Impacts of Migration on Mosuo Cultural Identity: A case study of the Mosuo People in Lijiang

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Impacts of Migration on Mosuo Cultural Identity:
A case study of the Mosuo People in Lijiang
Abstract

China is currently in the midst of the largest labor migration in human history and yet we know very little about the cultural impact on the migrants themselves. For many ethnic minorities, like the Mosuo, who have been isolated from urban, if not Han, influence for much of their history, this migration is sure to result in some cultural disruption. As a matrilineal culture defined by large extended families traced by the matriline, a distinct, non-exclusive sexual-reproductive system, a housing layout that reflects religious beliefs and social structure, and a fluid interplay of the local ddaba religion and Tibetan Buddhism, the Mosuo are an interesting group through whom to follow the impacts of migration. This study traces the Mosuo migration to Lijiang, the closest urban area to the Mosuo geographic epicenter, to develop a better understanding of how the Mosuo cultural experience both shifts and sustains itself in the face of migration. This study’s findings are based on a month of formal interviews which combined structured and unstructured techniques conducted in Lijiang (migrants: N=18, government officials: N=2, Mosuo researchers: N=4), and five primarily Mosuo townships and villages (N=11). Through participant observation techniques I conducted informal interviews with (rural: N= 34, urban =6) Mosuo residents. Through this research, I ask: What aspects of Mosuo culture change in the face of migration and what remain relatively constant? The answers to these questions can not only give a clue to the future of the Mosuo, but also tell a larger story of the ways that migration impacts migrants. Thus, in the context of a rural to urban migration in which young Mosuo migrants are often coming to the city solo to start a new life with a new job, I argue that the first aspects of Mosuo culture to be susceptible to change are those physical attributes and cultural practices that are less compatible with urban life, whereas the deeper values that the Mosuo associate with their identity and the rituals that mark important life events remain more stable.

Keywords: Migration, Mosuo (Na), ethnic minorities, culture shift, China
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Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Mosuo geographic region ................................................. 2
Figure 2: Layout of traditional Mosuo home ..................................... 6
Figure 3: Interior structure of the Yimi ............................................. 6
Figure 4: Road Construction in Ninglang County ............................. 13
# Table of Contents

Abstract. ................................................................. ii  
Acknowledgements ...................................................... iii  
Tables and Figures ...................................................... v  
Introduction .................................................................. 1  
   Internal Migration in China ............................................. 1  
   Mosuo: An Introduction ............................................... 2  
   Cultural Shift ................................................................ 9  
Research Methods .......................................................... 13  
Results and Discussion ..................................................... 16  
   Who is migrating and why? ............................................. 16  
   What is shifting? ......................................................... 18  
   What is remaining constant? ......................................... 24  
Conclusion ..................................................................... 28  
Suggestions for further study ............................................. 30  
References ..................................................................... 32  
Appendix ........................................................................ 38  
   Interview Schedule ...................................................... 38  
   Research Questions for Migrants .................................... 39  
   Research Questions for Villagers .................................... 40  
   Challenges in Conducting Research ............................... 41
Internal Migration in China:

It is well noted and well documented that China is a country on the move (Akay, et al.; 2011; Bilik, et. al, 2003; Chiang, et.al, 2013; Liang and White, 1996; Mackerras, 1994; Fan, 2008; Liang and Ma, 2004). In 2016, the National Bureau of Statistics of China announced that in the previous year, 168.84 million people\(^1\) had migrated from their hometown to work in another county for more than six months. This primarily rural to urban migration initially increased after the 1949 emergence of the Communist Party and through the first years of the Great Leap Forward (Akay et.al, 2011). It then slowed in the early 60s due to the famine-ridden country’s severe resource deficiency and was forcefully restricted from 1964-1978 in the wake of then new hukou system (Akay et.al, 2011). But in the early 80s, migration picked up speed. Akay’s (2011) and Chiang’s (2013) research teams argue that the dramatic increase in rural-urban migration that is currently occurring in China can be attributed to the 1978 economic reforms paired with the 1982 changes in the hukou system, progressively more blatant rural-urban inequality, increase in labor intensive industry, improved agricultural efficiency, and the subsequent surplus in agricultural labor.

In researching the drivers of migration in China, some researchers fixate on the cost-benefit calculation in migration decisions (Zhao, 1999; Fang, et.al, 2009), while others point out the larger range of socio-cultural motivators (Chiang et.al., 2013; Hu, 2012).

And yet, despite the ample research on rural to urban migration in China, the motivations for migration and the implications of a migrating society, there is very minimal research on the impact of this migration on the culture of those migrating, especially in regard to China’s diverse

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\(^1\) To put that China’s 168.84 million migrants in perspective, the 7\(^{th}\) most populated nation in the world (Bangladesh) has a population of only 162.91 million. China’s internal migrant population exceeds the populations of 226 of the world’s nations.
ethnic minorities. Becker and Bhugra’s 2005 study on migration and cultural identity points out that deculturation (defined as a loss of cultural identity) can be quite common in migrant populations and may lead to “ethnocide,” (Becker and Bhugra, 2005, pp.21). Severe deculturation is already threatening a number of China’s ethnic minorities (for instance, the Mongols and the Manchus) as they become consumed by Han culture (Sanchez, 2016; Bell, 2013). Yet other minorities, like the Mosuo, have thus far maintained cultural integrity in the face of external influences and thus make an interesting case study to understand the impact of migration on cultural practice and identity.

**Mosuo: an introduction**

The Mosuo are a small (N~30,000) ethnic minority group in the Yunnan-Sichuan border areas surrounding Lugu Lake and in the Yongning Basin (see Figure 1). As a primarily matrilineal society, Mosuo kinship, marriage, and residence practices often reinforce the maternal bond. The Mosuo make an interesting case study for understanding post-migration dynamics, as their kinship structure, housing layout, and religious practices are quite distinctive from other groups. Apart from Mosuo men’s historic participation in the Horse and Tea Caravan, the Mosuo have remained quite isolated (especially from urban life) until the past few decades due to the high terrain in which they live (Gatusa, 2005).

**Mosuo Classification**

As Nongbri’s research reveals, Mosuo is actually a generic name for several groups situated in the Yongning Basin and the villages east of Lugu Lake. According to early Han language

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2 Also referred to as Moso or Na (their name in their own language) (see discussion on controversy of naming: Shih, 2000, pp.697-699)
3 groups include the Na (population 30,000), the NaRu, (7,000), the NaHing (3,000), and the Naxi (210,000) (Nongbri, 2010)
literature produced in the Shang, Zhou, and Han dynasties (between 1750 BC and 220 CE), it is apparent that these groups all share a common ancestor, the Qiang, but have since diverged quite significantly in their cultural practices and language usage (McKhann, 1996). Despite their cultural divergence, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) originally classified the Na (Mosuo) as Naxi (McKhann, 1996). After three formal claims for distinct nationality status (the last one in 1993), the People’s Congress of Yunnan has only accorded the Mosuo semi-independent status as a 部族 zhibu [branch] of the Naxi (Smith, 2005). This is why they are currently referred to as 摩梭人 Mosuoren [Mosuo people] and not 摩梭族 Mosuozu [Mosuo nationality] (Knodel, 1996).

Some of the most prominent aspects of Mosuo culture are their visiting sexual-reproductive system, their matrilineal extended family structure, their housing layout, and their major life events (the Coming of Age Ceremony and the cremation funeral), which I will outline below.

