PARENTAL ROLES AND CHILDREN'SSOCIALIZATION IN MOSUO'S
MATRILINEAL FAMILY

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved husband and soulmate, Baofeng.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Parental Roles And Children’s Socialization in Mosuo's Matrilineal Family
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In-depth interviews with twelve Mosuo mothers of three generations and three Mosuo maternal uncles from fifteen Mosuo’s matrilineal households in the Yongning administrative village of Yunnan province, China were analyzed using Parsons’(1955) role-structure and Mischel’s (1966) social learning theory from structural functionalist’s perspective. The conclusion reached is that in Mosuo’s matrilineal family system, mother’s role is defined as both instrumental and expressive, maternal uncle’s role is defined as instrumental, grandmother and grand maternal uncle’s role is defined as expressive, and biological father’s role is defined as expressive. This role allocation structure makes Mosuo mothers economically independent; makes Mosuo maternal uncles and biological fathers also economically independent, but not able to control the two roles they are supposed to play simultaneously, and Mosuo men therefore enjoy less power and take less responsibilities in both their mothers’ families and their wives’ families. The culture socialized in Mosuo’s matrilineal family system can be defined as grand household oriented and women centered culture, which values feminine traits, and which makes Mosuo women enjoy more power and take more responsibilities in their families. Therefore, the mechanics of role allocation and children’s socialization balanced Mosuo men and women’s power and status in Mosuo’s matrilineal family system.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

China has the world’s largest population of over 1.3 billion. There are 56 official ethnic groups or nationalities in China. Among them, the majority group, Han, constitutes about 92% of the population of the People's Republic of China (mainland China). Chinese culture is one of the world’s oldest cultures. The 55 ethnic minorities maintain their own rich traditions and customs different from Han, and all are part of Chinese culture.

China had experienced feudal dynasties for more than 2000 years, so feudal ideology is deeply rooted in Chinese families. Specifically, Confucianism played a dominant role in influencing Chinese family traditions and values during this long period. Confucianism emphasized social and family harmony, and family hierarchy (Xia et al., 2004). Family hierarchy is regarded as a prerequisite to achieve family harmony. Hence Chinese families have been traditionally characterized as emphasizing absolute parental authority and valuing collective interest more than individual autonomy (Xia et al., 2004). Thereby filial piety was highly emphasized, as shown in the saying of “bai xing xiao wei xian” (filial piety ranks the top in all behaviors). Filial piety means that children have responsibilities to absolutely obey their parents and to take care of them when the parents get old (Deutsch, 2006). Under this guideline, children were socialized to obey their parents unconditionally, as exemplified by the saying of “fu yao zi si, zi bu neng bu si” (if a father wants the child to die, the child cannot have the option of not dying), or by the saying of “tian xia wu bu shi zhi fu mu” (there is no faulty parent in this world) (Shek, 2006).

Influenced by Confucianism, family roles were also highly gendered. Husbands were regarded as “yi jia zhi zhu” (master of the family) and wives were taught to be “chu jia cong fu” (a married woman should obey her husband) (Shek, 2006). Therefore, in the long history of the imperial era, woman, who was inferior to man and depended on him, ought to show loyalty to her superior through absolute sexual fidelity, which was often described as one of the prime female virtues; while there was no disgrace for a man in bringing in concubines or seeking the company of prostitutes (Hinsch, 2007). A man could divorce his wife under
seven conditions, known as “qi chu zhi tiao”, that is, barrenness, infidelity, not serving her parents-in-law, loquaciousness, theft, jealousy, and disease; however, a woman couldn’t initiate divorce under any conditions (Shek, 2006). Kinship in Chinese families was passed down through the male descent line. Sons were generally preferred over daughters because sons continued the family name and were expected to live with and support their aging parents while daughters were transient members of their natal families and were expected to marry into another family, serve their parents-in-law, and bear sons for their husbands’ family line (Edgerton-Tarpley, 2004). Hence, daughters and daughters-in-law who have no sons were in the lowest status in the family (Edgerton-Tarpley, 2004). In short, traditional Chinese families are highly patriarchal institutions. Women and daughters have very low status in their families, so they have to obey men absolutely.

Even though contemporary Chinese families have undergone tremendous changes compared with the traditional Chinese families in feudal era, we still can find the traces of the traditional norms and values, especially in gender issues. State control over human reproduction within the family through “one-child” policy started in 1979. Some researchers find that the one-child policy underlines the preference for sons in China (Cherlin, 2008). Son preference has led to widespread abuses against women and abandonment of women who give birth to daughters in rural China (Dalsimer & Nisonoff, 1987). Sex birth ratios after 1980 show a disproportionate number of boys. “The reported sex ratio at birth from the fertility surveys rose from 1.082 for the births in 1977-1981 to 1.128 for the births in 1985-1989”, which indicates an increase in sex-selective abortion (Coale & Banister, 1994, p. 475).

Influenced by traditional Chinese culture, the power and status difference between parents and children, husband and wife, and son and daughter is extremely large in Chinese families. Consequently, there is a huge bias of gender inequality that has caused serious social problems within the highly patriarchal cultural context and family system.

It is well known that patriarchy has been dominant in human societies for a long history. Patriarchy is defined as “the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the
male” (Rich, 1976, p. 40). In patriarchal societies, male is believed to be inherently the
dominant or superior sex while female is defined as “the other”, the inherently deficient or
subordinate sex (Bem, 1993). The bias of gender inequality is ubiquitous in Chinese
patriarchal society and Chinese predominantly patrilineal families, as I have discussed above.
But is patriarchy and gender inequality inherent in human’s societies at the beginning or
created by human beings with the development of civilization? Is there the alternative of
patriarchy in human’s societies where gender equality really exists?

In Rousseau's (1988) *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, he claims that there are two kinds of inequality among human beings: natural or
physical inequality and moral or political inequality. Based purely on reasoning, he deduced
that primitive men are naturally good and equal. Although physical inequality may exist
among them, such inequality is scarcely to be perceptible by primitive men, therefore its
influence is nearly zero. He says: “Inequality, which was almost nonexistent in the state of
nature, owes its strength and growth to the development of our faculties and the progress of
the establishment of property and laws” (Rousseau, 1988, p. 57). It is civilization which
makes natural inequality spread imperceptibly along with man-made inequality, and makes
“the consequences of social, political, and economic inequality not only permanently exist in
our relations with others, but also for our psychological well-being”(Rousseau, 1988, p. 3).
From Rousseau's theory, we can further deduce that men and women are also equal among
Rousseau's noble savages, it is civilization which legitimizes men's superiority and privilege
over women, and makes patriarchal society dominant in our world.

Such deduction can be verified by the findings of Bachofen (1967). After a broad
survey of Roman, Greek, and Egyptian myths and symbols, Bachofen came to the conclusion
that “mother right” had marked a cultural stage in human history before the patriarchal
system was dominant through the history of the civilized world. And in this cultural stage
mothers were the heads of the families, their children named exclusively after their mothers.
Only the daughters possessed the right of inheritance (Bachofen, 1967). He further points out
that the relationship between mother and children is “the origin of all culture, of every virtue,
of every nobler aspect of existence” (Bachofen, 1967, p. 71). Compared with father’s love,
mother’s love is inherently unselfish. It is mother who “extends her loving care beyond the
limits of the ego to another creature” (Bachofen, 1967, p. 79). In various ways, myth and
history imply that the principle of “mother right” is nothing but freedom and equality, hospitality and aversion to restrictions of all sorts; while patriarchal principle is contrarily all about hierarchy, inequality and restrictions (Bachofen, 1967).

The discovery of the principle of “mother right” as the origin of human society was regarded as “the same significance for prehistory that Darwin’s theory of evolution had for biology and that Marx’s theory of surplus work had for political economy” by Friedrich Engels (Fromm, 1997, p. 5). The principle of “mother right” was studied thoroughly by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and many Socialists. They treated it more than a certain prehistorical phenomena but a picture of what human society will arrive to in the future: “eventually man will return to the establishment of love and equality” (Fromm, 1997, p. 5).

However, Schneider (1961) criticizes Bachofen’s theory of “mother right” that matrilineal family system and patrilineal family system are not mirror images of each other for the superficial reason that both structures are identical except that the former’s membership is affiliated through the mother, the latter’s membership is affiliated through the father. Schneider (1961) further analyzes that in patrilineal families both authority and group placement are male functions while in matrilineal families although the group placement runs through the line of women, authority still runs through men. Schneider (1961) claims that in matrilineal families, “mother right” does not exist, and men enjoy more power and authority than women. The bias of gender inequality of patrilineal families still exists in matrilineal families.

**MOSUO’S MATRILINEAL FAMILIES**

The following review of the literature will give a brief introduction of Mosuo people’s unique matrilineal family structure, their custom of sexual life and the matrimonial reforms that Mosuo people have undergone in the past to provide a background for this study.

**Mosuo People, a Branch of Naxi Nationality in China**

In Southwest China, across the border of Yunnan Province and Sichuan Province, there is a group of minority ethnic people known as Mosuo. Today Mosuo people are mostly distributed throughout Yongning basin and along the shores of Lake Lugu, with a population of about 40,000 (Shih, 1993, p. 1).
According to Chinese historical records, a tribe named Mosha was first found in Yanyuan (today known as Sichuan province) in the third century, and it was the ancestor of Mosuo people (Mathieu, 2003). Before the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, the people dwelling in today’s Yongning area and Lijiang area were both called Mosuo by Han. But the people in the two areas called themselves Na. In 1949, the Na people of Lijiang were liberated by the Communist Party of China, and were formally defined as the Naxi Nationality. In 1956, the Na people of Yongning were liberated by the Communist Party of China. Because they speak a different language, have a different religious belief and a different family system from the Na people of Lijiang (Yongning area is matrilineal society, Lijiang area is patrilineal society), the Na people of Yongning area demanded to be defined as a different nationality in the name of Mosuo. In 1988, the Chinese government formally defined the Na people of Yongning area as Mosuo people, a branch of the Naxi Nationality (Mathieu, 2003).

**Mosuo’s Extended Family Structure, Matrilineal Family System, and Traditional Sexual Life**

Today, Mosuo people still maintain a matrilineal family system (Cai, 2001; Shih, 1993; Zhou, 2009). What is matrilineal? According to Schneider’s (1961) definitions, “unilineal rules or principles for the affiliation of descent unit members are those in which sex is systematically used as the distinguishing criterion, so that those kinsmen related through one sex are included and those related through the opposite sex are excluded” (Schneider, 1961, p. 2). Accordingly, when male sex is the distinguishing criterion, the descent principle or rule is called patrilineal. The Chinese predominantly families are patrilineal families. When female sex is the distinguishing criterion, the descent principle or rule is called matrilineal. Mosuo families are matrilineal families. Specifically, in Mosuo’s matrilineal families, when a child is born, he or she is automatically a member of his or her mother’s household. In each generation of a household, the brothers and sisters live together and raise the children born by the sisters together for their entire lives, while the sexual partners of either the brothers or the sisters are excluded from the household (Cai, 2001; Shih, 1993; Zhou, 2009).

