chinese #757 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Anthropology > General #2774 inÂ Books > Science & Math > Behavioral Sciences

Customer Reviews

....by Melisa Gao, Sr. Correspondent
Leaving Mother Lake is the autobiographical account of a girl coming of age as a Moso, an ethnic minority that lives in the Himalayas in southwestern China. In the Moso culture, women hold an honored place, and families are matrilineal. Yet young Yang Erche Namu feels trapped by society's expectations of her. As she grows into a strong-willed young woman, she decides to leave the Moso to pursue her dream of becoming a singer. Forsaking her ties to her family and her people, Namu relies on her own determination and resourcefulness to brave the unforgiving world. But Namu is caught between two ways of life, and this struggle eventually becomes the focus of the story. Namu, now a famous singer, wrote this memoir with the help of Christine Mathieu, an expert on the Moso people and their history. The authors' passion for this story and for the Moso people resonates with every sentence. Moso traditions and beliefs are a departure from almost any we encounter in today's world, and the book is worth reading for that reason alone. Leaving Mother Lake is a lovingly crafted tribute to this enchanting but little-known culture, with all its legend and lore. Namu and Mathieu use wonderful details to paint a picture of the

Moso people and their home. "Red granite and evergreen forests towered over the meadow, and peaks like saw teeth pierced the blue sky, slicing through feathery clouds - ridge after ridge, and as far as I could see," they write. "The air was so pure, so still, so empty of familiar smells and sounds that I might have become frightened if I had not been overwhelmed by so much wild beauty" (80). This calm beauty of the Moso villages later contrasts the rowdiness of the city streets Namu will visit.

The lifestyle and cultural norms of the Moso people "one of fifty-six Chinese nationalities" of Tibet, who "number about 30,000" are much different than those of most developed countries. The women tend to engage in a series of monogamous relationships, resulting in matriarch family units with several half-sibling children. This one fact might cause people to describe them as sexually promiscuous and immoral. Others might look at the matriarchal, matrilineal Moso as an intriguing social entity not bound by the social constraints of most cultures. Although the Chinese government has encouraged marriage, the Moso people are overwhelmingly undeterred. Mothers tend to prize daughters, as through their offspring the family lines continue. Children may never learn the identity of their fathers, and if they do, will refer to them (as all men) as "Uncle." Children ideally remain with their maternal relatives their entire lives, dying in the same dwelling in which they were born. Men are needed "to herd the yaks in the mountains, to travel with the horse caravans to trade in the outside world, and to make the long journey to Lhasa to study the holy Buddhist scriptures and become lamas." Girls shift from childhood to womanhood by participating in a post-menarche "skirt" ceremony. They then move from a communal room to their own special chamber and are encouraged to engage in sexual relationships. Leaving Mother Lake is the story of Namu Erche, a member of the Moso tribe, who lived a life less ordinary. Her mother, "curious and restless," defied the norms of the tribe by moving from her own mother's home to settle in a village two days' walk distant. Namu cried so much as a young child that three attempts to trade her to other families were unsuccessful.

Yang Erche Namu, born in 1966 is a professional singer, model, socialite, author and basically a very famous person in China. She has written eight autobiographies in Chinese, none of which have been translated into English. However, from what we can gather from excerpts most of them narrate together with her life story the many relations she has had with men all over the world, with detailed appreciations of their virtues and vices. She is actively interested in women empowerment in China and has been investing in hotels in her home region in Sichuan. In 2007 she wrote a public letter

proposing to Sarkozy, but evidently he preferred Carla Bruni. Her fame in China does not march together with public sympathy, and she says of herself that Chinese hate her almost as much as Mao's wife. However, this discussed public personality has a very interesting background, that has drawn the interest of an appreciated anthropologist Christine Mathieu (1954) who undertook the task of reconstructing Namu's childhood. This biography written in first person is not actually written by Namu but by her "interpreter" Mathieu. Namu was born in the Moso ethnicity, one of the 56 Chinese recognized minority groups. The less than 50,000 Moso live according to a matrilinear social organization. Women detain property and through the so called "walking marriage" procreate children that more often than not do not know their fathers. A woman's offspring is usually by different men. This kind of social organization is very rare, but still survives in some parts of the world and determines a peaceful and non violent environment. Until the 1980's this secluded society had had few contacts with the outside world and maintained its peculiar characteristics and represented an anthropologist dream..

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