


Fall 2015

Changes in Luoshui: How the Outside World Affects Luoshui Village and the Mosuo Culture

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Recommended Citation

Woychuk-Mlinac, Lucy, "Changes in Luoshui: How the Outside World Affects Luoshui Village and the Mosuo Culture" (2015). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. Paper 2208.
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Changes in Luoshui: How the Outside World Affects Luoshui Village and the Mosuo Culture

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for China: Language, Culture,
and Ethnic Minorities, SIT Study Abroad Fall 2015

Abstract

Is tourism really the biggest harm to Mosuo culture? Mosuo people are often the center of studies about how tourism affects the traditions and cultures of minority groups, but there is little focus on the other influences that change Mosuo culture. This study focuses on the lives of the Mosuo in Luoshui village, and how their everyday lives are influenced by the world outside of the village. Without knowing the causes of changes in the Mosuo village, there is little hope for fixing the situation and keeping dying traditions alive. Looking into their religion, education, and the holiday *shazhu*, as well as day-to-day interaction with tourists and current day *zouhuns*, this study investigates how the Mosuo overcome the daily struggles between their Mosuo identity and the tourist industry, and what is currently influencing their culture the most.

The study takes place over a span of three and a half weeks, involving nine informal interviews of people, both Mosuo and non-Mosuo, living in Luoshui Village at the time of the study, with additional ethnographic and observational field notes about the lives and cultures of the people. Findings concluded that the Mosuo have become used to the tourist industry and are no longer facing new, harmful influences by the tourists, more so by the foreigners who have begun living in Luoshui. The Mosuo have learned how to interact with the tourists in a way that gives them an income, and they can educate the tourists on the Mosuo lifestyle. On the other hand, Mosuo are losing their contact with Mosuo culture due to leaving the village for education and opportunities for jobs they could not find in the village.

The separation of the Mosuo people and the integration of them into predominately non-Mosuo areas, including children's boarding school, dissolve the existing Mosuo culture. Even when they do return, they bring pieces of the outside world with them, infiltrating the Mosuo village. While tourism allows Mosuo to show off their culture to those interested, leaving the village and going elsewhere suppresses the Mosuo culture.

Topic Codes and Key Words: Mosuo, Culture, Ethnicity, Tourism, Daba, Change

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Lu Yuan and Professor Yang of anthropology at Yunnan University for helping me get started on this project, providing me with people to contact, and helping me shape my original ideas. I would also like to thank Ms. He and Ms. Yang in Lijiang, as well as Shi Gaofeng, who all introduced me to Mosuo culture and gave me contacts in Lugu Lake. I would additionally like to thank all those who helped me in Luoshui village. I give a very large thank you to my Luoshui advisor, A-ke Dama, who gave me the confidence to do this project, introduced me to her family, answered all questions I had, and always greeted me with a smile. Thank you to her family, specifically Bing Ma Ge, Ci'er and Zhang Hua, for showing me around the village and answering all of my questions. Thank you to the Manidui Hotel, the Mosuo Yuan, and all of their staff members who helped and fed me. Thank you Er Qing, Duo Ji and Duo Ji's family for welcoming me into their home. Thank you to Er Huan and Angelina Ting, for introducing me to people, answering my questions, and welcoming me into your lives as a friend. Another thank you to Bing Ma Di, Ge Sang, and Tian Ya for your friendship and help. Another big thank you goes to Geze Duo Ji and his wife, for spending hours teaching me about Mosuo culture and the history of the area, and for being so welcoming. Thank you also to the family that owns the restaurant below Mosuo Yuan, for their help and kindness. Thank you Jessica Pan Collins, Josephine Wilson Clark and Livia Anne Abuls for helping me finalize this paper and helping me sort through all of my ideas. Lastly, a big thank you to Lu Yuan, Zhou Yan, and Zhao Jie, and the entire SIT: Kunming crew for their support and advice.

Introduction

The Mosuo people are a group in southwest China, living around the border of Sichuan and Yunnan. There are about 40,000 Mosuo living today (Walsh. 2005. 5). The government identifies the Mosuo as a subgroup of the Naxi and the Mongol nationalities, depending on whether the Mosuo are in Yunnan or Sichuan. Although the government does not acknowledge the Mosuo as a *minzu*, an “ethnic nationality”, the Mosuo use the term *minzu* freely when describing themselves in relation to other *minzus*, and I will do the same in this paper.

Within the past few decades, roughly since the 1990s, tourism to areas that have Mosuo culture has rapidly increased. Most are intrigued by the unique culture that the Mosuo possess. They are one of the only matrilineal societies still existing in the world, and families are separated based on maternal consanguineality. (Ji. 2013. 1)

The oldest woman in the family, the *zumu*, is the most important and influential member. She organizes the family and the money. Generations live in the same house. Men live with their maternal family, and take care of their sister’s children. At night, the men visit the home of their *azhu*, their significant other, and spend the night. In the morning, the men return back to their mother’s homes. This relationship is called *zouhun*, or walking marriage (Walsh. 2005. 3). In *Mosuo*hua, Mosuo language, this process is called *tiese*, which means, “walking back and forth”, signifying how the men migrate every night from their homes to the home of their *azhu*. The men and women have no responsibility towards each other or their relationship, and there are no set limitations on how many *zouhuns* one can have.

Lugu Lake, a lake that borders Sichuan and Yunnan and houses many Mosuo villages, became idolized, described as women and girl's country, where the females are sexually free and open. Love is the only true factor that is important when having a *zouhun*, and there are no worries or obligations. (Jiang. 1995. 392). Authors placed Lugu Lake on a pedestal, considering it to be a utopia of free love and happiness, with no possession and conflict (Ho. 1997.210).

Because of their unusual sexual relationships and ritual, the Mosuo attracted a lot of attention from scholars and tourists alike. Certain villages, such as Luoshui Village on Lugu Lake, transformed from farming communities to tourist attractions. Anthropologists became increasingly interested with how the growing tourism industry affected the Mosuo and their valuable culture. Lugu Lake and the Mosuo culture were given a role that was impossible to fill (Walsh. 2005. 3). The Mosuo became a spectacle, using their own identities to make a profit. Literature and advertisements filled outsiders' minds with what to expect when visiting the lake. In order to keep the tourists coming, an industry that is far more profitable than farming to sustain one's own family, the Mosuo complied.