A three-generation Mosuo family includes grandmothers, grand maternal uncles, mothers, maternal uncles (mother’s brothers), aunts (mother’s sisters) and the children (see
Figure 1). Each Mosuo family has two chiefs, one male and one female. Chiefs are usually the eldest male and female in the family who possess some qualifications such as the abilities of running the household as the female chief, and the personal prestige in the family and the village as the male chief (Cai, 2001; Shih, 1993; Zhou, 2009). Hence, a Mosuo family is an extended family. Extended family is defined as “a kinship group comprising the conjugal family plus any other relatives present in the household, such as a grandparent or uncle” (Cherlin, 2008, p. 39). Conjugal family is defined as “a kinship group comprising husband, wife, and children” (Cherlin, 2008, p. 39). Conjugal family is also called nuclear family.

![Mosuo family structure chart](image)

**Figure 1. A three-generation Mosuo matrilineal family structure chart.**

Mosuo’s traditional sexual life enjoys a high degree of freedom. The most prevalent mode of sexual life practiced is called “the furtive visit” by Cai (2001, p. 185) or “tisese” by Shih (1993, p. 50). It is defined as a secret romantic date or visit that occurs at the female’s residency without any of her family members knowing about it. When a girl arrives at the age of puberty, she can receive her lover’s furtive visit in her residency and make love with him during the evenings. In the next morning, before the other family members wake up, her lover secretly leaves the girl’s place and returns to his own residency. Either man or women makes the first advance to the other by means of words or gestures during the daytime. Both also have the right to accept or refuse the other’s desire for the date at night. Their sexual relationship is purely based on love. Sometimes the relationship lasts only for days, sometimes for months, or sometimes even for years. If they no longer love each other, they separate peacefully and continue to find other sexual partners freely. Normally, they can have multiple sexual partners during their life times (Cai, 2001; Shih, 1993; Zhou, 2009).

According to Cai’s (2001) investigation, their kinship system is determined by their concepts of procreation. They believe that everyone who is originated from the same female
ancestor has the same bone. The people with the same bone are considered as consanguine relatives. Therefore, their kinship structure is exclusively built by the maternal line. To Mosuo people, the man is the “waterer” in mating, play a necessary but unimportant role in procreation. The fetus’s flesh, blood and bone are all given by the mother. Hence, it is not necessary for the children to know who their biological fathers are. Their names are followed by their mothers, and they are raised by their mother’s families (Cai, 2001). Shih (1993) did investigation and in-depth interviews with hundreds of Mosuo people. He concludes that the unique Mosuo’s kinship system can be attributed to their “cultural choice”. Shih further interprets that the aims of the choice is to achieve the Mosuo people’s “particular psychological needs” and to reflect their understandings and definitions of the social world (Shih, 1993, p. 97). Specifically the reason that Mosuo people have chosen to have matrilineal descent, grand household (refers to Mosuo’s multigenerational household), and “tisese” (refers to Mosuo’s visiting sexual relationship or visiting marriage) is because in Mosuo people’s ideology, they value the harmony of their household above anything else. They believe that to organize a household only with those who share blood with mother is the best way to achieve and maintain their household harmony, because mother is the one who gives life to her children while father is a contributor but not a producer of newborn lives. This notion of procreation extents to the cultural logic that since one’s bond to his or her mother is unbreakable, those who share blood with their mother are also the closest and most reliable. According to this ideology, Mosuo households run through mother’s line, only mothers and their children are included in the household, and the sexual partners of either sex are excluded from the household. “The result is that in the Mosuo kinship system there is only natural order, the order of consanguinity; the order of law, or the relationships of the affinity, is absent” (Shih, 1993, p. 102).

Mosuo’s Matrimonial Reforms

Mosuo’s sexual custom was regarded as a decline of morals by Chinese government since 1950. Therefore, from the 1950s to the 1970s, Mosuo families underwent four matrimonial reforms. By using all kinds of measures such as economic stimulus of distribution of land only to men, administration constraints to force monogamy, propaganda of abandoning old customs and etc, according to Cai (2001), none of these reforms succeeded
in imposing monogamy to Mosuo people. On the contrary, the Mosuo villagers thought that the practice of wife and husband living together created conflicts within their families, and forced them to forget their ancestors. Therefore, the government’s policies created great contradictions between Mosuo and Han, and received strong resistance from Mosuo people.

However, according to Cai (2001), school education nowadays is much more effective than coercive policies in changing Mosuo’s matrilineal family structure and sexual customs. It is because education changes the young generation’s idea of procreation, which is the root of their kinship system. Cai predicts that with more and more Mosuo children having access to formal education, Mosuo’s matrilineal culture is subjected to the threat of assimilation by the dominantly patriarchal culture in Chinese society.

In conclusion, Mosuo’s matrilineal family system and culture is greatly different from Chinese predominantly patrilineal family system and culture. There is no role of husband or father in a Mosuo family. In their ideology, it is only mother who gives the children life and identity. Child-rearing is the responsibility of mother’s family. The harmony of the matrilineal decent group is emphasized in their family culture.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PURPOSE OF STUDY**

Based on the above background introduction, we know that Mosuo’s matrilineal family system and culture is extremely different from Chinese predominantly patrilineal family system and culture. Hence, the gender role allocations and the children’s socialization in Mosuo matrilineal families are expected to be different from those of Chinese predominantly patrilineal families as well. Therefore, this research focuses on exploring the following research questions: (1) how does Mosuo’s matrilineal culture define parental roles in their families; (2) how do Mosuo’s adults socialize their children into gender appropriate behaviors and attitudes; (3) how does the mechanics of gender role allocations and children’s socialization influence both men and women’s power and status in Mosuo’s matrilineal families?

The social importance of this research on parental roles and children’s socialization in Mosuo’s matrilineal family resides in two aspects. First, I try to demonstrate how the factor of social structure and its value and belief system contributes to gender role allocations and gender construction through parent-child interactions and cultural norms since Mosuo’s
matrilineal family system and culture is different from Chinese predominant patrilineal family system and culture. Second, while research on the topic of gender construction in patrilineal families is abundant, research on gender construction in matrilineal families is lacking. Since it has been established in the literature that the social problems of gender inequality can be traced to patriarchy and the patrilineal family system, it is important to know how the matrilineal family system, which runs differently from Chinese predominant patrilineal family system, operates and its influence on gender issues. This research on Mosuo matrilineal family’s parental role allocations and children’s socialization is expected to make some contributions to the knowledge of this missing link.

For this reason, qualitative research method and structural functionalists’ theories on gender role socialization are applied to this research in response to the research questions.
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following literature review provides a theoretical and empirical background for this study. Firstly, three different theoretical perspectives regarding gender socialization in childhood are generally discussed: psychoanalytic perspective, cognitive perspective and structural functionalist’s perspective. Then the structural functionalist’s perspective on gender role socialization is discussed in details, and is applied to this study. Finally, some current empirical findings concerning gender role socialization in extant matrilineal societies from the structural functionalist’s perspective are provided.

THREE DIFFERENT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER SOCIALIZATION

What is gender socialization? Firstly, we must distinguish between the two concepts “sex” and “gender”. Sex is defined as “biologically based distinctions between males and females”, while gender is defined as “the social construction of differences between women and men” (Marini, 1990, p. 95). Socialization is defined as “the process by which the newborn human organism is transformed into a social person, a person capable of interacting with others” (Handel, 2006, p. xvii). Socialization is a process that is carried out by the agents of socialization in a double sense that: first, they act upon the child; second, they act on behalf of the larger society. The principal agents of socialization are usually family, school, peer group and media in most societies. (Handel, 2006) In this research, I am concerned with the socialization of children being carried out by the agent of their families, and how a child is socialized by his or her parents and other family members into the “proper” man and woman in accord with the social system of gender hierarchy or equality. How the gender identities and gender differences are socially constructed? Three different theoretical perspectives give different answers to this question.

According to psychoanalytic perspective, represented by Sigmund Freud and his followers, gender identities and differences are formed at an unconscious and passive level, driven by interactions between infants’ biological instincts and cultural values (Kohlberg,
According to Freud (1961), infants’ biological instincts—sexuality and aggression—are channeled by parents’ restrictions into culturally acceptable ways. Infants therefore experience intense conflict: love their parents, need their nurturance on the one hand (defines as oedipal complex), fear that their sexuality and aggression instincts directed toward their parents will entail the loss of parental love and nurturance on the other hand. To resolve the conflict, children internalize their parents and form superego or conscience. Nancy Chodorow (1978) extended Freudian theory by using boy and girl’s asymmetrical structure of parenting to explain their different personality structures. According to Chodorow, because girls are the same sex as their mothers, they do not need to repress the oedipal attachment to mothers in the same way that boys do. Girls tend to define their self by “experiencing another’s needs or feelings as one’s own” (Chodorow, 1978, p. 167). On the contrary, boys have to repress their oedipal attachment to their mother by denial of femininity, and develop masculine personality by identification with their father. Boys are prone to define themselves in terms of “denial of relation and connection” (Chodorow, 1978, p. 169). Consequently, girls tend to develop a personality more emotional, and more open to the judgments of others. On the other hand, boys tend to produce a personality more rigid and more prone to be instrumental and domineering (Chodorow, 1978). Chodorow further explains that, unlike girls, boys do not have an ever-present same-sex adult with whom to interact. “Boys fantasize about and idealize the masculine role and their fathers, and society defines it as desirable” (Chodorow, 1978, p. 185) Therefore, boys, more than girls, must access societal presentations and constructions of gender, such as media images of masculinity. These representations of masculinity align themselves closely with prevailing notions of masculine superiority, and subject them to the much more rigid masculine gender role training.

According to cognitive perspective, represented by Kohlberg (1966), gender identities and differences are formed by children’s active and cognitive conception of their own bodies and their social world along sex-role dimensions. Kohlberg says: “The child’s sex-role concepts are the result of the child’s active structuring of his own experience; they are not passive products of social training”(Kohlberg, 1966, p. 85). In his critiques of psychoanalytic theories and social-learning theories, Kohlberg says: “we see the child’s social and sexual attitudes neither as direct reflections of cultural patterns nor as direct reflections of innate

According to structural functionalist’s perspective, represented by Parsons and Bales (1955), social structure and its value system determine family type, the definitions and allocations of parents’ roles and children’s socialization. Mischel’s (1966) social-learning theory sees children’s construction of gender identities through social rewards that respond to their gender-appropriate behaviors and attitudes by the agents of socialization.

In conclusion, psychoanalytic perspective attributes infants’ sexual drives and their asymmetrical structure of parenting as the origin of children's gender identities. Cognitive perspective assumes that children’s own cognition plays an active role in gender acquisition. Structural functionalist’s perspective argues that children's gender identities are constructed by the social structure and its value and belief system through the agents of socialization.

All the three theoretical perspectives are convincing. Infants’ sexual drives and their asymmetrical structure of parenting, the children’s own cognition, and the social structure and its value and belief system, can all be indispensable factors in children's gender construction, which is a very complicated process. But as far as Mosuo people’s unique matrilineal culture and family system is concerned, focusing on investigating the factor of social structure and its value and belief system in gender construction from structural functionalist’s perspective will be more interesting and rewarding. Since it can demonstrate whether or not and how the factor of the social structure and its value system contribute to gender role construction through cultural norms and parental roles. As we know from above, Mosuo’s matrilineal family system and culture is different from Chinese predominantly patrilineal family system and culture.

**STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALIST’S PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER ROLE SOCIALIZATION**

In Talcott Parsons’ (1955) role-structure of the nuclear family, the father’s role is, high both on power and on “instrumentality”; the mother’s role is high on power and on “expressiveness”; the son’s role is low on power but high on instrumentality, the daughter’s role is low on power but high on expressiveness (Parsons, 1955, p. 45) (see Figure 2). The differentiation of gender roles within the family constitutes a major axis of its structure (instrumental vs. expressive), and is involved in the central socialization function of family.
According to Parsons’ definitions, instrumental function is responsible for establishing the desired relations of the system to external goal-objects, and expressive function is responsible for the ‘internal’ affairs of the system and maintenance of integrative relations between the members of the system (Parsons, 1955). We should further notice that although as a structural functionalist, Parsons based the instrumental-expressive differentiation on the psychoanalysis theory. So it is universal that males are always instrumental leaders, females are always expressive leaders in all human societies, which is determined by the psychological factors in the Oedipal phase. Parsons says: “the most fundamental difference between the sexes in personality type is that, relative to the total culture as a whole, the masculine personality tends more to the predominance of instrumental interests, needs and functions, presumably in whatever social system both sexes are involved, while the feminine personality tends more to the primacy of expressive interests, needs and functions” (Parson, 1955, p. 98). Hence Parsons thinks that the instrumental role and expressive role is gender specific, resulting from psychological factors rather than the factor of social structure and its value system. Zelditch (1955) specifies the direct designation rules for instrumental and
expressive leadership according to Parsons’ definitions above. According to Zelditch, if a family member acts as breadwinner of the household (for example, boss-manager of the farm, leader of the hunt, etc.) decision maker of important affairs of the household, and executor of punishment, discipline, and control over the children, the family member is defined as instrumental leader. The relations between the child and instrumental leader should be constrained and distant, and the child shows respect to instrumental leader. On the other hand, if a family member acts as homemaker of the household, mediator and conciliator of the conflicts within the family, and spoiler and comforter of the children, the family member is defined as expressive leader. The child is more emotionally attached to the expressive leader (Zelditch, 1955).

In Hochschild's (1973) critique of Parsons’ theory, she says: "Both mother and father, according to Parsons, are more powerful than children; but he says virtually nothing about power difference between husband and wife."(Hochschild, 1973, p. 1017), Parsons seems to ignore that the power difference between the gender roles plays an indispensible role during the socialization process in the family. And yet, instrumental leaders are more highly valued. Therefore, they are granted more social power. In his attack of Parson's theory of instrumental expressive differentiation in nuclear family, Slater (1961) argues that the universality of parental role differentiation along an "instrumental expressive axis" is questionable. There is evidence showing that "in many cultures, one parent, usually the mother, is both more expressive (nurturant) and more instrumental (demanding)" (Slater, 1961, p. 297). Both Hochschild and Slater try to modify Parsons’ role structure of the nuclear family, and their modifications are convincing.

Following structural functionalist’s perspective, Mischel (1966) creates social-learning theory to study how gender role socialization works in gender construction. Mischel says: “In social-learning theory, sex-typed behaviors may be defined as behaviors that typically elicit different rewards for one sex than for the other”(Mischel, 1966, p. 56). According to Mischel (1966), the parents, as the primary agents of socialization, reward their children for the behaviors they think is appropriate for their gender and punish their children for the behaviors they think is not appropriate for their gender. By this way, children learn to discriminate between “sex-typed behavior patterns” and imitate gender appropriate behavior
The evidence supporting social learning theory shows that parents socialize their daughters and sons differently in order to exaggerate their children’s gender differences (Coltrane, 2006). Moreover, according to Bem (1993), boys are more rigidly socialized to conform to gender norms and allowed less crossover behavior than girls. It is easier for girls to be tomboys than for boys to be “sissies”. According to Coltrane’s (2006) explanation, because we have a male-dominated or patriarchal cultural bias that values masculine traits over feminine traits, we are more likely to approve of masculine traits whether boys or girls exhibit them. On the other hand, abundant evidence also can be found in the literature to disprove social learning theory. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) summarized data from over 70 studies published between 1936 and 1973 that reported on differences in parents' behaviors toward girls versus boys. The authors concluded that girls and boys are treated with a “surprising degree of similarity” by their parents (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974, p. 362). However, McHale et al. (2003) argue that the findings of Maccoby and Jacklin are limited, “factors ranging from cultural norms, to family structure, to situational demands represent some of the contextual conditions that promote or constrain parents' sex-typed treatment of girls and boys” (McHale et al., 2003, p. 130).

In conclusion, Parson’s (1955) role structure in nuclear family examines the role allocations and role differentiations between father and mother, and how these factors influence the mechanics of socialization to function within the family; Mischel’s (1966) social-learning theory examines how parents, as one of the important agents of socialization, socialize their children gender appropriate behaviors and attitudes. Combining the two theories, we can have a more complete understanding of the gender role socialization within family.

**EMPIRICAL FINDINGS ON THE GENDER ROLE SOCIALIZATION IN EXTANT MATRILINEAL SOCIETIES FROM STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALIST’S PERSPECTIVE**

Based on Parsons’ basic role-structure of the nuclear family, Zelditch (1955) randomly selects 56 societies as samples from available ethnographic reports to do cross-cultural studies to test whether the propositions in nuclear family about the allocation of the
instrumental leadership to husband-father as well as the expressive leadership to wife-mother can be applicable to other family systems in human societies, including patrilineal cases, bilateral cases, matrilineal cases and cases of double decent. The result concerning family systems of matrilineal cases is: firstly, “The nuclear family in the matrilineage is not simply a mirror image of the nuclear family in a patrilineage” (Zelditch, 1955, p. 329). Mother always takes the role of expressive leader both in matrilineal and partilineal systems. Secondly, where the solidarity of the matrilineal decent group takes precedence over the solidarity of the nuclear family, the mother’s brother, instead of the husband-father, representing the matrilineage plays the role of instrumental leader in the family of matrilineal descent group. But this exists only in unusual cases. In most matrilineal cases, the husband-father generally takes the role of instrumental leader in his own nuclear family.

Also based on available ethnographic reports, Watson-Franke’s (1993) cross-cultural investigation demonstrates how matrilineal family’s parental roles are different from patrilineal family’s parental roles. According to Watson-Franke’s (1993) analysis, in matrilineal families, father’s role is separated into two roles: biological father and maternal uncle. And husband’s role is also separated into two roles: brother and sexual partner. The result is that matrilineal men can’t have absolute control in all of these roles. So the father-image of despot in patriarchal society can’t be created. In a matrilineal family, as a brother and a maternal uncle, a man is supposed to live with his sister for a whole lifetime, and cooperate with his sister to hold the authority over their family, sharing both fosterage and discipline responsibilities as well as corresponding rights to his sister’s children. As a sexual partner and a biological father, a man gains sexual assess to women but does not belong to the women and his children’s family (Watson-Franke, 1993). She concludes “the Western equation of the matrilineal mother’s brother’s role with that of the Western father is inappropriate” (Watson-Franke, 1993, p. 572). On the other hand, rather than ascribing negative value to motherhood and femaleness, matrilineal mother is defined by powerful and usually positive female imagery. The economic position of matrilineal mothers is usually strong, providing autonomy instead of dependency. Their concepts of procreation emphasize the role of female in keeping the family's lineage (Watson-Franke, 1993).

In conclusion, according to Zeldtich’s (1955) findings in the matrilineal families around the world, mother always plays expressive role, and father or maternal uncle plays
instrumental role. But according to Watson-Franke’s (1993) findings, the concrete definitions of parenting roles played by the mothers, maternal uncles and biological fathers in the matrilineal families around the world are different from those of patrilineal families. However, the above studies are all based on available ethnographic reports rather than first-hand data. Moreover, most of the original sources used are not on the specific studies of gender role socialization in matrilineal societies. Therefore, the above studies and findings are limited in certain degree.

Based on the above theories and empirical findings, we can have the following hypotheses: (1) In Mosuo matrilineal family, mother plays expressive role, maternal uncle plays instrumental role; (2) The gender norms and values socialized within Mosuo matrilineal cultural context and family system do not depreciate feminine traits; (3) The mechanics of role allocations and children’s socialization balanced Mosuo men and women’s power and status in their matrilineal family system.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes in detail the rationale for the design of qualitative research and in-depth interview method, the recruitment of interview participants, the instrumentations of data collection, data analysis, and the principles of achieving rapport with the participants in the field as well as the limitations of the research.

RATIONALE FOR THE DESIGN OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The purpose of this research is in response to the following research questions: (1) how does Mosuo matrilineal culture define parental roles in their families; (2) how do Mosuo adults socialize their children gender appropriate behaviors and attitudes; (3) how does the mechanics of gender role allocations and children’s socialization influence both men and women’s power and status in Mosuo matrilineal families? All these research questions are exploratory questions to study a certain kind of family system and culture that we are not familiar with. One purpose of this study is to construct definitions on what roles Mosuo parents play in the process of socialization. Another purpose of this study is to build the theory regarding the mechanics of gender role allocations and children’s socialization in influencing gender power and status within the Mosuo matrilineal family system and cultural context. Hence qualitative research design is applied in this study for the reason that “Qualitative studies are usually exploratory and more hypothesis generating rather than testing” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 25). More specifically, grounded theory methodology is applied in this study with the purpose of "theoretical constructs derived from qualitative analysis of data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 1).

My choice of in-depth interview method is because it allows me to develop rich narratives that generate detailed information concerning Mosuo adults’ interactions with their children, male adults’ interactions with female adults in their family life and in the socialization process and etc. so that abundant evidence can be obtained to support my definitions of Mosuo parental roles and my theory of the mechanics of gender role
allocations and children’s socialization in influencing gender power and status in Mosuo matrilineal families.

**INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

I selected a number of 15 interview participants from 15 households in the Yongning administrative village, Ninglang County, Yunan province. Yongning administrative village is located at the center of the Yongning basin, composed of 21 natural villages, with a population of 6,544, totaling 1,279 households. There are eight ethnic groups living in the Yongning administrative village: Mosuo, Pumi, Zhuang, Han, and etc. Among them, Mosuo people are the majority group living in the Yongning administrative village, with a population of 3,702 (Yongning Township government, 2008). According to Shih (1993), the Yongning basin in northern Ninglang County is the cultural center of Mosuo people.

I selected only fifteen interviews because of “a combination of the time and resources available for the investigation and a law of diminishing returns (beyond a certain point, adding more respondents will yield less and less new knowledge)” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113). When the fifteenth interview was conducted, the research has reached "the point of saturation" within the research area of the Yongning administrative village, which means that, “no new data and new patterns are emerging from the interviews” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143). Achieving saturation with the small number of fifteen participants from fifteen households could be attributed to the reason that the Mosuo households living in the Yongning administrative village share very homogeneous lifestyles. They are farmers conducting similar agriculture production. The houses they are living in have a uniform pattern of architectural structure and residential arrangements. They have close connections with the households living in the same natural village and the natural villages nearby. They share the same religious beliefs and practice the same Mosuo traditional customs. Therefore, even though the cases are varied by the selection criteria such as gender, age, and the relationship with their children and household generation, no new data and new patterns were emerging from the interviews, when the fifteenth interview was conducted.

