



Prophets of Agroforestry: Guaraní Communities and Commercial Gathering

Richard K. Reed

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For almost four centuries, the indigenous Chiripá (Guaraní) people of eastern Paraguay have maintained themselves as a distinct society and culture, despite continual and often intense relations with Paraguayan society and the international economy. In this study, Richard K. Reed explores the economic and social basis for this ethnic autonomy.

Reed finds that Chiripá economic power derives from their practice of commercial agroforestry. Unlike Latin American indigenous societies that have been forced to clear land for commercial agriculture, the Chiripá continue to harvest and sell forest products, such as caffeinated yerba mate, without destroying the forests. Reed also explores the relation of this complex economy to Chiripá social organization and shows how flexible kin ties allowed the Chiripá to adapt to the pressure and opportunities of the commercial economy without adopting the authoritarian nature of rural Paraguayan society.

These findings offer important insights into the relations among indigenous groups, nation-states, and the international economy. They also provide a timely alternative model for sustainable management of subtropical forests that will be of interest in the fields of development and environmental studies.

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