Mosuo kinship and tisese

The most notorious and widely written about aspect of Mosuo culture is their visiting sexual reproductive institution (Nongbri, 2010; Blumenfield, et.al. 2014; McKhann, 1996; Cai, 2002; Lu and Mitchell, 2009; Shih, 2000). As Shih argues, the most commonly accepted term by the Mosuo is tisese⁵, a euphemism in Mosuohua that translates to ‘to walk back and forth,’ (Shih, 2000). Blumenfield, Mattison and Scelza (2014) succinctly explain the tisese in this way:

“The Mosuo nonmarital reproductive union, tisese, allows men and women

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⁴ According to researcher Shi Gaofeng (and reinforced by the personal narrative of Erche Namu), although a Mosuo person’s government identity card says “Mosuoren,” if they go to large cities outside of Yunnan, they are often accused of using a fake ID, as the national computer system does not register Mosuo people, but rather still has them officially labeled as “Naxi” (personal communication, March 16, 2017; Yang, 2003)

⁵ Much debate has gone into determining an appropriate English term for this system (Shih, 2000). Much literature refers to it as the “walking marriage” (走婚 zōuhūn), azhu hunyin, the “visiting system” or “visiting marriage” (Knodel, 1996; Haaland and Wu; 2009; Nongbri 2010; Geertz, 2001)
multiple concurrent, nonexclusive, non-contractual sexual relationships. In this system, a man visits his lover in her home at night, returning early in the morning to his mother’s house where he resides permanently,” (Blumenfield, et al., 2014, pp. 591).

From the age of thirteen (after the Coming of Age Ceremony (see page 7)) men and women will engage in tisese, not getting married or moving in with their sexual partner, but potentially have single partners for long periods of time (Gowalski and Liming). Increasingly, some couples are engaging in “conspicuous visitation” (in which they drop the pretense the of hiding the relationship), cohabitation, and even marriage (Geertz, 2001).

There are exceptions to the practice of tisese among some Mosuo communities. Political elite as well as the Mosuo that reside in the mountain areas of Southern Sichuan and the Labei area do not practice the visiting system. Shih (1993) and McKhann (1996) argue that the reason for this is simple: geographical constraint. With limited arable land, mountain villages are much smaller and more isolated than in the flatter agricultural regions and thus it would be too dangerous and too far away for a man to travel to his lover’s house at night.

**Mosuo Family Structure**

The majority of Mosuo society is matrilineal and thus, rather than living with their lovers, the majority of both Mosuo men and women live in their natal homes in large extended families, referred to as a yidu [homestead], sharing property and economic activities. Haaland and Wu explain the basic unit of Mosuo social organization as a “family based corporate group having an agricultural estate in the form of land and livestock with a gender based division of labor” in which “recruitment… is through children born to the women,” (Haaland and Wu, 2009, pp. 27).

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6 theories of why elites do not practice tisese elaborated on by McKhann (1996) 
7 Also spelled/ pronounced “Labo” by non-Mosuo
As a child’s father rarely lives with him or her, often uncles will act as paternal figures, filling the caring, disciplining, and supporting role to children and the mother’s sisters and brothers will raise her children together (Blumenfield, et.al., 2014). This does not mean, however, that the Mosuo are a fatherless society, as many anthropologists have argued (Cai, 2002). In fact, extensive research by Blumenfield and her team as well as Chuan-kang Shih show that most Mosuo know their father and receive some degree of support (whether financial or direct care) (Blumenfield, et.al, 2014; Shih, 2007).

While the media, the Chinese government, and sometimes even Mosuo themselves portray Mosuo culture with romantic phrases such as, “the last remaining matriarchal society in China,” (United Nations Development Program, 2017), it is not, in fact, matriarchal. Although women rarely hold political power in Mosuo society, they do hold great power in the home. Lineage is for the most part passed through the matriline, women are often the head of household, and it is women who inherit property. There are several theories for the roots of this matrilineal practice. McKhann (1996) argues that Mosuo nobility of the recent feudal past demanded that the commoners follow a matriline so as not to interfere with the noble patrilineal family line. Nongbri (2010) makes a more practical argument: men historically would be gone for long periods of time on the Tea Horse Caravan Route 茶马古道 and thus it would make sense logistically for women to be in charge of property and the management and distribution of crop proceeds. Blumenfield, Mattison and Scelza (2014) expand upon this argument, pointing out that Mosuo men were commonly away from home, both for long periods of time (not only in the caravan trade, but also serving as monks or working as labor migrants), but also for short periods of time (herding animals and politicking with other men). Thus, to have women in

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8 A matriarchy is defined as a system of society or government ruled by women, whereas matrilineal is defined as a system when kinship is based on the maternal line.
9 nobility made up of the native chief (tusi 土司) and the principal administrator (zongguan 总管)
The Mosuo Home

Like tisese, the Mosuo home looks slightly different in the Yongning basin and the Labei area, but all Mosuo homes have certain central elements that tie into the social structure and religious beliefs. The home is connected with a few central deities (Reggala is the deity of the home and Daggala is the deity of the earth on which the house is built), as well as deities and ancestors that occupy each corner of the home (Mathieu, 1998). Beyond its religious significance, the construction of the Mosuo home (yidu) is central to the Mosuo social structure. Haaland and Wu’s research (2009) presents a comprehensive overview of the Mosuo architecture (See figure 2). The central room where the most important household functions occur is the 祖母房 zumufang (or yimi in Mosuohua), the “mother’s room.” The room has three levels (See Figure 3). The first level is an earth or wood ground. The second is a wooden platform associated with women, birth, and domestic life. The central part of this level is the 火塘 huotang, the ever-burning fire on a three pronged platform called the 三角 san jiao in the center of the room that both serves the purpose of food preparation and is associated with the domestic gods. Yimi residents spend most of their time around the huotang, cooking, eating, and chatting. Before each meal and every time they drink tea or alcohol, they give an offering to the ancestors and the 火神 huoshen (or zanbala in Mosuohua) [fire god] on an altar by the huotang. In homes of people from areas other than Labei, the zumufang also has a painting of
the *huoshen* nestled into a carved wooden back wall, and in Labei households, the room had a *shengui* [a deity cupboard] for doing religious offerings on special days. This is also the room where the oldest woman (*ami*) sleeps and where women give birth. The third level of the *zumufang* is another wooden platform, associated with men, death and the public sphere. It is here that men, guests, and visiting *ddaba* sit, and includes a wooden door, behind which dead bodies are held, washed, and buried prior to cremation. Women are never allowed in this room. In the *zumufang* stands two wooden pillars (*dumi*) carved from the same tree, the female one from the root (on the second level), and the male one from the upper part of the tree (on the third level), where girls and boys respectively stand during their Coming of Age Ceremony.

Aside from the *zumufang*, the other important part of the *yidu* is the shrine house (*galayi*), which is also referred to in Mandarin as the *fotang* or the *jingtang* [a separate family hall for worshipping the Buddha]. Every morning in this room, one or more family members will fill bowls of water in multiples of seven, light *suyoudeng* [butter lamps] and *diandeng* [electric lamps], burn incense, and kowtow before images of the Buddha (this action is referred to as *baifo*).

At night, women above the age of thirteen sleep in private rooms and men sleep in the *fotang*, the room for fodder, or the room of a lover in another *yidu* while doing *tisese*.

The Mosuo home also serves as the location for the most important of Mosuo life events, signifying the beginning of adulthood and the end of life.