12 mothers and 3 maternal uncles were selected from 15 Mosuo households. Among them, 4 old mothers were born during 1930s-1940s, 4 middle-age mothers were born during 1950s-1960s, 4 young mothers were born during 1970s-1980s, 3 maternal uncles were born.
during 1950s-1960s. The reason for using the age as one selection criterion is because a common Mosuo household is an extended family, in which generation is an important factor determining the role allocations. For example, an old mother can be a grandmother and a mother at the same time and can also be female chief in her family. But as for a young mother, it is a different case. To interview the mothers of three generations, we can have a more complete understanding of the roles Mosuo mothers play in their household and in the socialization process. The reason for using gender as one selection criterion and interviewing 3 maternal uncles in addition with the interviews of mother is because maternal uncles play an important role in the socialization of the children and in their matrilineal families. The 3 maternal uncles are also the biological fathers of their own children, and play some influence in the socialization of their own children. Among the 15 Mosuo households in which the 15 interview participants are from, 4 households are households with four generations, 9 households are households with three generations, 2 households are households with two generations 1. The households with two generations are new and small household which were separated from their original households a few years ago. Mosuo people have a long tradition of household separation under the condition of irresoluble family tensions and conflicts (Cai, 2001). The structure of the two households with two generations looks like that of the nuclear patrilineal family, but they still maintain distinctive matrilineal extended family features 2.

1 To take household generation as one selection criterion is the advice from the Mosuo guide. According to his understanding of Mosuo households and culture, generation of the household is an important feature for Mosuo people to differentiate or categorize their households, the more generations a household has, the more prestige the household will enjoy in the villages. Hence I took his advice in order to vary the cases of the research and have a more complete understanding of Mosuo households.

2 Even though the two mothers separated from their original households, they still remain close relationships with their original households. For example, their houses were built by their original households and are very close to their original households; when they ran into difficulties such as short of labor in busy seasons, their original households came to help; when they had extra money, they gave it back to their original households; their children follow their mother’s last name; they hope their children will take care of their maternal uncles when their children grow up and their maternal uncles get old, because their maternal uncles offered lots of help to their children before their separations.
RECRUITMENT

The participants of this research were recruited combining convenient samples and snowball samples. A Mosuo guide, who offered lots of necessary help during the recruitment and interview process, was recruited by my personal connection. The guide accompanied me when visiting all the fifteen households. The first two old mothers who participated in the research were the Mosuo guide’s friends. The rest of the participants were recruited by snowball sampling. The guide accompanied me when visiting all the households. All of the interviews were done at the participants’ homes where they said they felt most comfortable and convenient. The interviews were all conducted at nights because the participants said they were busy during daytime. Some items such as liquor, tea, and cake were gifted when visiting the participants’ households according to Mosuo custom.

INSTRUMENTATIONS

IRB’s approval (see Appendix A) was obtained before the field research was conducted. Before each interview began, a consent process was completed with each participant, so that each participant would know the research purpose, my role as a graduate, their rights as participants, my contact information and etc. Verbal consent to the interview was obtained before each interview began. To protect their privacy, pseudonyms are used to substitute their true names in the research.

An interview guide (see Appendix B) was prepared comprising semi-structured questions on some basic information of the participants’ households and family members, their relationships and interactions with children and other family members, what responsibilities their family members assume to their families and to their children, their ideas on child-rearing, how the adults develop their children’s gender appropriate attitudes and behaviors, how they discipline or reward their children and so on. The interview guide

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3 As the researcher of this study, my hometown is Kunming city, Yunnan province. My mother has a Mosuo friend who left his hometown, Yongning, and has been living in Kunming for a long time. My mother’s Mosuo friend introduced me his elder brother, uncle Yang, who is a Yongning local resident, as the Mosuo guide.
was used to gather data. Follow-up questions based on the participants’ narratives were asked when necessary to the research.

The interviews with some of the middle-age mothers, all the young mothers and the maternal uncles were conducted in Yunnan dialect, which is my mother tongue. The interviews with old mothers and some of the middle-age mothers were conducted in Mosuo native language, and translated by uncle Yang, who is fluent in both the Mosuo language and Yunnan dialect.

All the interviews were taped-recorded for the purpose of accuracy. I simultaneously made notes of the follow-up questions I would like to ask later to ensure no interruptions while the participants were talking. I also made notes about their houses and rooms’ appearance, their family members’ activities I observed during the household visits, as well as their behaviors and facial expressions I observed during the interviews. The information from my observational notes is used as important data to verify participants’ narratives.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Most data transcription and coding were done in the field during the daytime when the participants were not available, so that codes were continuously tested against new data, I could also have the opportunity to verify the major themes emerging from the data with some Mosuo friends I made during the field research by chatting with them casually.

Some codes were developed according to the structural functionalist’s theoretical framework, for example, Parsons’ concepts of instrumental role and expressive role. But new themes and concepts were open to the research when certain “imported” concepts and theory did not fit the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 40).

I made a chart of concept map for each participant’s household, including the information concerning each family member of the household, their relationship to the participant, what responsibilities they take in their household and in the socialization of children and etc, to organize and analyze the raw data, so that new codes could be clearly recognized when they emerged from the data, and the codes obtained could be easily compared among the fifteen households (see Appendix C).
ACHIEVING RAPPORT WITH THE PARTICIPANTS

In order to achieve rapport with the participants, I need to obey three principles that I concluded from my experience of the field research.

Firstly, I needed to give up my previous thinking pattern of patrilineal family since a Mosuo family is a matrilineal family with a very complex structure. For example, one participant introduced his household as “Our household has six brothers and sisters, two younger brothers, one elder sister, two younger sisters and myself. Our maternal uncle is the oldest in our household. My elder sister has one daughter, who is also my niece. My niece has one son, who is also my grandnephew. My younger sister also has one daughter too. Her daughter has one daughter, who is also my grandniece…” The introduction at the beginning of the interview was difficult to catch up. But the interview could not be conducted without making clear of the relationships of the participant’s family members. Hence at least two visits for the households with complex structures were needed. The first visit was just for obtaining the basic information of the household. After the first visit, a chart was drawn to make clear the household structure and the relationships of the family members, so that further interview could be conducted in the following visits.

Secondly, I needed to give up my previous thinking pattern of nuclear family since a Mosuo family is an extended family. For example, I asked a young mother: “when your son doesn’t behave well, who disciplines him in your family?” She answered: “Anyone can! My son is very naughty, so everyone in my family spanks him when he doesn’t behave well. I spank him first, my elder sister spanks him, and my elder brother spanks him too! So my son was spanked nearly every day. Now when we adults raise a hand, he will say at once that he will never do that again.”

Thirdly, I needed to give up my previous thinking pattern of city life, which is lot different from Mosuo people’s rural life. So some interview questions I prepared in the interview guide actually were not good questions regarding what toys the adults give their children to play with, and how the adults dress their children and decorate their children’s rooms. Because these are not the ways in which Mosuo adults socialize their children at all. I learned in the field that Mosuo adults socialize their children mainly by letting their children do some simple household chores and simple farm works with the adults. So I focused my interview questions on household chores and farm works rather than toys, dresses and room
decorating, so that they could talk more and I was able to generate rich information from their narratives.

**LIMITATIONS**

Since the research population is the entire 40,000 Mosuo people, the number of fifteen participants selected from the Yongning administrative village of Yunnan province is very limited. Even though the findings of this research can represent the Mosuo people of Yongning administrative village, they can’t represent the entire 40,000 Mosuo people who are distributed in both Yunnan province and Sichuan province. Future research is suggested to investigate the cases both from Yunnan province and Sichuan province.

The research topic is parental roles and children’s socialization in Mosuo’s matrilineal families. Interviewing children as well as observing children’s behaviors and their interactions with the adults is also strongly recommended in future research, so that a more complete understanding of this topic from a child’s perspective can be achieved.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Several major themes emerged from the analysis of the interview participants’ narratives. First, in Mosuo’s matrilineal family system, mother’s role is defined as both instrumental and expressive, maternal uncle’s role is defined as instrumental, grandmother and grand maternal uncle’s role is defined as expressive, and biological father’s role is defined as expressive. This role allocations structure makes Mosuo mothers economically independent; and also makes Mosuo maternal uncles and biological fathers economically independent, but they are not able to have absolute control in the two roles they are supposed to play simultaneously. Second, the mechanics of role allocations and children’s socialization balanced Mosuo men and women’s power and status. Specifically, the two roles a Mosuo man plays as the maternal uncle and the biological father in two families make him a relaxed man, enjoying less power and taking less responsibilities in their families. And from the strategies that Mosuo parents applies to maintain the harmony and prosperity of their grand household during the socialization process, as well as the ideology that Mosuo parents value women’s abilities to run their household, the Mosuo’s culture can be defined as grand household oriented and women centered culture, which values feminine traits. This also allows Mosuo women to enjoy more power and take more responsibilities in their families.

ROLE ALLOCATIONS AMONG THE AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION IN MOSUO’S MATRILINEAL FAMILIES

According to Parsons (1955) and Zeldtich (1955)’s definitions of instrumental role and expressive role, if a family member acts as breadwinner of the household (for example, boss-manager of the farm, leader of the hunt, etc., decision maker of important affairs of the household, and executor of punishment, discipline, and control over the children, the family member is defined as instrumental leader. The relations between the child and instrumental leader should be constrained and distant, and the child shows respect to the instrumental leader. On the other hand, if a family member acts as homemaker of the household, mediator
and conciliator of the conflicts within the family, and spoiler and comforter of the children, the family member is defined as expressive leader. The child is more emotionally attached to the expressive leader (Zelditch, 1955). In the Mosuo matrilineal family system, the agents of socialization are mother, maternal uncle, grandmother, grand maternal uncle, and biological father. How the instrumental role and the expressive role are allocated among these agents of socialization is analyzed in the following part.

Mosuo Mother's Role

In my imagination and from hearsay, the women from matrilineal families should be the strong and able women with all the qualities that the manly men in our patriarchal society should have. If not, how could those women be the owner of their family, inheriting the properties and let the children to be named after their mothers? On my road to Yongning, I had one unforgettable experience. The road from Ninglang County to Yongning Village is about 60 miles long, and this mountain road is the most rugged road I had ever seen. It is narrow and full of twists, all made of stones as big as bowls. The car driving on the bumpy road is like a drunken guy staggers on the street. It took about four hours to go through the whole road. The experience of sitting in the cars driving on the road could be a nightmare to any tourist. Sitting in the bus, I couldn’t help admiring the bus drivers who have to drive on the road twice a day. Our bus driver was a middle aged woman, who was very talkative. Since I had the field research task of investigating Mosuo people, I couldn’t miss any opportunity to know more about Mosuo people. So I began to chat with the bus driver:

"Ma’am, are you Mosuo people?"

"No, I am not, I am Pumi (another ethnic group in China), but my husband is Mosuo."