Scholars have now thoroughly studied Mosuo culture. Within the anthropology world, they are often used as an example when discussing matrilineal clans and families (Ji. 2013. 10). Others study to see how the Mosuo have changed since they were "discovered" (Mattison. 2010. 159). Less and less Mosuo wear their traditional clothes, and more have begun to leave their tradition of *zouhun* for actual marriages. Many study and criticize the tourist industry, arguing that without tourism, the Mosuo wouldn't be corrupted by the outside world, and their culture would continue in the purest form. (Nathan.

2003. 1963). Others argue that cultural assimilation could not change a culture this much, and the culture's changes are due to the shift into wealth that the Mosuo have been experiencing (Mattison. 2010. 159). Other studies focus on the change in sexual relationships that Mosuo have been going through, switching for free loving *zouhun* to traditional marriage. Some mention that *zouhun* can actually be more monogamous than originally implied, and the exotic nature of a less monogamous sex life got more attention and shoved the truth aside (Walsh. 2005. 4).

There is copious amounts of information on the Mosuo in relation to their matrilineal society and relationships and how tourism affects those, but I feel that other aspects of Mosuo culture and other factors of how and why it's changing are not being looked into as much. These studies all relate to mine, all are focuses on the current Mosuo culture based on the changes that have occurred at Lugu Lake since the 1990's. My study focuses how tourism affects the culture, and how tourism may not be the biggest enemy to the Mosuo people. Tourism is now a common life for the Mosuo, and it is no longer a new and overwhelming section of their lives. Looking into the religion, education, and the holiday *shazhu*, as well as day-to-day interaction with tourists and current day *zouhun*, I chose to explore how the Mosuo overcome the daily struggles with their identity and the tourist industry, and what is currently influencing their culture the most.

Methodology

My research was conducted for three and a half weeks in Luoshui Village (落水村) on the Yunnan side of Lugu Lake (泸沽湖) during the month of November, 2015. November is considered to be a part of tourist “off season” in the village, although there were still many visitors at the time of my stay. Luoshui is a small village of about 500 residents who work various jobs, mainly within the tourist industry or in the farms at the bottom of the mountains. I chose Lugu Lake for its people and the amount of tourism it receives due to its beautiful sights and “exotic” Mosuo culture. A professor who is Mosuo herself recommended that I stay in Luoshui Village because while it is a tourist hotspot, Mosuo life and culture there has continued on in a way that is not exclusively for the sake of tourism. Before I stayed in the village, I had discussions with Shi Gaofeng, Professor He and Professor Yang, all Mosuo people who study Mosuo culture themselves. They introduced me to current Mosuo life, and gave me tips on what to expect and how to behave in the village. During my stay in the village, I lived in a hotel run by a Mosuo family, who I had many of my meals with. During my days, I would walk the area and make as many field observations that I could. I found that observing and taking notes of my surroundings and the interactions between the people, the cultures, and nature were important in understanding how this area functioned. When I was not exploring and taking field notes, I talked to as many people as I could.

I originally wanted to conduct formal, recorded interviews, but after my first attempt, I discovered that recording the conversations made the interviewees very nervous and uncomfortable with what they were telling me. Instead, I chose to rely on less formal interviews in which I hand wrote all the

answers and findings discussed during the interviews. I chose interviews because I wanted to be able to learn about the personal opinions and experiences of the people I talked with, and I wanted to be able to ask follow up questions that were specific to the person's previous answers. I was also able to ask my interviewees to repeat, expand, or rephrase their answers in a way that I could better understand them. The notes copied were both direct quotes written in the language they were spoken in, and translations of what the informant said. The notes were supplemented with field note observations of events and activities of daily life in Luoshui.

I was able to have informal interviews with 9 people. This does not include information voluntarily given to me by people during my field note observations; during my fieldwork, the people who spoke to me understood my research plan and allowed me to write down what I observed. Different questions were asked depending on the person and their relation to the area, along with different follow up questions based on their previous answers. There is a very wide range of how long these interviews were. Due to the setting of some of the interviews, some being while making dinner, babysitting children, or washing clothes, it is hard to tell exactly how long we spoke together.

I spoke to a range of people that were chosen based off the connections I had in the village. I arrived in Luoshui having three phone numbers of people who live in Luoshui, given to me by advisors and teachers. From those original three, I was able to meet their friends and family, along with others who would later become my interviewees. One contact I was originally given, who will be named *Ajie* in this paper, was particularly helpful when it came to finding other people to talk to. Many times, she allowed me into her home to meet and talk

with her and her family, and she took me to Mosuo events where I was able to meet more people. I chose to talk to all people with no restrictions based on *minzu*, age, occupation or reason for being in Luoshui. I wanted to have a rounded view of how people view Mosuo life and culture in Luoshui, and I feel that in order to do that, I needed to talk to not only Mosuo people.

While I chose not to target a specific age group, the circumstances narrowed my options for me. Starting from seventh grade, children begin boarding school, and are away from home for most of the time, except for holidays, until they graduate high school. Some continue onto college, which is also not nearby, and others have jobs in far cities, and do not return except for holidays. Based on these circumstances, the youngest person I was able to speak with was 25 years of age.

Another restriction on those I could talk with was that many of the older generation do not have a strong grasp on Mandarin, or *hanyu* as they called it, “Han language”, as it was not mandated for schools to teach Mandarin when they were younger. As I do not speak *mosuohua*, Mosuo language, I was unable to have any of my questions answered by them. The majority of people I talked to in the village spoke to me in their second language. For the Mosuo and myself, our second language is Mandarin, which can cause some communication issues. While I was able to understand most of the accents of those I spoke to, I had issues with some. My Mandarin vocabulary is also restricted, as I have only achieved a certain level of Mandarin ability, and I have difficulty picking up on slang or idioms that I was not taught in class. I was able to conduct two interviews in English with two hotel workers who studied abroad in English

speaking countries, and we were able to switch between English and Mandarin to fully understand each other.