**Major Life Events: Coming of Age Ceremony and Cremation Funeral**

The first major life event for the Mosuo is the Coming of Age Ceremony (referred to as *chengdingli* or *chengrenli* in Mandarin or *Ta-gie* for boys and *Li-gie* for girls in Mosuo, referring specifically to the pants or the skirts that the new adult dons for the first
time). This ceremony marks the entrance into adulthood for a 13-year-old child\textsuperscript{10}. During this ceremony, the child stands in front of his/her family (his/her back to the gender-corresponding pillar in the zumufang) and receives his/her first set of traditional clothing\textsuperscript{11} (Guo, 2008). A ddaba or a lama (or sometimes both) chant, guests give the child gifts, and then the child kowtows to all of the elders.\textsuperscript{12}

The second major ceremony for the Mosuo is the cremation funeral. Many informants described the funeral as the most important event of a person’s life, as it is the funeral that enables a person to be connected with the spirit world and follow a path back to the ancestors. According to Mathieu (1998), the Mosuo believe that one’s soul (\textit{wali}) can only be properly transferred to the ancestor world if a person dies a proper death (naturally and in the home) and if a religious specialist performs the correct funeral rites. The traditional belief is that if these rites are done correctly, the \textit{wali} will divide into nine parts, at least one of which is incarnated into an animal and after 49 days, the rest can be reincarnated into people (Mathieu, 1998). Traditionally, when a person dies, they are cleaned by the men and placed in a fetal position with yak butter in their nose and mouth and then placed in the ground in a special room behind the zumufang where they wait for the lama to determine an auspicious date. When that date arrives, they place the body in a special 革子 \textit{jiaozā} [sedan/coffin] and carry the body to a mountain where they cremate the body and the \textit{jiaozā} inside of a constructed wooden structure. At the mountaintop Mosuo cremation I attended in Yongning, a seated row of lamas chanted in unison while the \textit{da lama} [head lama] blessed an array of ingredients that grew in the area (ie. corn, rice, fruit) and gave them to another lama who threw the blessed ingredients into the fire of the deceased. The funerary attendants told me that this was how all Mosuo cremation ceremonies proceed, however

\textsuperscript{10} The age 13 corresponds to completing one full circle of the zodiac and thus is the average age, but some children do it at age 12 and some at 9.

\textsuperscript{11} Girls: long pleated skirt and blouse, a turban of yak hair and threat; Boys: a shirt, pants, and a felt hat (Guo, 2008)

\textsuperscript{12} In her autobiography, \textit{Leaving Mother Lake}, Erche Namu describes her \textit{chengdingli} in great detail (Yang, 2003).
there is very little literature to confirm their assertion.

**Cultural Shift**

The very nature of culture is dynamic and thus to compare post-migration Mosuo culture to an imagined stagnant “traditional” culture would be dishonest. Over the years, certain influencing factors have resulted in shifts in Mosuo culture. Thus it is important to understand other factors that have caused major cultural changes before delving into the impact of migration. For the Mosuo specifically, those factors have included the strong influence of Tibetan Buddhism beginning in the 16th century, the anti-tisese government policies in the 1950s through 1970s and the recent influx of tourism into Mosuo areas.

**Religious influences**

Traditionally, the Mosuo have practiced their own oral Ddaba religious tradition, which involves ancestor worship, praise of nature-based deities, and pacification rituals of ghosts carried out by ddaba priests in home-based ceremonies (Mathieu, 1998). The daily adherence to the ddaba religion involves the sacrificing of food to the ancestral and deity spirits at every meal. In the beginning of the 18th century however, the mass conversion of Mosuo to the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect of Tibetan Buddhism by the Gelugpa Lama pushed ddaba to the peripheries of Mosuo society, both geographically and ritually (Knodel, 1996; Mathieu 1998; Mathieu, 2015). This legacy is quite apparent today. Lamas, rather than ddaba priests oversee many religious ceremonies. Most Mosuo families have a room for chanting Lama scriptures and prostrating in their homes (Gatusa, 2005). A large number of Mosuo men continue to leave home to serve in a monastery (often the Zhamei Temple in Yongning) (Nongbri 2010). However, Lamu Gatusa, one
of the most prolific Mosuo researchers\textsuperscript{13}, argues that despite this religious influence, the Mosuo have conserved their own culture (Gatusa, 2005).

\textbf{Government policy influences}

In the 1950s-1970s, the Mosuo visiting system of romantic relationships was impacted by a series of reform-oriented government policies (Knodel, 1996; Nongbri, 2010). During the Democratic Reform era and the subsequent Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party expended great efforts to eliminate \textit{tisese}, which they perceived as an “anachronism” (backward and old fashioned) (Knodel, 1996, pp. 56). In 1956, under the Democratic Reforms, the CCP passed the \textit{PRC Marriage Law}, which declared monogamous marriages to be the only legal form of partnership. This law required all Mosuo people to register both their marriages and divorces, and mandated that all children be raised jointly by both parents (Knodel 1996). This law had little effect, though, as it required Mosuo cooperation. Without it, the local government could not enforce the law. To add an incentive to monogamy, the government offered land, housing and food aid to men who left their maternal homes. A series of marriage campaigns followed in the subsequent decades and came to a climax in 1975 with the “One-Wife-One-Husband Movement” when the government made marriage compulsory for every adult male above the age of 50 who had a partner (Knodel 1996; Gatusa, 2005; Shih, 2000). Government officials were posted in the streets and every time they saw a man going for a visit, they would punish the couple and take away their grain rations (Knodel, 1996). Shih reports that by 1956, 10 to 14\% of adults were formally married, and by 1989, in her survey of 524 adults in four villages, 13.9\% were married (Shih, 2000). Knodel reports that by 1976, almost 2/3 of Mosuo adults were married (Knodel, 1996, pp. 57). Several of my interviews in Lijiang confirmed the impact of these laws, noting

\textsuperscript{13} In 1995, Lamu Gatusa organized twenty men to train with the most learned \textit{ddaba} in Yongning and also completed a project of recording and translating all \textit{ddaba} ceremonies and related texts into Mandarin (Mathieu, 1998).
that either their grandparents or parents (based on age) had been forced to marry by the government.  

Yet despite, and perhaps in spite of, these rulings, there has been resurgence in *tisese* in many Mosuo villages. Nongbri, in her study of the resilience of matrilineal structures, argues that the government repression, perceived by the Mosuo as an attempt to “destroy the family and wipe out their identity,” actually served to “rejuvenate and revitalize” their matrilineal and *tisese* systems (Nongbri, 166-167). Knodel (1996) and Gatusa (2005) agree with this assertion, arguing that after the marriage policies, the Mosuo developed a strong self-confidence around their visiting practice. As migrant informant Xiong Yan remarked, the *tisese* is “the most important aspect of Mosuo culture because it is both what distinguishes us from other minority groups and is one of the best things we have.” All Mosuo may or may not feel as strongly as Xiong Yan, but during my rural fieldwork, I did notice that the majority of those still living in their native villages are still engaged in *tisese* relationships.

**Tourism influences**

The third major factor influencing Mosuo culture that merits attention is the influx of tourists into certain Mosuo areas in the last two decades. Davidson (2013), Walsh (2005) and Knodel (1996) all discuss the positive impact that the newly developed tourist economy in Lugu Lake has had on the financial situation of the Mosuo communities there, but they have different takes on the implications of this newfound financial strength. Knodel asserts that this it is catalyzing families to split up as a way to make more money, thus disrupting the traditionally large family

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14 Of all of those that I interviewed that discussed their family history of relationship patterns, 12 of 16 (75%) reported that their grandparents had done *tisese*, and only 12 of 31 (38.7%) reported that their parents had done *tisese*. However, out of respect for a somewhat sensitive subject, I rarely asked outright for information on the marriage history of my informants and their families, so the data is impacted by not everyone talking about the marriage practices of their parents or grandparents.