"You must know many Mosuo people?"

"That's for sure! I have lived in Yongning village for more than ten years, and my neighbors are all Mosuo."

"Are you scared of driving on such dangerous road back and forth everyday?"

"Nothing to be scared of. I am the bus driver here for many years. Although I am Pumi, my personality is as strong as that of Mosuo woman. Actually I learn from them, ha-ha." She laughed loudly.
I was surprised by her words. Rather, it was not difficult to notice that her driving skill was very good, and she had a very bad temper too. She drove the car faster than the other cars on the road. When the cars ahead blocked our road, she scolded them loudly with dirty words. She stepped on the gas heavily and passed the cars ahead. Passing is very dangerous on such a narrow and twisted mountain road. I turned back and found the cars left behind were all driven by big guys. What a manly woman she was! I couldn’t help thinking the she was not a Mosuo woman yet, but just a Pumi woman assimilated by Mosuo. What would a real Mosuo woman be like?! I couldn't imagine, and looked forward to finding the answer.

But when I really met Mosuo women and got to know them better later, I found that all of my imagination, the hearsay about matrilineal women, even what the Pumi bus driver showed me in reality are not the true image of Mosuo woman! How Mosuo culture defines a good Mosuo woman, and what role Mosuo mothers play in their families are analyzed in the following part.


According to Mosuo people, there is a strict and clear rule on the division of labor between Mosuo females and males: Mosuo females are in charge of all the “internal affairs”, while Mosuo males are in charge of all the “external affairs”. The so-called “internal affairs” means the center of Mosuo people’s life—the family. The family includes the fields and the crops grown in the fields, all the domestic animals raised in the stables, and all the family members living in the household. What kind of woman can be a qualified Mosuo female chief defined by Mosuo traditions? The 62-year-old mother Yili who is the female chief of her household made the most representative response to this question:

A mediocre woman who is not capable, and who has no ambitions and guts is not qualified to be a female chief of the household. Take me as an example. I am the chief of my household, I must decide how to make good use of the strengths of our household, what kind of target our household needs to achieve every year and how. If not, I can’t run our household well. For example, how much income can we get by selling the produce of the field and the domestic animals we raised this year? How should we distribute all the expenses next year? How much should we spend on raising pigs, how much on raising chickens, how much on growing crops, how much on building houses? All these things need to be well planned by
me. If we spend a little on this today, and spend a little on that tomorrow without any plans, we can’t get anything done. What Mosuo women do is all centered on the whole family.

From Yili’s answer, we can see that to be a qualified Mosuo female chief in the household is no less competent than a business owner. Not all the Mosuo mothers I interviewed are the female chiefs in the households, only the old mothers and some of the middle age mothers are. Some of the middle age mothers and the young mothers are not chiefs in their households yet but they are candidates for the future female chiefs when the present chiefs are too old to be the chiefs. So all the Mosuo women are expected to have the qualifications that Yili mentioned, and they will choose the most qualified woman to be the female chief of their household.

Most Mosuo people are farmers living in the rural area. Each household has its own fields. All the routine farm work, is done by women in the household, except the heavy farm work such as plowing which is done by men. Women do farm work almost every day. Old mother Wumei told me:

Interviewer: Describe for me what kind of farm work your daughters and you usually do in the four seasons.

Wumei: We do different farm work in different season. We need to transplant rice seedlings in the spring, do weeding in the summer, do harvesting in the autumn, and cut firewood or pick up pinecones on the hills in the winter. Well, we grow and harvest different produces in each seasons. The schedule each season is very busy.

The time when I went to Yongning and did the field research was summer which is Mosuo mothers’ busiest time. All the Mosuo mothers I interviewed were busy with weeding for the corn they grow. It was also the season for harvesting the highland barley. All the households piled the harvested highland barley on their yards to dry them in the sun. After weeding during the daytime, the mothers were back home late in the afternoon. But without any rest, they continued to cut the dried barley, and separate the seeds and the straws of the barley by the winds before sunset (see Appendix D). They told me that these highland barley seeds could be made cakes for their family to eat. After dealing with their highland barley,
still with no rest, they continued to cook for the whole family. So it was not until 8:00pm or 9:00 pm when they finished their dinners and the interviews could begin.

Besides taking care of their field, Mosuo mothers need to take care of all kinds of domestic animals which they raised in their stables. Normally, they have several pigs, one or two horses, and one cattle on the first floor of the stable, and lots of chickens on the second floor of the stable (see Appendix D). The middle age mother Ruolan told me:

The domestic animals and their stable are regarded as Mosuo women’s faces. Each Mosuo household has a two-storied stable located just across the front gate of their house. So every visitor of the household can see the stable at his or her first sight before entering into the home. If the domestic animals in the stable are thin and weak, or the stable smells badly, the women in this household will lose their faces and get a very bad reputation around the village.

But all the Mosuo households visited had clean and well-organized stables and healthy domestic animals. This also indicates that most Mosuo mothers are diligent and good at raising domestic animals.

Usually, there are several females in one household, so they do these farm work together as a team. The team leader is the female chief. Female chief is in charge of distributing tasks for each team member every day. The 66-year old mother Wumei said:

As a chief in my family, I not only do farm work myself, I also distribute the tasks to the other family members every morning. I will tell the other family members: “you do this, you do that.” Normally, they never disobey what I say.

We can see that without leadership and management skills, you can’t be a qualified female chief. The female chiefs not only distribute tasks to the females in the household, they also distribute tasks to the males in the household when they are needed to do some farm work. For example, the heavy farm work such as plowing is done by men. The 49-year-old maternal uncle Yuanhe who works as a local schoolteacher told me:

Although my sisters are doing most of the farm work. I help them to do some farm work during the busy season. For example, when they are busy with

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4 No matter how busy these Mosuo mothers were, they were all very hospitable to us, treating us with hot teas, delicious snacks such as peanuts, walnuts and etc. Some of them even treated us with the liquor they made by themselves. During the whole research, I was touched many times by Mosuo people’s hospitality to a strange guest. It also reflects how kind and warm-hearted Mosuo people are.
harvesting in the fields, I am asked to feed the pigs when I am off from my classes.

From the above introduction, we can see that Mosuo mothers are breadwinners of the households because they provide sustenance for their whole households from the produce they grow and harvest in the field and from the domestic animals they raise in the stables. They also contribute to part of their household income by selling the produce and the domestic animals.

**Responsibilities for Doing Household Chores and Taking Care of the Elders**

Just as mothers in our patriarchal families, Mosuo mothers also are responsible for doing most of the household chores and taking care of the elders in the family. Since most Mosuo mothers live in grand households, it is very common that three or four generations total more than ten family members living under the same roof. Hence their household chores are much heavier than those of nuclear families. And they need to take care of several elders sometime simultaneously. Moreover, Mosuo people live in poor rural areas, most common modern appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators, vacuums, microwaves and so on are seldom seen in Mosuo’s households. Many household chores, which could be done by pushing several buttons with the help of these modern appliances have to be done by Mosuo mothers completely by hand. One day I saw Wumei’s daughter, who is a mother of two sons, washing a huge pile of clothes by her hand for all her family members after returning from the field. She just kept washing and washing. She only took a break during dinnertime, and continued to wash after dinner. It seems she didn’t mind that it took her such a long time to do the washing. She just kept doing it slowly and patiently.

Without exception, each Mosuo household has a hearth in their main room. The hearth has important meanings for Mosuo people, which will be discussed later. I mention the hearth here because Mosuo mothers use the hearth to boil water and cook food for the whole family. Every morning, the mothers ignite the hearth. The fire in the hearth will burn for the whole day until late at night. The firewood burned in the hearth is from the trees on the nearby hills, which is cut by them or from the dropped pinecones which they picked up during the winters. All the firewood they collected during the winters was piled in their yards
for everyday use. By using the most traditional and primitive way to cook, we can imagine how inconvenient it is for Mosuo mothers to prepare food and water for the whole family \(^5\).

Since they never buy meat from the market, salted pork is eaten often. All Mosuo mothers are good at salting pork. Every Mosuo household kills several pigs raised by them during the New Year celebration, and then the mothers salt the pork to be used for the whole year by the household. That is why they seldom eat fresh meat. But they will kill chickens and eat fresh chicken during some special occasions such as festivals, treating guests and etc \(^6\).

House cleaning is also no easy job because they have several houses. In order to provide accommodations for so many family members, Mosuo people’s residential complex is composed as a big quadrangle. Every Mosuo household follows the same pattern of architectural structure. When entering from the front door, I can see a large yard and three one story or two-story houses surrounded as a quadrangle. The one-story house on my left side is the main building where they receive their guests; where their food is cooked, where all the family members eat food together, and where they have family meetings. They also have compartments for the elders and the pregnant women in the main building. The two-story house on my right side is for the female members to receive their sexual partners. Each female has her own small room there. The two-story house facing me ahead has rooms for the other family members on the first floor and the sacred chamber on the second floor. The sacred chamber is for their religious worship. Hence we can imagine how hard it is to keep all the rooms and the yard clean and organized. Doing cleaning is Mosuo mother’s job.

From the above description, we can see that Mosuo mothers are responsible for extremely heavy household chores since they all live in the grand households. But the household chores are not done by one female but by a team consisting of several female

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\(^5\) But we were invited to dinners for several times during the field research, their food are very delicious to us.

\(^6\) We also had the honor to eat the chicken killed specially for our visits. That was why the hospitality of Mosuo people impressed me so much.
members led by the female chief of the household. That is why their household chores are always done orderly.

Without exception, all the Mosuo mothers I interviewed regarded filial piety as the most important quality to evaluate a Mosuo woman and a Mosuo man. The young Mosuo mother Liwen, who worked in the big city for seven years and returned back home a few years ago, told me proudly:

Mosuo people have the good tradition of taking care of their elders and respecting the elders. I can say that no other ethnic groups in China or Han people show as much filial piety to the elders as Mosuo people do.

What Liwen said is real. The research experience verified what she said. Middle age mother Bima’s household has two grand maternal uncles who need to be taken care of intensively. One grand maternal uncle is 81 years old, and the other grand maternal uncle is 79 years old. Before we visited Bima, we heard some villagers praise Bima for her filial piety to the elders. One villager told me:

Bima’s mother passed away last year. Bima has no other sisters, and she has to assume the full responsibilities to take care of the three elders in her family. Previously, Bima’s old mother was lying on the bed for several years and needed to be taken care of intensively. Bima wiped her mother’s body every day so that her mother could feel better. Bima took care of her mother considerately for several years until last year when her mother passed away peacefully. Now Bima has continued to take good care of her two old maternal uncles. Villagers all know about that.

When we interviewed Bima, she never mentioned how she take care of the elders in her household, but she told me how she taught her two daughters to have filial piety to the elders:

Good girls need not to be taught everything. They will learn everything from what they observe in their daily life. When my daughters observed how I took care of their grandmother and grand maternal uncles, they followed me to take care of them. Occasionally, they did things not as well as I did. I just pointed out, they knew how to do things better.

From Bima’s description, we can see that by showing a good example to her daughters, Bima taught her daughters how to take good care of the elders, and how to show filial piety to the elders.
MAINTAINING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP AMONG FAMILY MEMBERS AND BETWEEN THEIR FAMILIES AND THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD.