Throughout my stay in Luoshui, I conducted my interviews whenever and wherever I could; no one's lives and schedule stopped for me. Whenever a person was available and allowed me to interview them, I did. While I believe this made the interviewees more relaxed and feel less pressure, it did affect the flow of the interviews that I conducted, with occasional abrupt stops to catch the crying child, or stop the boiling pot from overflowing.

During my interviews and all of my interactions in Luoshui, I needed to be aware that I am a white, American, female student, who is alone in this village. During my stay in the village, I was the only white female I encountered, and I feel my visual appearance alone was never ignored by those who I interacted with, including tourists. While I never felt uncomfortable with any of the people I interviewed, my interactions with a few of the tourists in the area made me uncomfortable, and I did not try to approach them with many questions, hindering my selection of people to interview. I was a student who came to the village to understand the culture of the Mosuo, and was generally treated as such. While I was a welcomed guest, I was a guest nonetheless, and one whose Mandarin was limited at that. This affects the answers I received as well.

All field notes and notes from interviews were then typed up onto my computer, and then uploaded onto Atlas Ti software. I used a modification of the Constant Comparative Method of coding, as defined by Sheila M. Fram in her article "The Constant Comparative Analysis Method Outside of Grounded Theory" in *The Qualitative Report* Volume 18, Article 1 from 2013, which involves having an original set of codes, and throughout rounds of coding adding more

codes as more themes develop until the work is saturated. The different codes created for this research categorized the aspects of Mosuo life and culture that I found to be affected and changed by other cultures, religions, and relationships. I also compared my findings to findings from scholars who have previously studied Mosuo people. A limitation on my research is the amount of resources I was able to obtain while in Yunnan, China. I had difficulty finding as many documents on the Mosuo people and resources related to my subject that were in English, and available for me to read.

Pseudonyms were created for all participants of this study, listed below are those who I interviewed in November of 2015 and were used as a part of this research. While some pseudonyms are names that have been altered for reasons of privacy and anonymity, others are Chinese titles that I was asked to call the people I spoke to. There are both those of Mosuo descent and those who do not identify as Mosuo, but were in Luoshui village at the time I was there as well. All of the Mosuo I interviewed were currently living in Luoshui. The majority of these non-Mosuo people permanently live in Luoshui village, while the others have spent extended periods of time, two weeks or more, visiting there.

摩梭人(The Mosuo):

- A-jie
- A-ge
- Duoji
- Laoshi

Non-Mosuo:

- Kangkang
- Angelina
- Zhanghua
- Jiejie
- Gege

Research and Discussion

Tourism Within Luoshui

Those who grew up in Luoshui Village remember that Luoshui began to change about 20 years ago, when the amount of tourists that visited started to rise steadily. Originally, there was general confusion and ignorant fascination about the area and about the Mosuo people and their beliefs. The tourists didn't know how to interact with the locals, nor the local with the tourists. Many Mosuo didn't speak *hanyu*, and the visitors didn't know what was appropriate to ask. A-jie stated that originally tourists, who only vaguely knew about the Mosuo life, would ask for a *zouhun*, or ask how many fathers a woman's children had. The first tourists were insensitive and inaccurate in understanding the Mosuo life. "Tourists do not understand that the food and clothes may be different, but the hearts are the same", says Duoji.

Now, tourists seem to have a better understanding about Mosuo culture. Books, articles, DVDs and other resources have popularized Mosuo culture, allowing tourists to receive more information about Mosuo life before visiting Lugu Lake. "People understand more, and are less ignorant about our lives" says A-jie, who believes that the tourists have gotten better at respecting Mosuo traditions. Duoji, while he does believe interactions between Mosuo and tourists have gotten better, believes tourists are still destructive to Mosuo culture and the environment.

Recently, the number of non-Mosuo residents in the village has increased, taking over hotels, restaurants, and shops. Many buildings are Mosuo owned, but rented out to foreigners to handle. This is a relatively recent occurrence, according to Duoji, who says that only three to five years ago, everything in the

village was Mosuo run. He and Kangkang, the CEO of the fanciest hotel on the waterfront, stated that because the Mosuo didn't know much about technology, they had trouble advertising their hotels to the outside world. "They [Mosuo] don't know the internet", said Kangkang, whose Han mother is a co-owner of a hotel, a Mosuo man is the other owner. Kangkang is spending time in Lugu Lake to see how to better market her hotel and promote the culture of the area through social networking. She is interviewing locals on their daily life and taking pictures to put up onto WeChat and Weibo, hoping to bring in more people to visit.

Foreigners rented buildings or land from Mosuo owners, and turned the hotels into places that would attract other foreigners to visit. A-jie's family lives in the back of their hotel complex, but the hotel and teashop in the front is run by foreigners. The Mosuo Hotel, where I stayed, is still run by the original Mosuo family, but the stores in the front of the hotel are rented to a Bai nation family from Dali. The mother and father, Jiejie and Gege, moved here two years ago from Dali because they heard that the business on Lugu Lake was doing well. They rent the space that they have turned into a restaurant and a souvenir shop from the Mosuo family that runs the hotel, and they live within the hotel compounds. They say their relationship with the Mosuo landlords is "very good, we really respect the elder women", says Gege.

The menu of this restaurant only advertises about three "Mosuo" dishes, with the rest being general Yunnan food, the most popular being fish hotpot. In other places throughout Luoshui, there are imitations of traditional Mosuo life. While showing me his hotel, one Han hotel owner knocks on a wooden wall and said "I used wood for my hotel because that's traditional Mosuo style". While he

is not wrong- Mosuo houses are made of logs stacked together- he is imitating the Mosuo structure of a Mosuo purely because it will draw in more tourists, looking for an authentic Mosuo experience.

Many young men who work as canoe paddlers, photographers, and other jobs focused to the tourist industry wear only articles of traditional Mosuo clothing. You can see groups of young men waiting by the docks of canoes, wearing either a traditional jacket, shirt, or both, cigarettes in hand, cowboy hats on head. The air is filled with shouts in Mandarin, calling to get tourists take pictures with the alpaca and ram tied to the scenic viewpoint, to go on a boat ride, to buy bread to feed the seagulls. The group of canoe paddlers are silent, engrossed in their own world of card playing and gambling. They speak *mosuohua* to each other, laughing and making fun of one another, not entirely concerned about attracting tourists to their boats.