15 Labei marks an exception to this statement, as it historically has not done *tisese* for a while.
structure, while Walsh is more worried about way the tourist economy has coerced many Mosuo women into “performing their Mosuo identity,” in an exaggerated way (Walsh, 2005, pp. 454). On the subject of tisese, Nongbri (2010) and Knodel (1996) argue that the tourist economy has reinforced the tisese system, while Blumenfield’s research team (2014) contests that the Mosuo in tourist areas are actually less likely to adhere to matrilineal norms. However, as Latusa (2005) points out, tourism is really only affecting the Mosuo villages surrounding Lugu Lake (especially Luoshui), and thus this factor is largely irrelevant for other Mosuo communities.

Migration into Lijiang and beyond

In the last few decades, migration has arguably had an impact on the largest number of Mosuo people and yet has been mentioned in a negligible number of studies. It is this impact that I have chosen to investigate. The first trickles of Mosuo migration seemed to begin in the mid-80s (although a few, like Cao Jianping, left their villages a full decade and a half earlier). This coincides with the Reform and Opening era and the rural-urban migration trends as described by the Akay et al.’s study. In the past few decades, migration has rapidly increased. My informants in their mid-30s and 40s noted that they were one of very few members of their communities to have left, whereas those in their late 20s and early 30s said that nearly all of their friends have left their home village. In conversations about the next generation, informants told me that almost every single young person now is leaving the village, if not pursuing a university degree. While this data coincides with the current trend of youth-dominated rural-urban migration (Fan, 2008; Chiang, et.al, 2013; Akay, et.al, 2011; Zhang, 2003; Hsu and Sutherland, 2012), it also coincides with the gradual construction of roads in the region which surely aided the flows of migration (see Figure 4).
According to the Ninglang County Department of Transportation, road construction began in rudimentary ways in the late 1980s and the current concrete roads were only completed in the last 10 years or so. When I was in Labei, this was a common topic of conversation, as the recently completed road has been the stimulus of a significant increase in out-migration from an area that used to be a two days walk to Yongning and a five days walk to Lijiang.

Mosuo migration is not limited to Lijiang. Some do not go as far as Lijiang and settle in Lugu Lake, Yongning Township, or Ninglang Countyship. Some go much further—through my interviews, I heard references to Mosuo going to Shangri La, Kunming, Lhasa, Shenzhen, Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan, Dalian, Shandong, Guizhou, and Henan.

However, Lijiang is one of the most popular choices for migration, namely because of its proximity to the Yongning and Labei villages and its relative development in the last two decades (McKhann, 2001; White, 2010). Decisions to migrate to Lijiang are also likely reinforced by the presence of Mosuo in the city already from earlier migrations (Zhao, 2003). It is for this reason that I selected Lijiang for my research.

Migration poses a challenge very different from religious conversion, government policy, or tourism. The latter represent changes coming in, changes that a society has little power to prevent and must navigate through. Migration, on the contrary, signifies people intentionally leaving the geographical epicenters of their culture. In the face of migration, people must
determine for themselves which aspects of their own culture they are willing and able to maintain. Thus migration is posing a new sort of challenge to Mosuo cultural integrity.

In the context of a rural to urban migration in which young Mosuo migrants are often coming to the city solo to start a new life with a new job, I argue that the first aspects of Mosuo culture to be susceptible to change are those physical attributes and cultural practices that are less compatible with urban life, whereas the deeper values that the Mosuo associate with their identity and the rituals that mark important life events remain more stable.

**Research Methods**

I conducted my research over the span of a month in Lijiang Prefecture—focusing most of my time in Lijiang, the largest urban area in the prefecture and then in Ninglang County where most of the Mosuo are concentrated in the villages around the Lugu Lake area, the Yongning Basin and the mountains beyond it. I spent 23 days in Lijiang, two days in Luoshui (a tourist-developed village in the Lugu Lake area), five days in Yongning (spending time in the Yongning township as well as Dapo Village and Hai Yujiao Village), and two days in Labei Village. I decided to spend time in these areas as a means of following the migration pattern in reverse, beginning where many Mosuo are migrating to and going to where they are leaving from. I also chose the city of Lijiang as it is the closest major city to the Mosuo area and thus tells a story of a culture in transition; impacted by the influences of urban life, yet close enough to the villages to maintain certain customs.

I used the snowball sampling technique to select interview subjects both in the urban and rural areas, facilitated by the tightknit Mosuo community in Lijiang and the villages of my informants’ birth. Understanding the importance of 关系 (“guanxi”, literally relations or connections), I knew that people would trust me much more if I was introduced to them by
someone else and thus only met with people who I had been referred to by others in the community.

My urban interviews concentrated on adults between the ages of 24 and 60 to capture those who had already begun working (and thus excluding the younger age demographic which may or may not be studying in university) but had not yet retired. Every one of my informants was born in a majority Mosuo village in Ninglang County and has since moved to Lijiang to work. Their education levels ranged from no education at all to master degrees.

In Lijiang, I collected my data through open-ended interviews that combine structured and unstructured techniques to allow both for simple information comparisons and longer narrative reflections. Each interview lasted on average 1.5 hours. When I was in the villages, I lived in the homes of the families of those I had interviewed in Lijiang, participating in the classes of those who were teachers and the agriculture of those who were farmers. In the villages, I collected most of my data through participant observation. I used a much more unstructured approach to interviewing, asking questions in casual conversation settings while cooking and eating meals or grazing animals, etc as it felt much more appropriate for the atmosphere. I also engaged in Mosuo community events both in Lijiang and the villages, and traveled to two of the major Mosuo religious sites (指云寺 Zhiyun Lamasery in Yongning and 扎美寺 Zhamei Lamasery in Yongning). In Yongning, I further attended a cremation ceremony.

In accordance with the Ethics and Human Subjects Review, I obtained informed consent from my informants to include their input and pinyin names (as pinyin allows for a level of privacy greater than their names in Chinese characters) in my research. I interviewed: Cao Jianping, a migrant herself and the director of the Mosuo Cultural Research Institute, Shi Gaofeng, a Mosuo professor at Yunnan Minzu University, Shen Haimei, a professor of migration, ethnic minorities, and women’s issues at Yunnan Minzu University, Li Guowu, a
director in the Lijiang Foreign Affairs Bureau, Jesse Millett, a former researcher of Mosuo tourism, thirteen migrants in Lijiang and four migrants that split their time between Lugu Lake and Lijiang. I conducted 6 further informal interviews with migrants in Lijiang. In Luoshui, I formally interviewed Duo Ji, director of the Mosuo Folk Culture Museum and three further villagers. In Yongning township, I formally interviewed five villagers and had informal interviews with 14 further Yongning residents, a lama, and three temple keeper. In the two Yongning villages, I had informal interviews with eight farmers and four teachers. In Labei Village, I formally interviewed four villagers/teachers and had informal interviews with four other villagers. This totaled 35 formal interviews and 40 supplementary informal interviews.

Results and Discussion

Who is migrating and why?

Before delving into the impacts of migration, it is important to understand who of the Mosuo are migrating and why. Chiang, Hannum, and Kao (2013), argue that people are not only motivated to migrate based on economic goals of individual economic improvement and altruistic family support, but are also pulled to leave by a desire for personal development. I similarly found three primary reasons for migration: 1) a need to support a financially struggling family back home, 2) a desire to see the world beyond the village they had grown up in, and 3) an academic and career-based draw (both motivated by community encouragement and personal professional ambitions).