Mosuo people believe that women are better at dealing with interpersonal relationships than men. So Mosuo mothers play an important role either in dealing with the interpersonal relationships within their households or in dealing with the interpersonal relationship between their households and their neighborhood. The 50-year-old maternal uncle Danian told me his incisive observation:

If in a family, all the family members are men, men are less communicative than women. The atmosphere of the family will not be so good. If there are both women and men in the family, sisters and brothers sit together and chat, and the atmosphere of the family will be very good and harmonious.

Maintaining the good relationships with neighbors is also Mosuo women’s job. Unlike city people who have little and cold relationships with their neighbors, Mosuo people know each other within a village, visit their neighbors often, and have close relationship with all the neighbors and villagers. Mosuo mothers play an important role in building and maintaining the relationship with their neighbors. The 60-year-old mother Hongmei told me:

If a woman is not capable of dealing with the relationships with the relatives, the neighbors, and the villagers, and she ignores something that she is supposed to do, then this can make the relationship between our family and the other family more distant. For example, when some important things such as building a new house, or deaths happen in our relatives, neighbors, or villagers’ families, we are supposed to send the families some gifts. If the women in our family fail to do that or if the gifts our family send is not appropriate, this may cause misunderstandings between our family and the other families. So a capable Mosuo woman usually has an account book to memorize in detail what gifts our family have received, when and from who so that she can determine what kind of gifts are appropriate according to her account book.

From Hongmei’s description, we can see that Mosuo women put lots of effort in maintaining the good relationships with their relatives, neighbors and villagers. That is why Mosuo people have a large connection in the local area and they always can find someone to help when needed.
EXECUTOR OF PUNISHMENT, DISCIPLINE AND CONTROL OVER THE YOUNG KIDS

From the above description, we know that Mosuo mothers are very busy everyday. They need to take care of their fields, raise domestic animals, do household chores and etc. This means they have little time to take care of their young kids, and they don’t have much time to stay with their young kids. Their young kids are taken care of by the grandmother and the grand maternal uncles. But no matter how busy Mosuo mothers are, they are the main discipliners of their young kids. All the mothers I interviewed admitted that they beat their young kids with a stick. The 37-year-old young mother Zhuoma told me her memory of punishing her two-year-old son one day:

My little son is very naughty. One day, when I was washing clothes beside the pond in our yard, my son jumped into the pond with his shoes and was all wet. I was very angry, and I used the stick to beat him heavily.

The 54-year-old mother Milan told me her memory of punishing her nine-year-old daughter one day:

I think, to be the mother of my two daughters, I not only need to provide my daughters food and clothes, I also need to teach them how to be qualified Mosuo women. I remember one day, it was very hot. I asked my nine-year-old daughter to go outside and look for pigweed to feed our pigs. She went out with a basket and came back very soon with her basket empty. She told me that she was too hot to stay outside. I beat her because she gave up too easily to the hardship. How could she run the household in the future?

I feel Milan is too strict with her daughter since her daughter was only nine years old then. But since raising domestic animals is regarded as Mosuo women’s face as we mentioned before, it is reasonable that Milan is so strict with her daughter on feeding the pigs.

IN CHARGE OF THE SOCIALIZATION OF TEENAGE GIRLS

When little girls grow up into teenage girls, they begin to be shy of the male adults in their family, such as their maternal uncles, and grand maternal uncles. They will stay more often with and be closer to the female adults such as their mothers, aunts and their grandmothers. For this reason, mothers are in charge of the socialization of teenage girls. The socialization of teenage boys will be discussed later when analyzing maternal uncle’s role. Mothers will teach their teenage girls to do some household chores. The girls also
regard their mothers as models to learn how to be a real Mosuo woman. The process of teaching and learning is a natural, step-by-step, learning-by-doing process. Middle age mother Yingzi tell me how she teach her daughters to do household chores:

    Interviewer: What kind of household chores do you teach your daughter?
    Yingzi: When we were young, girls were required to learn weaving. It was a required skill for a Mosuo woman. But today there is no such a requirement anymore. Most families don’t weave cloth by themselves. So nowadays we only teach teenage girls to do common household chores that can’t be called skills. We need not to teach girls specially, because they will naturally learn how to do these things by doing them with us. For example, when I teach my daughter to cook rice, I need not to tell her how much rice is needed, or how much water is needed. She can cook rice after watching me cooking for a few times.

    Yingzi is a skillful woman who is good at weaving cloth. She takes the cloth she weaved to the market to sell occasionally. But she didn’t teach her daughters her skill of weaving because she thought it was outdated. She was strict with her daughter in doing other household chores when her daughter was a teenage girl:

    After my daughter was off from school, and finished her homework, I would ask her to cook dinners, and feed pigs and chickens together with me. Then she could do these things by her own. During the busy season, she cooked dinners, and fed the pigs and the chickens for me. When I returned from the field late at night, everything was done by her.

    Middle age mother Ruolan remembered how helpful her daughter was when her daughter was still a teenage girl:

    Ruolan: My mother and maternal uncle passed away early. When my children were still very young, I really had a hard time then. No one could take care of my little son and daughter, and we had to do the farm work in the field. My daughter was very smart. At the age of seven, and she learned to feed pigs and chickens. She also could cook food and took care of her four-year-old younger brother then.

    Interviewer: was it you who taught your daughter to do these household chores? Yes. When we returned from the field I taught her how to cook, and how to feed pigs and chickens. She learned to do these things soon and helped me a lot.

    From the above analysis, we can define Mosuo mother’s role as both instrumental and expressive, because they not only take the instrumental tasks such as breadwinners, executors of punishment, discipline and control over the children, they also take the expressive tasks such as doing household chores, taking care of the elders in their families, maintaining the relationships within family members and the relationships with their neighbors.
Maternal Uncle’s Role

According to Mosuo tradition, men are in charge of the "external affairs", so what does the “external affairs” mean? The maternal uncle Yuanhe who works as a school teacher told me that the division of labor between Mosuo men and Mosuo women has a long history. He said:

A long time ago, Yongning area was a stop on the famous Ancient Tea Route⁷. Many Mosuo strong men went out and made money by driving horses in the horse train. Only a few men stayed at home. The women at home needed to do everything. My maternal uncle used to drive horses until New China was founded in 1949.

Mosuo women need to take care of the fields, the domestic animals, the family members and everything about their family as we have discussed before, so that Mosuo men can be free to go away from home and make money. Today, the Ancient Tea Route has become a historic route and Mosuo men no longer drive horses on the route. But the Mosuo tradition of the division of labor between men and women remains. The following part analyzes how Mosuo culture defines a qualified Mosuo man, and what role the Mosuo maternal uncle plays in their families and during the socialization process of their children.

BREADWINNER

Today Mosuo maternal uncles still make money outside with their skills, labor and knowledge. They are the main source of the family income. From the information I obtained during my field research, I learned that Mosuo maternal uncles make money through the following ways nowadays:

1. The best and most stable way to make decent money is to work in the local schools, local hospitals and the local government administrative agencies. Not only men, but many Mosuo women also get a job of this kind if they are highly educated.

2. The second best way to make money is to be a lama in the lamaseries nearby. Lama is a privileged member in Mosuo society; the lama’s whole family is also respected by

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⁷ Ancient Tea Route was a trade link from Yunnan, one of the first tea-producing regions: to India via Burma; to Tibet; and to central China via Sichuan Province from around a thousand years ago.
the villagers. Lama is generously compensated by the religious services he offered to the Mosuo households. This traditional job is only available to men.

3. Many Mosuo men are not highly educated, but they learned some skills from their elders, so they can be carpenters, veterinarians, house builders, shoe makers and etc.

4. More and more Mosuo young men and young women who are not highly educated choose to go to the cities nearby and make money working as cheap laborers. This is also a trend happening in most rural areas in China in recent years.

5. The rest of Mosuo men who can’t find a way to make money outside join the farm work with their mothers and sisters. Or some of them just sit idle all day, supported by their other family members.

I would like to mention that although the maternal uncles are breadwinners of their households, the money they earned is not indispensible to run their households. Maternal uncle Tianshuo told me proudly:

> Unlike city people, they will starve to death without money. But to Mosuo people, we can at least make a living on our fields even without money.

Even without the money maternal uncles bring back, by doing farm work in their fields, Mosuo mothers can support the whole family and can even have some income by selling the produce and domestic animals, though not too much. However, the money maternal uncles contribute to the families can make their lives better and happier. Especially if the children need to go to college. The tuition could be a heavy burden for a common Mosuo family. Maternal uncle Yuanhe who got a decent job as a schoolteacher told me:

> When one of my nephews went to college, my monthly salary was only RMB700 (about US$100), his tuition and living expenses in the big city for one year was about RMB 8,000 (about US$ 1,200), that was in 2000. Hence all of my salary went to provide his college education. At that time, I dared not to have my own wife and kids because I was worried that I couldn’t afford to buy them any gifts. That is why I am 50 years old, but my son is only 9 years old now.

We can imagine that Yuanhe really had a hard time sending his nephew to college. The love and care maternal uncles provide to their nephews and nieces is no less than the fathers in our patriarchal families. Maternal uncle Danian told me:

> In our Mosuo families, maternal uncles are responsible for bringing up our nephews and nieces. When maternal uncles get old, nephews and nieces are responsible for taking care of us. The biological fathers do not have such responsibilities to bring up their children, if they have abilities, they can offer as much help as they can. If they don’t have, we never require them to help. For example, one day my niece broke her schoolbag. She came to me and said: “Uncle, my schoolbag is broken, now what?” I said: “Don’t worry, I will buy you a new one.” But I continued to joke with her: “Wait, your father is a carpenter,
right? You can ask your father to make a wooden schoolbag for you to carry”. She said: “No, uncle, you buy me one!” So I bought a new schoolbag for her. I never say no to my nieces and nephews if I am able to do for them. But the kids never ask for something I am not able to do.

Maternal uncles not only support their nieces and nephews all the school expenses, they also buy the clothes, shoes and other life necessities. Maternal uncle Danian said:

I never forget to buy gifts for my nieces and nephews during children’s festival. During children’s festival, I will tell all my little nieces and nephews: Today is your festival. Tell uncle what you wish to have, and uncle will try to realize your wishes.

Maternal uncle Tianshuo also tell me:

There is a big village fair in Yongning during every New Year celebration. We only buy new clothes and new shoes at that time. So I will buy new clothes and new shoes for my sisters, nieces and nephews.

From the above discussion, we can see that maternal uncles do not need to provide food to their whole family, but they are responsible for the life necessities that their farm can’t produce and for the children’s education expenses and etc by making money outside. The love and care they give to their nieces and nephews is the same as the fathers in patrilineal families.