The gambling itself is another negative side effect of the tourist industry, says A-jie. Most Mosuo in the tourist area don't rely on farming as their source of income, and farming is no longer hours of labor. Mosuo had constant busy work when they were running their own hotels and trying to manage their restaurants, but now foreigners are renting these spaces. Duoji states that a lot of Mosuo people don't have jobs that take up their entire day. They take shifts being cabbies, traders, farmers, and canoe paddlers, creating free space in their day for games such as mahjong and gambling games.

While there is an increased amount of gambling within Luoshui, there is a decrease of tourist-Mosuo interaction. The hotels are usually run by those of another *minzu*, and the Mosuo can keep to themselves if they truly want to. A-jie says she almost always speaks in *mosuohua*, because she never interacts with

tourists. Unless she is talking to one of her non-Mosuo friends, she sticks with her first language. Nazhu, another woman whose family rents out the hotel in the front and lives together in the back helps raise the children of her family, and take care of the elderly as well. She helps raise the children and pigs and never interacts with the tourists, so she rarely speaks Mandarin.

The tourist and Mosuo interactions that do happen aren't as ignorant and invasive as they previously were. If a tourist wants to really learn about the Mosuo, they can go to the slightly run down but educational Mosuo museum. Otherwise, there are two events in which tourists can "experience" Mosuo life: the canoe rides, and the dance performances.

A-ge invited me one day to go on one of Lugu Lake's famous boat rides. The boat rides are meant for tourists, although you can see the canoes being used for fishing and transportation purposes all around the lake. The men gamble while they wait until a canoe is filled with 10 to 14 tourists are sitting two by two on the wooden slats that horizontally cross the rectangular wooden boat. There are two paddlers per boat, A-ge's cousin is the other paddler. They request 50 yuan per person. There are 12 other tourists on the boat today, all of them have brought leftovers or bought bread from the peddler for 10 yuan to feed to the seagulls.

When the tourists are excitedly talking to one another, laughing at the seagulls who circle the canoe, hoping to get some bread, the two Mosuo men speak over everyone in *mosuohua* to one another, clearly unimpressed by this batch of tourists. They switch to Mandarin to speak to the tourists and share some information about the lake: the island over there is named *Liwubi*. In Mandarin, the name means nothing, but in Mosuohua, it's named for the birds

that come in the spring and sit on all the flowers and tree blossoms and chirp. We pass through two islands that are connected shallowly under the water. A-ge tells us that the mountains are named Big Brother and Little Sister, *a-ge* and *a-mei*. He also points out how the mountain range of Sichuan make the form of the mountain goddess, the tallest mountain being her face looking up to the heavens.

After A-ge talks about the culture of the land, the tourists become curious about the famous *zouhun*. A-ge explains what a *zouhun* is, and why the Mosuo people are a matrilineal culture. He gives a detailed explanation of what a traditional walking marriage involves, the family interactions, the children, where everyone lives. A-ge continues that although walking marriages are still being practiced, the amount of formal marriages is increasing as well. The tourists on the canoe are fascinated, and begin to ask even more questions, asking about specific scenarios and situations: *what if there are no girls in the family? what if there aren't uncles?*, but A-ge answers all of these questions vaguely, it does of course depend on the family and their own choice. The tourists become bolder and begin to ask questions about A-ge's personal arrangement and his own family. He laughs the questions away, points to the mountains that are behind Luoshui and talks about them, changing the subject completely. While A-ge will educate the tourists on Mosuo culture in general, he does not go into personal details and scenarios about the people in his life.

Once the 15 minutes on the island were up, everyone piled back into the canoe, and the questions continued, *where do you buy clothes? Do you go by yourself?*, and A-ge laughed and answered the tourists who were eagerly trying to understand life on Lugu Lake. A-ge talks more about Mosuo life, how many foreigners run the places because Mosuo "couldn't survive" running it by

themselves. At the end of the boat ride, all the tourists thank them, take a few more pictures, and pay. For this two-hour boat ride, the two Mosuo men together made 650 yuan.

This experience showed me how normalized living in a tourist village has become for the Mosuo. They understand that people come from all over to see the Mosuo life, and they may not have the most accurate idea of what that life really is.

The boat ride is a great opportunity for tourists to learn about Mosuo culture. They have two Mosuo canoe paddlers to ask all their questions, and the Mosuo are then given the opportunity to educate others on what their lifestyle actually is, as opposed to a skewed version learned elsewhere. While the Mosuo paddlers are happy to explain what their lives are really like, they are not personal in their answers. They talk about the Mosuo as a people, not about their personal situations, and they skillfully steer the tourists away from those questions. Their interactions with tourists over the past decades have taught them how to give out correct information, while keeping their own lives private and away from the tourists.

Every night, in the big village square, the traditional Mosuo dance begins at 8pm. One person from each Mosuo family participates. In the middle of the square is a big fire hearth, the life of Mosuo culture. Bleachers line three of the sides of the square, the fourth is a porch and “backstage”. I go to the dance on a Tuesday with Kangkang and Angelina, who also works in the fancy hotel. They are friends with two of the dancers and have seen the dance before. The stands are not packed, but there are quite a few tourists ready to watch. At 8pm, the dance begins. The Mosuo all dance around the fire in a line, holding hands or

fingers with one another. The line of men is cut in two, with all of the women in between. All of them are dressed in formal Mosuo clothing. They dance a traditional group dance around the fire with synchronized steps and kicks.

Towards the end of their performance, the men at the end of the line, clearly the youngest men of the group, start changing up their performance. Instead of doing the steps in the same way everyone else was, they over exaggerate every step, in sync with only one another. Their bodies flop and move front to back, in a cartoonish manner. The audience, who were not fully enthralled by the previous dances, suddenly became more interested. When the boys passed a group of people, they would all clap and laugh and take pictures. The steps changed more, now the dancers would all step and hop and shake a little. The boys on the end of the line stepped more, hopped more, stuck out their behinds and wiggled. The crowd wolf whistled and cheered and everyone took out their cameras. The other dancers didn't seem to mind too much, this was a pretty normal occurrence.