The first reason, a need to support their families, was primarily cited by middle-aged to older male migrants who left home at a very young age. Some, like Asang, who initially left home at age 13 to sell horses in Lijiang, were counted on to help pay their siblings’ and cousins’
school tuitions, while others, like Naka Erche Duoji (who left home at age 15 to work as a carpenter in Ninglang for ¥3 per day) simply needed to help his family put food on the table. Although this “altruistic economic motivation,” as Chiang refers to it, may not be the primary motivation for all migrants, several reflect on how much their being away from home has helped their families and home communities (Chiang et. al, 2013, pp. 1). Yang Lifen mentioned sending ¥200 back to her family each month and she and He Xin specifically discussed driving back to their home villages to take people to the hospital when they are sick. This is a major advantage, as a few informants recalled early deaths of family members due to the inaccessibility to hospitals from their villages. Furthermore, interviews in the villages revealed that families who had members living and working in the city on average lived a better life and had a nicer house than those with no one living outside of the village.

The second reason, a dual yearning to escape the hardship of farm work and a desire to see the world, accounted for a large number of migrations. For many, seeing former migrants return home with money, nice clothing, and knowledge about the world further catalyzed this desire. Understanding (often from the encouragement of older siblings and cousins who had already left) that excelling in school was their ticket out of the villages, those who wanted to migrate for this second reason often worked very hard in school to get good grades and test into good schools and then jobs after graduation.

The third reason, a pursuit of specific academic career aspirations, was mentioned by a smaller number of migrants. These migrants are sometimes pushed by family to excel academically and sometimes motivated to accomplish certain personal goals. However it is these migrants who have often excelled the most once in the cities and have the resources to support fellow Mosuo migrants in the city and family members back home.
The significant number of women in the population of Mosuo migrants also confirms Gong and Chun-Lei’s 2012 study that argued that the gender gap of risk averseness is relatively smaller in Mosuo communities than other groups. This can possibly be explained by the strong sense of gender equality in Mosuo culture, the consequently relatively higher rates of education of Mosuo women, and the large family size (which provides a reliable safety net for risk taking) (Geertz, 2001; Zhonghua, 2001; Gong and Chun-Lei, 2012).

What is shifting?

Day to day life

The first shift for Mosuo migrants that demands attention is the complete alteration of day-to-day life. This is the most obvious difference, and though not necessarily cultural, came up in every single interview and thus must be noted. Each and every migrant had grown up a farmer (some with two parents as farmers, some with just one). Their childhoods consisted of cutting grass for the pigs and cows, grazing the livestock (sheep, cows, water buffalo, horses, pigs, and yaks) and helping their parents grow corn, rice, potatoes, and soybeans. The most commonly used term regarding the farmwork their families had done was “辛苦”xinku [hard, strenuous]. Currently, in the villages of their upbringing, my informants’ families continue to do this agricultural work—now aided by tractors (and in the case of Luoshui, money from renting land). However, the average day-to-day life in the village still consists of farming and grazing animals. In sharp contrast, migrants in the city are not doing any of this farm work anymore. They are driving their kids to school, sitting in offices, and teaching in university classrooms. One migrant noted with a smile that the biggest difference in his life here is that he drives a car rather than riding a horse to get around.
While the common notion is that Lijiang’s only industry is tourism, those who I interviewed occupied a wide variety of jobs. Some worked in private company offices, government offices, police agencies, hospitals, schools, universities, and travel agencies; others entertained tourists as bus drivers/ tour guides, in Minority Villages across the country, bars, hotels, museums, and restaurants, and still others did manual labor in industries such as construction and mining. This range in professional opportunities is a testament to the advantages of China’s higher education affirmative action program, which allows minorities from less privileged backgrounds to attend reputable institutions (Sautman, 1998). Furthermore, although a few people mentioned being asked inappropriate questions about tise in their universities or on the job (outside of Lijiang), for the most part they reported not being treated differently due to their Mosuo identity. Unlike some ethnic minorities, like the Uyghurs, who reportedly experience discrimination in school admission and job hiring once they have migrated, the Mosuo seem to not experience these hurdles, which has helped in opening up a large range of opportunities (Hoy, 2003).

**Language**

In response to the drastic rural to urban livelihood shift, some of the first cultural aspects to change are the most common aspects of day-to-day life. One of these is language. No one I spoke to in Lijiang spoke solely in Mosuohua. That would have been inconvenient and arguably impossible in the city. In the workplace, most of their coworkers are Han or of other ethnic minority backgrounds, so they converse mostly in the local dialect. Learning new languages is not only an outcome of migration; all children now learn Mandarin in school and hear it on TV.

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16 Companies included China Telecoms
17 Government jobs included both official positions in the Education Administration, Women’s Federation, and the People’s Congress of Ninglang County (all held by Cao Jianping) and government office jobs (in the Forestry Bureau and the Chinese Welfare Lottery Office).
18 The affirmative action system by adds 20 points onto entrance exams headed towards a Nationalities University or five points for exams for any other school (Sautman, 1998)
Yet the constant usage of languages other than Mosuohua is what differentiates migrants from villagers. Professor Shi Gaofeng expressed fear of the gradual disappearance of the Mosuo language as it is no longer taught in schools and is minimally used in the cities. However, despite this new exposure to Han languages, there seems to be a continued intra-community usage of Mosuohua and a commitment to educating children in Mosuohua. Every informant who has children has taught their children Mosuohua and the two informants that were pregnant said that they definitely would be teaching their children the mother tongue. While interviewing Yang Lifén, her three-year-old daughter decided she wanted to talk to her grandfather, so she picked up her mom’s phone and in perfect Mosuohua proceeded to converse with her grandfather. Language usage may be shifting, but Mosuohua is still being passed to the next generation.

**Family Structure**

Another fundamental aspect of Mosuo culture that shifts in response to migration is the family structure. Traditionally living in large homes, migrants for the most part migrate on their own. They may join up with siblings or cousins or friends once in the city, but very few come initially with parents (or children, as almost everyone migrates before the child-bearing age). After establishing themselves, some have parents come and live with them, but even this was rare. Growing up, my informants’ families ranged from seven to twenty people living together. This included grandmothers (and sometimes grandfathers), mothers (and sometimes fathers), their mother’s (and sometimes fathers’) siblings and their children, sometimes spouses of those who had gotten married. This was not only a somewhat hectic and boisterous family setup, but served as a constant support network and community of people working together. In the cities households averaged out at about 3.25 people per family (usually a married couple, a child, and

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19 The high numbers of children in Mosuo homes is due to their exemption from the one-child policy (Sautman, 1998)
perhaps one or two of their parents who had come later, but also in some cases a group of friends living together). This marked a drastic change for many migrants.

**Tisesè**

A further striking difference in Lijiang is the absence of *tisesè*. Only one migrant who I spoke to was doing *tisesè* with her partner (and this was after a divorce with her former husband). The most common reason that people cited for not using the visiting system was that it was “不方便” *bu fangbian* [not convenient]. Playing with the Mandarin term, *zouhun* [walking marriage], Shi Gaofeng joked with me, “Nali zou?” [where do you walk?]. In a busy city, walking to a woman’s house at night and returning home in the morning is much more of a hassle than it is in a village. Lamu expanded upon that inconvenience by explaining that there are too many household chores to handle to live alone. Engaging in the visiting system would put too much burden on the few people in the household as well as be too expensive (housing prices in Lijiang are significantly higher than those in their home villages). The third reason cited by the head of the Mosuo Cultural Research Association, Cao Jianping and reiterated by He Mei is the legal issue. According to them, if a couple does not get married, their child does not receive a hukou. Furthermore, a couple cannot buy a house together without a legal marriage license. 20 Thus, inconvenience is compounded with legal barriers, causing the substantial impracticality of *tisesè* in the cities. The final reason cited was the disinterest and misunderstanding of non-Mosuo partners in *tisesè*. Several of my informants have dated non-Mosuo people and four have married people of other ethnic groups (Yi, Naxi, and Han). The visiting system does not translate over inter-ethnic barriers.