**DECISION MAKER OF THE “BIG” THINGS OF THE HOUSEHOLD**

Besides making money from outside, the maternal uncles need to do some important things, which is the so-called “big things” for the their family. What kinds of things can be called “big things” by Mosuo people? Examples are, building new house, and the funeral of a dead family member. Usually only the male chief of a household can be the decision maker of these big things. The old mother Yili told me how Mosuo people arranged these big things:

Building new houses, and planning funerals are things to be decided by men, normally the male chiefs of a household. The male chief needs to make the final decisions about how to build the new houses, and how to hold the funeral for the dead family member. For example, our family built new houses two years ago. It is my brother who decided what kind of building materials to buy, how to build the new houses and etc. Of course we discussed together first, then my brother made the final decision. Once it is decided, no family member would object him. We all follow his decisions.
New houses building, funerals are big things not only to the family but also to all the other families living in the same village. All the other families will send a representative to help. Maternal uncle Tianshuo said:

Tianshuo: If there is a big thing such as a funeral, or a new house building ceremony happening in the family of our villagers, we will try our best to help, because we have a tradition of helping one another. Normally, our family members will sit together and discuss how to help, then I will represent our family at the ceremony and to offer help. We Mosuo people seldom have weddings, hence we regard funerals as very important to us.

Interviewer: Can only the male chief, be the representative?

Tianshuo: Not necessarily, sometimes the female chief also can be the representative of the whole family when the male chief is not available.

According to Mosuo’s tradition, only men can be the final decision maker of the big things such as new house building, and funerals, and men are preferred over women to offer help and attend the ceremonies of new house building and funerals. But it can take many years for a family to have one big thing happen. Even for the whole village, such big things can’t happen often. In comparison, Mosuo female chiefs are the decision makers of the “small things”, but these small things such as fields, domestic animals and etc. are more essential to everyday life.

EXECUTOR OF PUNISHMENT, DISCIPLINE AND CONTROL OVER THE CHILDREN

Besides providing the material support to their nieces and nephews, maternal uncles are the main discipliner of their nieces and nephews, but especially nephews, since Mosuo people believe that boys are much naughtier than girls. Only maternal uncles can be tough enough to discipline boys. Yong mother Liwen described the maternal uncle like this:

Since my son’s father can’t stay with my son as long as his maternal uncle can. So my son is disciplined mainly by my brother. My brother will teach my son how to behave, what he should do, and what he should not do. My son behaves well in front of my brother, but he is very naughty in front of me and his father.

Maternal uncle Danian, who is a male chief in his family, told me:

Danian: I am the eldest brother in our family. I have six sisters and brothers. I have many nieces and nephews. The kids all listen to what I say to them. But they may not listen to their mothers or their fathers’ words.

Interviewer: Why?
Danian: Maybe because I am respected by my family members. Sometimes in our family, the kids’ mothers and fathers can’t discipline their kids until I show up.

Interviewer: Have you ever beaten your nephews and nieces?

Danian: No, I never beat the kids. But other maternal uncles in our family do. My second brother always beat the kids when they don’t behave well. But I don’t think beating is a good way to educate the kids today. I just scold them when they don’t behave well.

Interviewer: Do the kids’ mothers and fathers try to protect their kids when you or your second brother discipline the kids?

Danian: Never! Kids’ parents understand that we discipline their kids is for their own good. They never object to it or protect their kids. Sometimes we even punish their kids unjustly. You know sometimes adults do punish the kids unjustly if they have wrong judgment. Sometimes if I was not at home, when the kids did something wrong, and their parents saw it, they will scare the kids: “I will tell your uncle you didn’t behave well today.” This is our Mosuo people’s tradition to build a strict image of maternal uncles in front of the kids.

According to Danian, the adult that Mosuo kids are scared of most is not their mothers or biological fathers, but their maternal uncles. Young mother Zhuoma’s words verify what Danian said above about maternal uncles in Mosuo families:

Zhuoma: Sometimes when I was beating my son, his father tried to protect him when he visited us and saw it. But the person my son is most scared of is not me, but his uncle, because his uncle treats him very strictly! Stricter than I do. My son’s uncle stays with my son everyday, so my son is scared of his uncle most.

Interviewer: When your son’s father saw your son’s uncle disciplining your son, did he try to protect his son?

Zhuoma: No!

Interviewer: Why not?

Zhuoma: Um, because, because this is not good, (She laughs embarrassedly).

I did not keep asking Zhuoma. I know Zhuoma implied that this is not good because this may cause conflict between the uncle and the father. The relationship between the maternal uncle and the father is more sensitive than the relationship between the mother and the father. The father had no concerns when he tries to protect his son in front of Zhuoma, but the father has to be very careful when he tries to protect his son in front of Zhuoma’s brother, because he is only a visitor of Zhuoma’s family.
IN CHARGE OF THE SOCIALIZATION OF TEENAGE BOYS

When the little boys grow up into teenage boys, their maternal uncles are in charge of the socialization of them. According to Mosuo people, they hope that their teenage boys can learn how to be a real Mosuo man by learning from their maternal uncles. And most important reason is that only their maternal uncles can be tough enough to discipline teenage boys according to Mosuo’s traditions.

Old mother Pingna told me how maternal uncles socialize teenage boys:

Mosuo men should know how to plow. This is the required skill for men in a Mosuo family. Teenage boys will go to the fields with their uncles, to learn how to lead the cattle and to do the plowing. Uncles also push their nephews to study well in school. But if their nephews can’t study well, uncles may let their nephews learn some useful skills from the old carpenters, or old veterinarians in the village.

Middle age mother Ruolan also described how her brother socialized her naughty son:

My son is very naughty, he dropped out of school even when he was only in the fourth grade of primary school. His maternal uncle disciplined him all day and beat him often, but it didn’t work. We, had nothing left to do, and had to let him drop out of school. Then he said he wanted to go to the big cities and earn some money. We let him go. But when he was in the city, he could not even support himself, let alone earn some money back. We got letters from him that he didn’t have money and he was starving, so we had to remit money to him again and again. If we didn’t, we were afraid that he would do some bad things such as stealing money from others. It was so good that he came back home last year. His uncle bought him a farm tractor. Now he can help others to harvest crops using his farm tractor and earn some money. He will also bring some money back when his business is good!

We can see from Ruolan’s words that the maternal uncle plays an important role in planning their nephews’ career.

Even though maternal uncles put lots of effort into trying to educate their teenage nephews on how to be qualified Mosuo men. They are always the one that Mosuo boys are scared of most. And this feeling will grow and distance their relationship with their uncles when they grow into teenage boys. Maternal uncle Yuanhe is a tough guy in his nephew’s eyes. Yuanhe told me:

When my nephew was little, he was close to me, and would often follow me go here and there. Then when he grew up he began to talk less and less in front of me and dared not to sit together with me. When I come into the room where he stays, he leaves the room soon. I find he always keeps away from me. He likes drinking but I don’t allow him to drink too much. He never dares to drink in front of me
because I will scold him. Once he drank too much in the restaurant and got drunk. My friend came across him and told me the next day that my nephew was drunk yesterday in the restaurant. So I found my nephew and told him: “You are still young. Don’t drink too much. If you drink like yesterday again next time, I will let my friend call me at once. Then I will get you back personally. I often scold my nephew strictly like this. I don’t drink and smoke, and I don’t allow my nephew to have these bad habits too. My nephew is not scared of his father, but he is scared of me.

Yuanhe’s relationship with his nephew is the typical relationship between Mosuo maternal uncle and teenage nephews. But we also have the kind maternal uncles that their teenage nephews are not so scared of. Danian told me:

I am an easy-going man. My teenage nephews like to chat with me. My teenage nieces don’t talk so much with me, but they will joke with me sometimes. Unlike most of the other maternal uncles, whose nephews are scared of them, my relationship with my nephews is like friends. Sometimes we can chat together until midnight.

Danian’s conversation indicates that the relationship between maternal uncles and teenage nephews also depends on different people’s characters. Danian mentioned before that he never beat his nephews or nieces, which could be the reason he has a closer relationship with his nephews and nieces.

From the above analysis, we can define Mosuo maternal uncle’s role as instrumental. Because they take the instrumental tasks such as breadwinners, decision makers of the big things in their households, executors of punishment, and discipline and control over their nephews and nieces.

Grandmother and Grand Maternal Uncle’s Roles

There is no kindergarten in Yongning area. Mosuo mothers told me it is difficult for their kids to go to school because there are not enough schools here to accept all the kids when they are old enough to go to school. Therefore, some adults need to stay at home and take care of these little kids who are supposed to be taken care of by kindergartens or schools in the cities. As we discussed before, Mosuo mothers need to go to the fields and do farm work all day; Mosuo maternal uncles are the main source of the household income, and also need to work all day outside. The only adults who can stay at home and take care of the little kids are the kids’ grandmother and grand maternal uncles who are too old to do farm work in the fields and to make money outside. Therefore, Grandmothers and grand maternal uncles
play an important role in childcare and in the socialization of their little grandchildren. This also shows the advantage of a Mosuo grand household where several generations live under the same roof. The following part analyzes what role Mosuo grandmothers and grandmaternal uncles play in their families and during the socialization process of their little grandchildren.

**GRAND HOUSEHOLD IS INDISPENSIBLE TO MOSUO CHILDREN’S SOCIALIZATION**

It would be a very big problem if there were no grandmothers or grandmaternal uncles in Mosuo families. But it happens in some Mosuo families if the grandmothers and grandmaternal uncles die before their grandchildren are born. This will cause a bad influence on the young kids either for their school education or for their healthy growth. Two families I interviewed had this problem before. Old mother Yili has two sons and two daughters. She remembered the hard time she and her children went through when she was still young. She stressed this problem to me again and again during the interview. She said:

My mother and maternal uncles died so early, there was no one who could take care of my four little children at that time. I have one elder brother, who went far away from home and made money by building the roads. He seldom came back home. I had to take care of my four little children myself while doing farm work. I hoped that all my children could go to school. My eldest son had to ask for leave from his school often in order to help me take care of his younger brothers and sisters, and to do some household chores. Hence my eldest son couldn’t receive as much school education as his young brothers and sisters did.

With regrets, Yili admit that she had a very bad temper and treated her children rudely then:

With no grandmother and granduncle to take care of my kids, I had a heavy burden then. I beat my kids even though they only made small errors. For example, I asked them to clean up the rooms, but they didn’t listen, so I beat them. I asked them to collect some firewood in the hills, but they slept over, so I beat them. I asked them to stay at home while I went to the fields, but they went out to play, so I beat them.

Since the mothers need to do farm work, and household chores while taking care of their little kids, they suffer from heavy pressures that overwhelmed their lives. No one under such conditions can have time and patience to treat their little kids the way little kids should be treated. Therefore, Yili’s bad treatment of her kids before is understandable.
Old mother Pingna had the same experience as Yili. Pingna had three sons and three daughters. She also expressed her deep regrets when she recalled the hard time her kids and her went through many years ago:

At that time I was a terrible mother to my kids. My mother and aunts died early. My kids’ father died early too. I had too many kids, and I couldn’t do anything about it. Every morning I got up and cooked food for the kids. Then I went to the fields to work with two of my youngest kids being carried on my back. When I came back and found the kids who stayed at home hadn’t eaten the food yet, I beat the kids. Sometime when my kids didn’t behave well, I beat them and locked them up. I punished my kids severely when they didn’t listen to me. Fortunately, my kids behaved well most of time, because they understood that it was very difficult for their mother to raise the family. We were very poor then. We had no food to eat, and no clothes to wear. The kids understood their mother.