Angelina and Kangkang, who have been to the performance before, said this is what the boys on the end did. It was not part of the traditional dance, but it was more entertaining. "I think it's sexy. If they didn't make it exciting people would fall asleep", said Angelina, who laughed and cheered when the boys started. At the end of their performance, all of the tourists were invited to join hands with the Mosuo, and learn the dance they just performed. Everyone joined hands and tried to follow the steps around and around the fire. The boys, to everyone's delight, did the same exaggerated steps they had done before.

After the dancing, the Mosuo all stood together on the porch, separated into boys and girls. They sang a traditional Mosuo song all together, and the

audience clapped. The performers sang three more songs. Each was a traditional Mosuo song, but they were not in *mosuohua*. Instead, they were translated and sung in Mandarin, so the audience could understand the love songs that they were singing.

The dances show traditional Mosuo culture, with an aspect of tourists learning the dances themselves and having fun with the people of the village. The songs are translated into Mandarin so the audience can all understand them. While the Mosuo use events and attractions as ways to educate the tourists who come, and give them a real glimpse into the life of the Mosuo, these events are catered specifically for the comfort or entertainment of the tourists.

Tourism is an incredibly important industry in Luoshui. Luoshui itself has less than a thousand residents, but according to Duoji, between 3,000-20,000 tourists a month visit through Luoshui. When the tourists arrive, the Mosuo have an opportunity to teach them about their own culture. When the tourists come through, they also influence the Mosuo in their lifestyles. The disparity, however, between tourist and non-tourist villages in this area is huge. "In a non-tourist village, in one year the highest a person makes is 30,000 yuan. In Luoshui, 200,000yuan is the lowest a person makes in a year," says Duoji, "Even though the culture is failing, the living is better". He laughs, "The other Mosuo villages don't like Luoshui".

In the non tourist villages, the children are still required to go to school, which becomes boarding school in middle school and onward. "The farms can only feed themselves", says Duoji, and there is no profit to afford electricity or other technologies. The children who have finished school can either go back to the villages and farm, or leave to other places and make money to send back to

their families. Even without tourists, the people of the towns are still interacting with other cultures and traditions. To an extent even more, where they send money home, but don't go back themselves. When all the Mosuo of the town are in other cities, where does the culture go?

Religion

The Mosuo religion is a combination of Daba and Tibetan Buddhism. For centuries, both religions have presided together, and cohabit within the same households. Daba has been around for an estimated thousand years, and emphasizes that all souls are immortal. After death, the soul continues on. Where the soul goes varies on the region (Matheiu. 1998. 221). In Lugu Lake, a daba (the shaman) guides the soul to the highest mountaintop, Seba'anawa, where it can continue on and be a part of the spirit world. Because ancestors never truly die, the Mosuo must find ways to show their respects to the ancestors who will help guide them. When a spirit is angered with you, it will make you fall ill, and only a daba can exorcise the bad spirit out.

Historically, each household had their own daba (Matheiu. 1998. 213), but the numbers of young boys who are willing to train to become one has been decreasing over the past decades. Duoji, who is still an avid believer in the power of a daba, worries about what a world without them will be. When he is sick, he calls upon a daba before going to the doctor. Dabas make house calls, and traditionally accept meat or liquor as payment, but now they will also accept money, says Duoji. Duoji worries that when his time comes and he dies, there will be no one to guide his soul to Seba'anawa. Children are required to go to school starting at a very young age, and, according to Duoji, dabas begin their

training when they are five or six years old. Instead of following the line of a daba, who is not paid well and must spend around 20 years of intense studying, children are choosing to go to college and have jobs related to business, leaving the role of daba empty. Dabas are able to talk to spirits, send the bad ones away, and consult the gods for help. There are no ancient texts or scriptures from which dabas learn their ways, it's entirely by word of mouth and memorization (Mathieu. 1998. 210). When there are no more dabas, there is no more Daba religion.

While signs of Dabaism are hard to spot in Luoshui village, Tibetan Buddhism thrives. A little before 2010, a new temple was built on the mountain behind Luoshui. The mountain is covered in prayer flags, and has lodging for the lamas of the temple. Behind this temple, an even newer and grander temple is currently being built. Within the village, there are three stupas. During the late morning and early evening, the Mosuo women of the village, in their traditional clothes, all walk to one of the stupas, holding their prayer beads in one hand and their prayer wheels in the other, and circle the stupa clockwise. Flags and stones with Tibetan prayers engraved cover the lakeshore. While Daba doesn't have temples and icons, Tibetan Buddhism has plenty.

As is the case with many areas that practices Tibetan Buddhism, typically one member of each family goes off to become a lama. Two of the villagers, A-ge and Gesang, both studied in Tibet and India for some time to become lamas. Gesang trained for four years to be a lama and A-ge studied for ten years before they quit and came back home. Instead, now they both are boat paddlers, dancers, and car drivers. They are both fluent in Tibetan, and A-ge knows some Hindi and English because of his time abroad. Even though they did not become

full lamas, their experience with the outside world influences their lives in the village. A-ge and his wife want to have their daughter grow up as a Tibetan Buddhist. There was no mention of teaching Daba traditions at all.

Education

From an early age, Mosuo children are assimilated out of their heritage by school. By 7th grade, the children go to boarding school 20km away from Luoshui. The elementary school in the village goes from 8:00am until 4:30pm every day. Right next to the school entrance is a sign,

请讲普通话，请写规范字

“Please speak in mandarin, and write with criterion’s words”

Of the Mosuo parents who I interviewed, no one speaks Mandarin with their child at home. Nazhu is teaching her one-year-old simple words, such as *erzi*, “son”, and *ayi*, “aunt”. Duoji has taught his three-year old daughter *xiexie*, “thank you”, but he says even without him teaching her Mandarin, she’s already exposed. “She hears it on the radio, TV, and when other people speak *hanyu* around her,” he says. Huahua, whose child is half Han and half Mosuo, says that she speaks both with her child. This little girl will be ahead of the game when she starts school. Laoshi, a teacher at the elementary school, said that about 30% of the students in the elementary school are Mosuo. The rest are Han, Yi, Pumi, and Bai.