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20 Although Cao Jianping confirmed these laws a second time, I could not find document evidence to back up their assertions.
In the village, the tisese is just the way of life. It is normal. In Shih’s article attempting to explain why the Mosuo practice tisese, she says that the “prevailing discourse among the Mosuo is that they and their ancestors have been practicing tisese since time immemorial. For them this is the most sensible way to manage their sexual-reproductive behavior, and no further reason or justification is needed,” (Shih, 2000, pp. 704). In the villages (other than Labei), it is the most natural thing to do tisese. In contrast, in the cities, it is the most natural thing to get married. In migrating, the Mosuo make a shift of practicality. Rather than abandoning their culture, the switch to marriage post-migration is simply an act of necessary assimilation and accommodation to the environment that they are in.

**Housing structure and home-based religious practice**

When migrating, the traditional Mosuo architecture is one of the most tangible physical losses. Every single informant cited a zumufang in their natal home, complete with a huotang, huoshen and a place to sacrifice food to the ancestors. As well as the zumufang, all but two informants also cited a fotang in their homes. Whereas the rooms that they described, and which I saw in the villages, ranged in size and decoration, they were all used for the same practices: filling bowls of water, lighting butter lamps and electric lamps, burning incense, and kowtowing before images of the Buddha.

Despite the overwhelming majority of people having grown up in a traditional home, the trend in the cities has reversed. Of the current Lijiang residents that I interviewed, only 3 out of 17 currently have a huotang and 4 out 16 have a fotang (but five additional people have one or more foxiang [images of the Buddha] to which they pray. A common reason for the lack of a huotang was the same as that for terminating the tradition of tisese: inconvenience. Many migrants currently live in apartments and told me quite practically that they cook with electricity instead of using a huotang. But the other commonly cited reason tells a much more powerful
story. Fourteen migrants explicitly articulated to me that they saw their home in Lijiang as “临时” *linshi* [temporary]. Still seeing their homes in their home villages as “家” *jia* [home], many migrants have not created a traditional home environment in their urban houses. Asang referred to his house in Lijiang simply as a “居所” *jusuo* [residence] and Najing told me that when she says “回家” *hui jia* [to go home], she is referring to her home village and not her apartment in Lijiang. Because of this impermanence of their urban homes, many people have not brought their sacred ritual objects that are fundamentally tied to home to Lijiang, especially the Tibetan Buddhist prayer objects that usually reside in the *fotang*. These objects belong in the villages.

However, as Mosuo migrants stayed longer in Lijiang and established themselves more in the city, they gradually brought more of the traditional home elements into their lives. Those who were here more temporarily, living in apartments that they shared with friends, siblings or cousins tended to not have elements of the Mosuo traditional home. In contrast, migrants with more stable jobs and who had gotten married and had children in Lijiang had a higher tendency to have these objects (*huotang*, and some sort of Buddhist ritual objects to pray to) even if they ultimately intended on returning to their home villages. Yang Lifen (currently a professor of 19 years) has had a traditional wood carved wall made in her home village, deconstructed and reconstructed in her *zumufang* in Lijiang. Furthermore, an informant who told me her parents were intending on moving to Lijiang to join her and her brother said that if they come, they will likely look for a larger house and then build a *huotang* (which she does not have now in her apartment). This suggests the reverse of cultural loss. Those who have the resources to stabilize themselves in their destination of migration may resuscitate the elements of home. And yet this may not be true for the younger generation. It is hard to know what the trend will be for the next generation as many are not at the point of financial stability to be able to afford the kind of home that would support a *zumufang*. 
The other important function of the huotang, aside from a communal gathering space and the presence of a deity, is that of ancestor worship. Seven out of 15 people (including four who do not have a huotang) reported continuing to sacrifice food to their ancestors at each meal. Those who do not do this practice either cited a lack of a huotang as the reason or the fact that their family back in the villages is already feeding their ancestors and thus they do not need to do it twice. It is mostly those who are older (40+) or who have elder family members living with them who continue to give these sacrifices in Lijiang.

What is remaining constant?

In her critique of the ending statement of the Marlo Poras’s film *The Mosuo Sisters* which implied dramatic cultural loss, Tami Blumenfield wrote:

“It is easy to assert that a society is dying out, that its language will disappear; but apparently, it is much harder to accept that people will reject the shiny life of a consumption-oriented metropolis or a materially comfortable role as a daughter-in-law in a distant place in favor of staying close to one’s own supportive family network.”

She makes a strong point. Despite the physical shifts and the apparent inconvenience of much of what was considered common nature about being Mosuo, there are aspects of the Mosuo identity that have remained quite constant in the face of migration.

Value of home and family

The most apparent of the stable components of Mosuo culture is the commitment and connection to the family and the values associated. Cao Xinhua and Najing agreed that the Mosuo are the most “恋家” lianjia [home-loving] of all minority groups. As well as returning home every year...
for Mosuo New Years (and that years batch of Coming of Age ceremonies) without question, those who can, return home much more frequently\(^{21}\). Many people explicitly cited their decision to move to Lijiang being contingent on its relative proximity to their home villages. I spoke with two recent college graduates who decided to come stay with Cao Jianping (their aunt) at the Mosuo Cultural Research Institute and help her out with no expectation of payment. In discussing this, Cao told me that their inclination to lend a hand for no payment is a testament to the strong value that Mosuo youth still have for their mothers and their mothers’ sisters. Zhonghua made this statement in his 2011 study: “The Mosuo value their matrilineal family structure because it advocates equality between women and men. They respect the old and love the young, encourage unity among the people, and amicably put up with each other,” (Zhonghua, 2011, pp. 39). This sentiment of taking care of and valuing one another was echoed by many of my informants. In discussions of the values that parents were raising their children with, many cited a common phrase that translates roughly to “respect the old and take care of the young,” and said that it was important to expose their children to Mosuo culture by bringing them back to the village as much as they could.

This continued commitment and value of family and home is especially important in the context of the change in the fundamental family structure. Such a continued placement of importance on these two interconnected values shows that despite the fact that Mosuo are not living in the same extended family situation that they traditionally had, they have not abandoned the centrality of family and home in their cultural identities. Almost every single informant said that they wished to retire back in the village. This shows that in their minds, migration is temporary and that the Mosuo home, where so many of the cultural aspects previously described are rooted, is where people ultimately feel like they belong.

\(^{21}\) I often had to postpone interviews because informants were home visiting family.
Major life events: the Coming of Age Ceremony and the Cremation Funeral

The other constants in the narratives of Mosuo migrants are the ceremonies that are at the very roots of their cultural and religious identities. Every single informant described participating in his or her own chengdingli. All of my informants not only recalled their own chengdingli with pleasure, but vowed that no matter how far away they may live one day, they will undoubtedly return home to perform it for their own children. In her reflections about how important it is to her to have her son receive his official clothing on his chengdingli, Cao Xinhua told me, “It is very important. We can’t throw away our culture.” This ceremony is not something that people are willing to compromise on and that shows in the quick way that people told me that of course they would return home to do it for their children. In Becker and Bhugra’s 2005 paper on the intersection of migration, cultural bereavement and cultural identity, they argue that, “rites of passage are important in the development of an individuals’ cultural identity.” Thus, the preservation of the 13-year-old rite of passage ceremony evidences a continued commitment to preserving cultural identity.

Yet with migration, there have been shifts in the significance of the ceremony. Traditionally, the chengdingli marks the first time that a person wears Mosuo clothing (before which girls and boys wear the same clothes and are practically indistinguishable until they begin to hit puberty). According to my informants though, parents are starting to think it cute to dress their children in Mosuo clothing when they are much younger. The responses to this are mixed—Yang Lifen scoffed on this practice and said that the ceremony will become less special if it is not the first time to don Mosuo clothing, but others, like Lamu thought it was “挺好” ting hao [great] for kids to dress in Mosuo clothing. The other big significance shift is in the underlying meaning of the ceremony for a child’s role in society. In the villages that traditionally did tisese, the chengdingli entitled a woman to her own room in the house so that she could
receive lovers, while for the man it meant that he lost a sleeping place at home and needed to find one in lovers’ homes. However, for my informants, who were commonly away at a middle school in Ninglang or Yongning when they were 13 (and for the children of my informants who will be living in Lijiang when they reach their age of maturity), the ceremony has very little to do with their status in the household or their ability to choose a sexual partner. At age 13, children are no longer thinking about the chengdingli as partly marking their beginning of adulthood in a sexual way, but that does not make it any less important. This continued commitment to a coming of age ceremony, despite a change in meaning is not unique to the Mosuo; Jews in the US continue to celebrate Bar Mitzvahs, Chicanos throw Quinceñeras, etc. despite the fact that these ceremonies mean different things in their new contexts (Woolf, 1973; Horowitz, 2010). Thus, regardless of the shift in significance, the chengdingli remains a major part of a Mosuo person’s life in their entrance to symbolic adulthood and that is not lost in the face of migration.

The other major life ceremony that the Mosuo are protecting from elimination is the cremation funeral. Most of my informants declared this to still be one of the most important parts of their culture. Shi Haiqin said that the funeral is so highly esteemed because it involves heaven and the ancestors that are looking down on them. While many said that it is common to return to the village to perform the cremation, several explained to me how they had adapted the ceremony to be doable in the city. As access to lamas is much more convenient now, the Mosuo are able to determine an auspicious date much sooner and thus do not need to put the body in the ground in the special room for a week or two as they would in the past. Furthermore, the Lijiang government has set aside a plot of land on a mountain for the Mosuo to perform their cremation ceremony, so they are still able to do it on a mountainside with lamas chanting as they have traditionally. Shi Haiqin was the only informant to be concerned about changes in the funerary process and that is because her father is one of the only people left who is trained in how to carve
the *jiaozi*. She fears that since this skill is not being passed on to younger generations and because the cremation ceremony is so complex, the will be placed in a funeral home when she dies and not be cremated. She was the only one to have this fear, however. The majority of my informants thought cremation to be not only crucial spiritually, but also the most practical way of performing a funeral, and were in no way worried about it changing.

The maintenance of the funeral is quite significant, for the inability to conduct a funeral by the proper rites and with the correct spiritual leader is one of the haunting factors for many migrants who leave their home areas. Studies on Samoans in Auckland, New Zealand and California, Hmong in Australia, Zoroastrians in Canada, and Cambodians in America show that for those that can, cobbling together the resources for a proper funeral is a priority for many migrant populations (*Lilomaiaava-Doktor*, 2009; *Lee*, 2010; Foltz, 2009; Hopkins, 1996). With the *chengdingli* and the cremation funeral intact, the Mosuo maintain two of the central cultural aspects defining themselves first as adults and then as ancestors.

**Conclusion**

Although the fears that the Mosuo culture is “particularly vulnerable to disappearing,” as Amy Qin recently wrote in the New York Times, are valid, this paper’s accounts of the experiences of a group of Mosuo migrants in Lijiang show that although certain aspects of Mosuo culture have been compromised in recent years, the entire culture is not being wiped out.

The worries of experts are real, but the findings of this study will hopefully put some perspective to the fears of Mosuo deculturation. In a conversation with Mosuo scholar Shi Gaofeng, he expressed worry about the intermarriage of Mosuo to people of other groups, the high rate of youth leaving to pursue an education and never returning to the villages, and the
gradual disappearance of the Mosuo language. He ended our conversation with a sigh, wondering wistfully whether or not the Mosuo would still exist in 50 years. Many informants voiced similar worries about the future of their culture. Najing said that Mosuo culture would *kending* [definitely] disappear and Cao Xinhua reflected that she fears the Mosuo will end up like the Machus, who once had their own language and culture and now have none.

Yet encouragingly, for the number of people who are worried about the fate of Mosuo culture, there are just as many people combatting that fear with hope and action. Yang Lifen pointed out that while some aspects may disappear, the Mosuo are now able to record aspects of their culture with essays, and photo and video recording. She said that there are more ways than ever of learning about their culture and teaching their children. Lamu echoed these sentiments, talking about how more and more Mosuo are researching their own culture and today’s Mosuo youth are spreading knowledge about the Mosuo lifestyle in their universities. Cao Xinhua vowed that they could not *diudiao* [throw away] their culture and that she would continue to do any customs that she could at home.

Mosuo scholars like Lamu Gatusa and Professor He Xin are actively trying to study how to balance development and cultural preservation. At the 2005 2nd World Congress on Matriarchal Societies, Lamu Gatusa announced, “I do not believe that we can avoid the interface with the strong modern civilization, and I suggest we adjust and reconstruct our culture. We should learn to choose and develop in a sustainable way and find a path between tradition and modernization.” This paper’s findings are a testament to the fact that the construction of that path is underway.

Some aspects of Mosuo culture are simply unwieldy for a new migrant—the traditionally constructed house, the *tisese*, the constant usage of their mother tongue. Yet that does not mean that all of Mosuo culture is being lost. In intentionally continuing the ancient practices of the
chengdingli and the cremation ceremony, the Mosuo appear to have determined what is at the roots of their identity and have remained committed to those practices. The defining aspects of cultural identity shift when certain aspects become impractical and others stand out as irreplaceable.

This study shows that once taken out of their home contexts, the things that many Mosuo took for granted their entire lives are not as easy to access in the cities. As a part of the almost inevitable process of assimilation (and influenced by financial and logistical barriers), Mosuo migrants find themselves giving up their traditional housing structure, their extended family living situation, and their visiting relationship system. But the aspects of their culture that they can maintain without major strain—their values of family and of home, their major life events (the Coming of Age Ceremony, the cremation funeral)—these they will maintain. And after some time, those who can then afford to (and want to) reintegrate their traditional practices back into their lives have that option. The older population of migrants has proved this to be true. It will be up to future research to gauge if this practice of re-integrating certain aspects of Mosuo culture (especially into the home) will be undertaken by the younger generation as well.