The Mosuo students sometimes speak *Mosuohua* to each other, but they are not allowed to use it during class. Only in the youngest grade, where some children know no *hanyu*, does Laoshi speak *mosuoshua* to students during class. I asked if they teach any of the local culture at the school, and if any children seem

to know about Mosuo culture. Laoshi replies that they do not teach the kids about the local cultures, they should learn that at home, “some of them know, some of them don’t know”. It’s entirely up to the parents to pass on their culture to their children. Duoji and his wife are “slowly, very slowly” trying to teach their daughter some Mosuo dances and stories. Their daughter is already three years old. They have two more years to teach her about Mosuo culture before she spends most of her day being forced to learn a new language and learn about China’s Han culture. They have seven years after that to teach her to be proud to be Mosuo before she stops living with them.

Parents have until their child is in 7th grade to teach them all about Mosuo culture, before their kids are sent off to boarding school. In the time they have to teach, their children are also learning a new language along with other school lessons, and now have more friends who are of different cultures and backgrounds. These kids are still living in their Mosuo home, they haven’t even left yet, but they already prefer to speak Mandarin with one another. Erqing, whose youngest daughter just started boarding school, says his daughter doesn’t want to speak *mosuohua* anymore, and only speaks in Mandarin.

Education is important. Whether it’s going off to Tibet to train to be a lama, or just going 20km away to middle school, everyone experiences new cultures and they themselves expand their minds. Sadly, their minds are not expanding with knowledge about their own people, and Mosuo culture suffers a blow. Mosuo language is forbidden most of the day, and children are learning about how important the rest of China is, not about their own people. Those who go off and learn other languages only continue on learning about the culture of

other places, and slowly forget their own. Even when they return home, new languages and cultures become intertwined with the Mosuo lives in Luoshui.

Zouhun and Other Relationships

Zouhun is often considered to be the only type of relationship a Mosuo could have, which is not accurate. There are exceptions and instances, even in history, in which one would have a marriage of sorts. Historically, families of nobility would marry (Knödel. 1998. 51).

To the Mosuo, the most important thing is to have a big family. Families that are organized consanguineally are successfully large, as divorce, breakups, and questions of paternal identity do not affect the size of the family. But more important to the Mosuo than having a *zouhun* is having a happy, big family. In order to achieve that, sometimes a *zouhun* is not the answer.

A-jie, who has a *zouhun* herself, has parents who, by Mosuo terms, are married. They did not have a formal marriage, but her father lives in her and her mother's home in an arrangement that she called *ana-xia tongju hun*, or a co-habitual union of the Ah and Xia families. This marriage happened because when she was 15, her uncle moved to Yongning and formally married a Naxi woman. When her uncle moved out, A-jie's mother no longer had a man help raise her children. While the family is matrilineal, it is still considered important to have a man in the family to help raise the children. A-jie's father, whose mother had nine children and could spare one moving away, came to live with the mom to help raise A-jie and her two younger brothers.

In another family, Duoji only has brothers and his wife has no siblings, so they married to combine to make a larger family. Together they raise their

daughter. Duoji, who really believes that big families are the center of Mosuo life, is worried about the toll that tourism and life outside the village has on large families. “Families have a lot of people: 7, 8 members.” he said. Families have separated as more people marry with people of other *minzu* and become a separate household. Money begins to belong to the individual, not a family, and the support system decreases. Big families can help each other; individuals have no one to help them when they fall. “Mosuo family is different than any other *minzu*, which means it falls harder”, says Duoji.

A-jie and Nazhu, women who are in their thirties, both have had long lasting relationships with their *azhus*. Nazhu, whose has the same *zouhun* with one man for at least nine years, says that her *azhu* raises his little sister’s children. Both her children know who their father is, and when they visit their father’s house, he gives them gifts and they are treated as “the most highly-esteemed guests”. When it comes to the qualities of a good *azhu*, Nazhu is confused by the question she doesn’t rely on his money, status, or job. I chose to rephrase my question to why do they have a *zouhun*, and she replies, “We are not indecisive, we chose to have a *zouhun*. If he had a lot of bad qualities, then I wouldn’t be with him. I help myself”.

A-jie has a similar history with her *azhu*. They met on a Buddhist pilgrimage in Tibet, but they knew each other before. They have had a *zouhun* together for at least fifteen years, and her children know who he is and when they visit, they are treated as *qinqing*, as relatives. Their *zouhun* has gone on for some time, and A-jie says they are very independent people who don’t interact a large amount. Nazhu sees her *azhu* quite regularly, where A-jie says that he doesn’t come every night any more. She laughs, saying they are not that young

anymore, he doesn't need to come over all the time, and when he calls, he comes over. When he doesn't, it's not a problem. Both A-jie and Nazhu corrected my belief that a *zouhun* was a secret between the man and woman involved. Both of their families were very involved with the beginning of their *zouhun*, and everyone knows about them. During the courtship, their men's families gave gifts to their families, to make sure they approved of their children's' relationship. There was no secrecy, and both say they know who in their families has a *zouhun* with whom.

I asked Angelina what she thought about *zouhuns*, and how they are decreasing in number. She replied that Mosuo are choosing Han marriage for two reasons: 1. Because it is easier for government registration when you can trace your lineage, and have families that the government recognizes for your *hukou*, your government ID. And 2. Because the younger generation leaves the villages, becomes more educated and has a more "open mind". When they leave the village, they become more Han, so "they want to have more Han marriages".

A-jie and her family are not as concerned about lack of *zouhun* separating families. In fact, A-jie states that although Luoshui and Mosuo culture has been affected by the outsiders, she believes that "siblings still live together, food hasn't changed, there isn't a separation of families". A-jie has good reason to believe this is the case. Her younger brother, A-ge, married a Han woman two years ago, but the couple and their daughter live with A-ge's family in their Mosuo home.