Suggestions for further study

While this study addresses the current generation of migrants, it does not discuss the next generation of Mosuo that are currently in university and younger. These people will mark the next iteration of cultural shift. To expand on this research, there needs to be an investigation of the values and goals of the next generation of Mosuo and what aspects of Mosuo culture they intend on preserving in their own lives.
Furthermore, in my rural field study, I began the conversations about the changes people have experienced in their own villages, yet that was not the focus of this study and thus was not nearly as in depth as my interviewing about life shifts in the city. In the future, I would suggest more research looking into what is changing in Mosuo villages (other than the tourist epicenters of Lugu lake where there has been extensive research), to see if there are trends paralleling what migrants are experiencing in the cities and how out-migration is impacting those villages.
References


Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Schedule:
March 16, 2017: Shi Gaofeng (Mosuo professor at Yunnan Minzu University), Kunming
March 24, 2016: Shi Yan Ni (only Mosuo student at Beijing Minzu University), Beijing
April 11, 2017: Shen Hai Mei (professor of migration, ethnic minorities, and women's issues at Yunnan Minzu University), Kunming
April 11, 2017: Jesse Millet (former researcher of Mosuo tourism), Kunming

Lijiang:
April 28, 2017: Cao Jianping (migrant, and director of the Mosuo Cultural Research Institute)
April 30, 2017: Shi Haqin (migrant)
April 30, 2017: Xiong Yan (migrant)
May 3, 2017: Cao Xinhua (migrant)
May 3, 2017: Najing (migrant)
May 4, 2017: Yang Lifen (migrant)
May 4, 2017: Li Guowu (director in the Lijiang Foreign Affairs Bureau)
May 4, 2017: Hei Mei (and brother and friend) (migrants)
May 5, 2017: He Shuhua (migrant)
May 9, 2017: Lamu (migrant)
May 10, 2017: He Xin (migrant)
May 10, 2017: Asang (migrant)
May 10, 2017: Nankai Senglou Duoji (migrant)
May 10, 2017: Naka Erche Duoji (migrant)
May 21, 2017: He Li (migrant)

Lugu Lake/ Luoshui:
May 12, 2017: Luosan (migrant bus driver between Lijiang and Lugu Lake)
May 12, 2017: Duo Ji (former migrant, current director of the Mosuo Folk Culture Museum)
May 12, 2017: Hai Liang (part time migrant, part time villager)
May 12, 2017: Liao Mingyu (villager)
May 13, 2017: Muri Zhaxi Cailin (villager)
May 13, 2017: Er Qing (part time migrant, part time villager)

Yongning township:
May 14, 2017: Shi Chunwu (villager)
May 14, 2017: Shi Hongzhen (villager)
May 14, 2017: Gei Rong (villager)
May 19, 2017: Yang Juncheng (villager)
May 19, 2017: Wang Xiaoyan (villager)

Labei village:
May 17, 2017: Yang Jianxin (former migrant, current villager)
May 17, 2017: Yang Zhizi (villager)
May 18, 2017: He Xiaodong (migrant in Lijiang, back home to build house)
May 18, 2017: He Wenzhong (villager)
May 18, 2017: He Xingyuan (villager)
Appendix B: Research questions for migrants:

Background
1. Basics on home village/ upbringing/ parents’ jobs/ how those jobs influenced interviewee (open-ended)

Migration
2. When did you leave your home village? How long have you been away? 你什么时候离开家的？你在这里住了多久了？
3. Why did you leave your home village? 你为什么离开家？
4. How did you choose the city that you migrated to? 你怎么选择去哪个城市？
5. If you can access a developed tourist economy especially around Lugu Lake, what motivated you to leave? 尽管现在泸沽湖旅游业很发达，你为什么还是决定离开泸沽湖区？
6. What do you do now? 你现在做什么工作？

Cultural Upbringing
7. What traditions or rituals do you remember from your childhood?你还记得摩梭风俗？
8. What was your house like in your home village?
   a. Fotang?
   b. Huoshen?
   c. Huotang?
9. How many people lived together in your family? Who?

Identity
10. You grew up in a majority Han country—when was the first time that you realized that you had a different background from other people? 中国大部分是汉族——你什么时候第一次感觉到你和别的民族不一样？
11. How has your Mosuo identity impacted the way people have treated you? 因为你是摩梭人，别人对你有什么不同的看法？

Impacts on Cultural Livelihood and Treatment
12. Growing up, what was your daily routine? What did you do every day? What is your daily routine now? 小的时候在你家乡的时候，你每天做什么？你可以详细的告诉我吗
13. Where have most of your friends gone?
14. What do your current friends in the village do every day? 现在你在家乡的朋友每天做什么？
15. If you had stayed in your home village, would your life have been like theirs? 如果你没有来这里，而是留下家乡，你的生活会和他们一样吗？
16. How did your life change after coming to Lijiang? 你来丽江以后，你的生活有什么变化
   a. 穿的衣服有什么变化？(Clothing)
   b. 吃的东西有什么变化？(Food?)
   c. 说的语言有什么变化？(Language?)
   d. 每天的活动呢？(Daily activities?)
   e. 跟朋友一起玩儿的时候呢？(What you do with your friends for fun?)
   f. 住的房子呢？(Housing?)
   g. 结婚男女朋友呢？(Marriage?)
17. How many people live in your home here? Who?
18. What is your house like now?
   a. Fotang?
   b. Huoshen?
c. Huotang?

19. In your current city, is there a Mosuo community? What do you do together? 在丽江有没有一个摩梭人的社区 你们一起做什么?

**Impacts on Religious expression and cultural identity**

20. Is it easy to access religious life in bigger cities? 在大城市你能不能继续参加宗教仪式？
21. Are there temples available to you? Do you go to temples? 在丽江，有没有喇嘛庙或者别的庙？你去不去庙？
22. Do you do any sort of ancestor worship? 在丽江，你会不会祭祖？拜祖先？
23. Do you sacrifice to the kitchen god? 你祭火神马？
24. When people die, how do you do funerary rituals? 如果有人去世了，会举行什么样的葬礼？
25. Do you do anything that you consider religious? 你做什么宗教的事情？

**Cultural resiliency and future implications**

26. Are you afraid for the survival of Mosuo culture? 你会不会担心摩梭文化会慢慢消亡消失摩梭人会被汉化吗？
27. If your village customarily does the walking marriage, do you think you will continue this tradition? 如果你的农村还有走婚的话，所以你觉得你会不会走婚？
28. Do you intend on returning to your home village? 你打算回去住在你的老家吗？
29. Is it important to you to raise your children in Mosuo culture? 摩梭人生了孩子以后，让他们在摩梭文化中成长有多重要？

**Appendix C: Research Questions for villagers**

**Background**

1. Basic biographical info on home village/ upbringing/ childhood/ parents jobs

**Family structure**

2. Who many people live in your house? Who are they?

**Migrant family members**

3. Who has left? Where have they gone? What do they do?
4. How often do they come back?
5. What do they help with?
6. Are they married?

**Home layout**

7. What are the rooms in the house? What happens where? Who lives where?
   a. Huoshen?
   b. Huotang?
   c. Fotang?

**Customs and daily livelihood**

9. What are important customs that you practice?
10. Day to day life: What do you do all day?
Impact of migration or other external forces

11. Is life better/easier for families who have members away or with everyone here?
12. How has your life changed?
13. Are you afraid for the loss of Mosuo culture?

Appendix D: Challenges in conducting research

I would like to acknowledge the challenges that I faced in this research. The first one was time. The time I had was limited and although I used the time I had very efficiently and effectively (conducting 2-4 interviews each day), there was simply not enough time to interview as many people as I would have liked to. This, of course, limited the scope of my responses and the potentially larger range of experiences and perspectives I could have collected.

The second challenge was language. I made the choice to not use a translator for I wanted to build a stronger trust and intimacy with my interview subjects. I truly feel like this was effective. Most of my interviewees began to feel like friends—we exchanged gifts; we ate together, and chatted before and after the interview. Yet because I did not have a translator, I did not understand everything that my interviewees said. The pieces that got lost were most often their reactions or emotional responses to certain cultural shifts. I did not have much of an issue with understanding what was changing, but I was limited in understanding how they felt about these changes. This was an obstacle I was aware of in formulating the focus of my research and thus did not focus on people’s feelings about the changes, as I was not able to competently gauge these. In future research though, it would be important to include this perspective.