The wife, Huahua, has learned *mosuohua*, and she converses with them in their language. If anything, marriage has caused A-jie's family to increase. Huahua says she prefers Mosuo culture to Han. As her toddler runs around us, babbling and hitting the ground with a piece of bamboo, Huahua explains that

Mosuo families are large, and all of the members of the family help out with the child and take her everywhere. Huahua has been fully accepted by the family as one of their own, she worked as one of the Mosuo dancers before her baby was born, and was even given a Mosuo name that she likes better than her Han name. She says that A-ge's mother, *amu*, didn't mind, because she understands that "The youth do what they feel. If it works, then it's good". Even if the family does accept Huahua as a member of the family, A-jie says that they don't think of them as married. "When they are in Yongning [Huahua's hometown], they are married. When they are here, they are not".

When asked if she wants her child to grow up as a Mosuo, Huahua immediately replied "definitely", her daughter's surrounded by Mosuo culture, so it will be easy for her. Huahua and A-ge met in Lijiang, and Huahua insisted they get married. She says that because he loves her, he agreed. While she felt that marriage was necessary for them, she doesn't see a large difference between marriage and *zouhun*. She believes that the feelings between both relationships are similar, and both have family support systems. As an outsider who entered this culture, Huahua thinks that outsiders don't understand a lot about *zouhun*.

Most Mosuo who are over the age of 30 have a *zouhun*. It was significantly harder to find people under the age of 30 who had, or willing to discuss, *zouhun*. A few would casually mention seeing their girlfriends, implying a lack of *zouhun*. The stigma the Han have with *zouhun* is connected with the idea that Lugu Lake is the Girl's Kingdom, where the girls all have sexual freedom and have many lovers. "To the Han, *zouhun* is the same as one night stand", says Kangkang. Angelina says that *zouhun* simply means, "not married", and the man and his family have no responsibility. When Kangkang and Angelina introduced me to

Gesang, they told me they call him *zouhunwangzi*, king of the *zouhuns*. When I inquired more about this, they told me it's because he's handsome, and flirts around with the ladies: he's a "player". They used the term *zouhun* with its "one night stand" definition, to a Mosuo person in a Mosuo village. Even if any of these young men had *zouhun*, why wouldn't they try and hide it from outsiders, who will disrespect the culture of their relationship?

Another potential reason for the lack of *zouhuns* in the younger generation is that there isn't opportunity for many men to have a *zouhun*. For a place known as "the kingdom of girls", there were not a lot of young Mosuo women in the village. Originally, the "free women" are the biggest draw into the village, and they were at the center of it all, but Luoshui has moved away from that part of tourism. After Liberation, men had more opportunities when they left Luoshui. With the growth of the market and the increase in tourism, men could leave to get educated and become politicians, teachers, monks and successful traders (Nathan. 2003. 1963). The women were left with the village, taking care of the house and the tourists.

Now, foreigners have taken the women's jobs. The men still paddle the boats and drive taxis. The women, who were originally hotel workers were mostly replaced by outside hires. Some Mosuo women still work within the hotels, shops, and restaurants, but not many. The women I met who were under the age of 30 were almost all non-Mosuo. I met three Mosuo women under the age of 30, but none of them were willing to speak with me. It seems that now women are educated as well, they are also able to seek out better and more successful jobs. Going to school elsewhere gives them opportunities to stay out of the village and find success. Many young men, who can still make good money

with from tourists and still have jobs available, stay. Even the female dancers were usually above 30 years old.

Without women, how can there be a *zouhun*? Nazhu's mother approved of her relationship because she was so worried Nazhu would leave the village, and a *zouhun* kept her there. It seems that a *zouhun* is a reason to stay, but the prospect of a *zouhun* is not good enough. Especially now that there are alternatives to a *zouhun* and marriage is a very viable option for many, staying in the village when there's both work and love outside of Luoshui does not seem to appeal to many of the young Mosuo women, putting the young Mosuo men without any *azhus*. Almost all nights, one can find the same young men who paddle the canoes in the day in the bars of Luoshui, gambling with dice, playing cards, singing, and smoking cigarettes. There is rarely a female at the tables of Mosuo men, and there are never more women than men. When there are few young women, and the idea of a *zouhun* is disrespected, how can anyone expect their traditional way of life to continue?

Shazhu

"*Shazhu* is not a holiday, it's a season", said A-di, the co-owner of the hotel Kangkang works at. *Shazhu* is mandarin literally translates to "kill pigs". The Mosuo, Pumi, and some Naxi all celebrate *shazhu*. When the weather begins to get colder, they need to prepare for the colder months, so the families kill their pigs and begin to prepare and salt their meat for the upcoming months. On the day that is *shazhu*, they prepare a huge meal, mainly with pork dishes, and invite friends and other family to come and eat. A-jie invited me to her aunt's *shazhu*, as well as her own. In total, I attended four *shazhu* dinners in Luoshui. There are

special pig dishes that are *shazhu* dishes, not eaten during the rest of the year. A-jie's favorite dish is pig intestine stuffed with rice and blood, which is then boiled. She giggles as she steals more from the plates about to be served.

The family spends all day preparing the meat for tonight and for the next few months. While making sausages, A-ge and Gesang get yelled at by another family member helping with the sausages; A-ge and Gesang were speaking Tibetan to one another, and he couldn't understand what they were saying. Even on one of the most traditional of days, there are still signs of the outside world within the Mosuo home.

As the men make the sausages and the women, including Huahua, who has learned how to make all of the Mosuo dishes, cook more meals in the kitchen, the children run freely throughout the house. They play games, some variation of tag, with one another. While they play, they speak mandarin to one another. They talk to the adults in Mosuohua, but they switch right back to Mandarin with each other. Every now and then, the children stop to watch the food being made, and try to turn the sausage wheel, or help chop vegetables. There is no recipe for any of the dishes, this is the only way the children will learn how to make the food. The oldest children miss *shazhu*. Only one of the four *shazhus* dinners I attended was on a Saturday, the only day students can come home from boarding school. The other dinners were held on other days of the week, meaning only the elementary school children and toddlers were around to help and learn.

At around 4pm, the people arrive. It's mainly other Mosuo, but tourists are welcomed. A-jie invited all of the non-Mosuo people to eat, including the people staying in her brother's hotel. The tourists who arrived are from Beijing, and A-jie offers to take shots of Baijiu before the dinner. Before they all take

shots, A-jie and a friend of hers sing a traditional Mosuo song about welcoming new friends into their life. Like at the dance performance, although the melody and meaning behind it is from traditional Mosuo culture, the song itself is sung in Mandarin, so the visitors can understand it as well.

After the meal is done, the visitors try and pay her for the meal they had, but A-jie would not accept their money, repeating, “This is a holiday, you do not pay”. Later, when asked about it, A-jie told me “No one pays. I’m welcoming them to this holiday”. *Shazhu* is an important event for the Mosuo whether tourists are there or not, and it is still part of the Mosuo lifestyle. Its not a way to get more money from the tourists, A-jie genuinely wanted to educate the people on her way of life.

To me, *shazhu* is a great example of how Mosuo life continues on with the influences of the outside world. The holiday still has many traditional components; all food was prepared by the hands of the family and all dishes were traditional *shazhu* dishes, handed down generation after generation with no recipe. While the tradition of *shazhu* continues, aspects of the day are altered by the outside. The oldest children are not present for many of the dinners, as they are in school and are not allowed to come home for this holiday, even if it is special to their culture. Without the oldest children there to watch and learn, its hard to say how they will be able to continue making the *shazhu* meals, which aren’t made other times of the year.

At the same time, even those present during the event are changed. Speaking Tibetan excluded the other members of the family from A-ge and Gesang’s conversation. A day spent with family is supposed to be about family, and instead, A-ge and Gesang keep their interactions private from the others and

utilize the abilities they learned while training to be lamas. While there may be no harm in speaking Tibetan to each other, it added a tension between them and their excluded family members.

Lastly, A-jie chose to make this holiday an event that some non-Mosuo could experience to see this part of their life. This dinner is the most authentic traditional Mosuo experience one could see within Luoshui village, and A-jie decided to further educate some people she that decided respected her and her family enough. The language of the drinking song she sang to welcome the visitors into her home was not of tradition however. The song was still switched to Mandarin for the convenience of the visitors, showing how the Mosuo are accustomed to the Han's presence in their village.

Conclusion

Luoshui Village has housed tourists for at least 20 years. They suffered through the ignorance of the first batches of tourists, who were too baffled by the culture to be respectful. Gradually, the tourists became more understanding of the Mosuo, and the Mosuo became more accurately well known by the outside world. There are still misconceptions about the Mosuo people and their beliefs, but there is also significantly more correct information about them out there than there previously was. I argue that while tourism still influences the Mosuo people living in Luoshui, they are not the biggest factor in the changing of the Mosuo people anymore.

The Mosuo people are used to tourists, and their lives have adjusted to living in a village with constant visitors. They rent out the storefronts and hotels, and now they don't have to interact with the tourists in their own houses. They

have set up attractions and events to educate the tourists on Mosuo life, and they know how to answer questions that educate, but do not share too much personal information. Parts of the culture that is shown to the tourists have been changed specifically for the comfort of the visitor, such as adding some pizzazz to a dance or changing the songs into *hanyu*. This may not be the authentic Mosuo culture, but the Mosuo are able to make more money when the visitors are more entertained and satisfied. The part of Luoshui village that the tourists see is set up specifically for the tourists, and they no longer invade the Mosuo people's personal lives.

The tourists are not the biggest problem to the Mosuo anymore. The biggest problems are that young children leave their Mosuo life early, and opportunities for a better life do not always include Luoshui. Children aren't given a whole lot of opportunity to learn about Mosuo culture. Education is important, and every child should have the opportunity to receive an education, but it comes at a price. Their home language is looked down upon at school, they learn nothing about Lugu Lake, the importance of their culture, or anything related to being Mosuo in school. They do not return to their home for Mosuo holidays like *shahzu*, and they miss the opportunities to proudly be a part of Mosuo culture. No child wants to be a daba and continue to learn the ancient Mosuo ways, and even if they did, they would also have to attend normal school as well. Tibetan Buddhism is also part of life outside of Lugu Lake. Usually one son of each family goes to study to become a lama, few to no children are doing the same for Dabaism.

Once educated, unless one wants to work in Luoshui, jobs that are usually related to farming, tourism or constructing new hotels and buildings, they go

elsewhere to work. Places outside of Lugu Lake don't necessarily have *zouhuns*, and marriages are more standard. It would make sense to leave the village for the sake of money and better opportunity, and if they happen to fall in love and marry, so be it. Women are finding more opportunities for jobs outside of Luoshui. When they leave the village, they are not only changing their personal culture and influence, but the men left in the village, without a mate, are also affected.

Luoshui is different from many other Mosuo villages, however, because they have better opportunities still within the village than many. For many Mosuo villages, farming is the only work offered to people returning from school, which is not a great option for the educated youth. Plus, someone needs to leave to bring money back to provide for the family. While people of Luoshui do leave for other options, at least there are still multiple options within Luoshui. The culture may be changed for the sake of the tourists, but the Mosuo still have a reason to practice their culture, and have being Mosuo something that's important, and exciting. The places without tourists may keep all of their songs in *mosuohua*, but there are fewer and fewer people in the villages to sing them.

I think the best solution would be to educate Mosuo children more about what it means to be Mosuo. Whether it is a culture afterschool class, or letting them come home for holidays such as *shazhu*. I think that while they are in the village, they have a support system of Mosuo people who can teach them and make them proud. If that support system doesn't reach out, when they leave, they don't understand why they should keep being Mosuo. If people outside of the village were proud to be Mosuo, maybe they wouldn't abandon Mosuo customs and find a husband as soon as they leave. If thousands of people visit

their hometown every month, just to learn about their culture, the people should be proud of it. Along with educating the Mosuo more, the outside should understand Mosuo culture even more. Lugu Lake is still considered to be an exotic place, and those who are not Mosuo should better understand terms such as *zouhun*.

Lastly, I think that one of our jobs as academics is to make sure we do not criticize any culture for changing. Cultures do not stand still, and every culture changes throughout time and is affected by the surrounding environment. While I do believe traditions are important and should be upheld, we must not force a culture that is adapting to its surroundings to halt and stay like it was years ago. If we made the Mosuo of today act like the Mosuo of the past for the sake of “preserving” their culture and traditions, they would simply not be the Mosuo people.

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