Pingna also mentioned that her younger sister and her younger brother helped her a lot to go through the difficulties. Otherwise it would have been impossible for a woman to raise six children by herself at that time.

From Yili and Pingna’s experience, we can see that the grand household is indispensible to Mosuo’s children’s healthy growth.

**Responsibility for Child Care and Sharing Some Household Chores**

Most of Mosuo families have grandmothers and grand maternal uncles. The mothers can concentrate on doing farm work and do not need to worry about their young kids. Some grandmothers can even help mothers with household chores, which will reduce the mothers’ burden. Young mother Diyun has her mother and two maternal uncles in her family. When I asked Diyun:

Interviewer: Who is your son most emotionally attached to in your family? Diyun: Well, it would be my son’s grand uncle. His grand uncle takes him outside and plays all day long. My son’s grandma is busy with some household chores such as feeding the domestic animals and cooking. She can’t stay with my son too long, so it can be said that my uncle stays with my son the longest time, my son is closest with him.

In Diyun’s family, the grandmother shares some household chores with Diyun, one of the grand maternal uncles is responsible for child care.

The old mother Wumei is a grandma with four grand children now. She is still good at doing household chores and raising domestic animals. She does not want her daughters to
have the same difficulty as she used to have, so she shares household chores and child care as much as she can:

Wumei: When my grand children were little, I took care of them while doing household chores. My brother doesn’t know how to take care of young kids, so I had to take care of them. I am more relaxed because all my grand children go to school now.

Interviewer: Who are your grand children most emotionally attached to in your family?

Wumei: My grand children are all most emotionally attached to my brother (she laughs). Because he never scolds them. But I scold my grand children as long as they don’t behave well, so my grand children are not close to me.

In these families, there are grand mothers and grand uncles who can help the mothers to reduce some burdens. The mothers are in another extreme of happiness. By comparison, in those families, in which there are no grand mothers and grand uncles as we discussed above, the mothers are in the extreme of hardness. Young mother Liwen whose answers completely surprised me:

Interviewer: Tell me about how you educate your two-year-old son?

Liwen: Um, to tell you the truth, I have no idea about how to educate my son. I need not to educate my son at all, because my mother takes care of it. If I were living in a small family with my husband and my son, I would need to think about how to educate my son. But I am living in a large family, and it is my mother who takes care of my son and teaches my son how to behave. So I really don’t know how to answer your questions. When my son learned to walk, my mother taught him how to walk step by step. When my son learned to talk, my mother taught him how to talk word by word. I can’t stay with my son most of time, I have to do farm work in the fields most of the day. I never need to think of the question you asked me. I just feel free of worry to let my mother take care of my son and educate him.

Liwen is 30-years-old, but her face looks like a girl in her twenties. I begin to admire her life as a mother in a big family.

THE MOST POWERFUL PROTECTOR OF CHILDREN

Grandmothers and grand maternal uncles are the powerful protector of their grand children when their mothers and maternal uncles are disciplining them. Elders tend to spoil little kids. This rule applies to all Chinese families including Mosuo families. Some Mosuo
mothers even worry that it will be bad for their kids if the elders spoil their kids too much. Young mother Liwen told me:

Sometimes, my sons’ aunts, maternal uncles or I spank my son when he does not behave well. My mother is unhappy with it at once. Mother says: “the kid is so little now, he knows nothing. But he will learn little by little as he grows. You can’t spank him like this.” So we dare not to scold or spank my son in front of my mother. We are afraid that it will make her angry. Sometimes if we spank or scold my son a little heavier, my mother will get very angry, even not talking with us for a long time. So we have to discipline my son when away from my mother.

Not only grandmothers spoil their grandchildren, grand maternal uncles also spoil their grand nephews equally. Young mother Diyun’s family has two grand maternal uncles. The two old men spoil Diyun’s son very much. Diyun said:

My uncles both have very good tempers. They never spank my son, and never even scold him. Each time when I spank my son when he doesn’t behave well, my uncles will stop me and tell me “it is useless that you spank him because he is so little and knows nothing.” So I dare not disobey my uncles and have to stop. But I will still try to explain to my son why he is wrong.

Obviously, in Mosuo’s grand households, the two generations have different opinions on disciplining their children. It is typical in all the multigenerational families, but it may be because there is no in-law relationship between the two generations in Mosuo families, so different opinions won’t turn into family conflicts. Liwen’s family solves the problem by disciplining the children while away from their mother, Diyun’s family solves the problem by using a moderate way of explaining. The relationship between the two generations does not get any worse from the mothers’ relaxed expressions and the respectful tone to describe their elders.

**Being the Ones That Children Are Most Emotionally Attached To**

As we discussed before, in Mosuo’s grand households, the grandmothers and grand maternal uncles stay at home and take care of their young grand children. They spend the most time with their young grand children. They are also the ones who spoil their grand children most and always try to protect their grand children when the mothers and maternal uncles scold them or spank them. Therefore, in the children’s eyes, their grandmothers and grand maternal uncles are the ones who love them most. Old mother Yili, who said that she used to be a terrible mother, is a kind grandmother whose grandsons love her most:
My grandsons are all well behaved. They stay at home except for going to school. When they are off from school, they return home and help me to do some household chores. My grandsons are all good boys, better than most girls. For example, my youngest grandson got an award from school for his good scores, I rewarded him with a pair of new shoes. Another grandson brought home 500 Yuan from school, which was the financial difficulty allowance given by their school. All my grandsons love me most. If they missed me so much and called me back if they were away from home for a little while.

Old mother Pingna who has several grandchildren now also told me proudly that:

My grandchildren are very close to me. Every time when they come back home, they will look for me first and ask: “where is my grandma?”

Young mother Diyun has two sons. One is five years old, and the other is twelve years old. Both sons are taken care of by their grandma while Diyun does farm work most of the day. When I asked Diyun:

Interviewer: Do your sons help the adults to do some household chores?
Diyun: They do. When my eldest son goes back from school and finish his homework, he will help his grandma to cook.

Interviewer: Can your son cook at such a young age?
Diyun: Yes. When I am not at home and work in the fields, my son is afraid that his grandma is too tired, so he helps his grandma to cook. My son always cares about his grandma. His grandma loves him too. Sometimes his grandma gives him one Yuan (about US$ 15 cents) to buy an ice cream. It is the happiest thing for my son to get the reward from his grandma. (She laughs.)

The close relationship between the elders and the children in Mosuo’s grand household is touching. That is why all Mosuo elders regard taking care of their grand children as the happiest thing in their old age.

In conclusion, in Mosuo families, grandmothers and grand maternal uncles play an indispensable role in taking care of their grand children. Most grandmothers also help mothers with some household chores. They are the ones who spoil the children most. They are also the ones children are most emotionally attached to. Therefore, I would like to define grandmothers and grand maternal uncles’ role as expressive in their families. The expressive role they play is almost the same as the role of the homemaker mothers in the nuclear families.
Mosuo Biological Father’s Role

In the literature on the study of Mosuo’s matrilineal culture, some says that the children in Mosuo matrilineal families don’t know who are their biological fathers (Cai, 2001). I asked Mosuo people about it. They told me that it was true in the past that Mosuo people’s visiting marriage did not last so long and stable. Most Mosuo people had multiple sexual partners during their lifetime. But their custom of visiting marriage changed after Chinese government intervened with a few policies. In the past, most Mosuo people simply discontinued their marriage relationship if they didn’t love each other any longer, or if they fell in love with somebody else. So it was very common that some marriages only lasted for months or even for days before they started a new one. Hence some children might not know who their biological fathers were. But Chinese government used economic stimulus to encourage stable marriage relationships. So today although Mosuo people still continue their custom of walking marriage, but the relationship between husband and wife is now as stable as the marriage of Han people. The only difference is that Mosuo’s husband and wife live separately in two households. Therefore, all Mosuo children know who their biological fathers are today. Biological fathers visit their mothers’ families very often, and play a role in the socialization of their children. I will analyze what role Mosuo biological fathers play during the socialization process of their children.

A FREQUENT VISITOR OF HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN

Mosuo’s children live in their mothers’ households, follow their mothers’ surnames, and are raised by their mothers’ households. Their biological fathers don’t live in the same household as the children and their mothers live. But their biological fathers are frequent visitors of their mothers’ households. Young mother Liwen told me:

Interviewer: Describe for me your perfect mate?

Liwen: Unlike Han people, we Mosuo women don’t live together with our husbands but live together with our brothers and sisters, so we don’t have so many requirements of our husbands. We just hope that our husbands care about their children and wives, and have filial piety to the elders of both families. We don’t hope our husbands are able to earn lots of money. My son’s father lives near to us. He visits us almost everyday. He helps our family with some farm work during busy seasons.

Interviewer: Do you miss him when he is with his own family?
Liwen: No, I don’t. It is our custom. So I never have such feelings.

Interviewer: Do you hope you can live together with your husband in the same household someday, just like Han people.

Liwen: No, I think Mosuo husbands and wives have better relationships than Han husbands and wives have. I heard that Han husbands and wives quarrel often about money, kids, household chores, and etc. But Mosuo husbands and wives live in two households. My husband can’t intervene in our household’s business such as money, kids and household chores. So we have nothing really important to quarrel about. We need not to worry about anything or decide anything important together.

Interviewer: So you never quarrel with your husband?

Liwen: We do quarrel, but we quarrel just for, um, for fun. (She laughs)

Liwen’s words are convincing that Mosuo husbands and wives can have a better relationship than that of Han husbands and wives, because their relationship is pure love between a man and a woman. They live separately in two households so they don’t have the same economic interest, and they don’t need to take the same household responsibilities. Even if they quarrel about something really that really matters to both of them, and they can separate from each other for a while until they both forget the angers and miss each other again.

**PLEASE HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN WITH GIFTS AND POCKET MONEY**

Mosuo biological fathers need not to take the responsibility to raise their children. It is mothers and maternal uncles’ responsibility. When children or mothers need money, they never ask for money from fathers or husbands, but from maternal uncles or brothers. Young mother Diyun tells me:

In our family, my uncle is in charge of the money of our household. All family members give my uncle the money they earned. The income from selling crops and domestic animals is also held by my uncle. When we need money, we will go to my uncle and ask for him for money. My husband will sometimes give his children and I some pocket money to buy some snacks and clothes.

Diyun’s husband gives some money to his wife and children, but it is just pocket money to please his wife and children, not for necessities.

Maternal uncle Tianshuo told me the difference between his wife and his sisters when he handles the money he earned:
Tianshuo: When my sisters need to use money, they just come to me and ask for it. But to my wife, she never asks for money from me, I always give money to her.

Interviewer: Will you favor your wife over your sister?

Tianshuo: No, it is two different things. My sisters ask for money for my whole household’s use, and not for her private use. I give my wife money just for her private use, and it is just pocket money.

It is Tianshuo’s responsibilities to give most of his money to his sisters for the public use of the whole household. But Tianshuo keeps a small amount of his money for his private use. He can use it to please his wife and children. So that is the difference between his wife and his sisters when Tianshuo handles the money he earned.

But Tianshuo didn’t answer my question whether he will favor his wife over his sister. I am still curious about this question, so I asked the same question to Danian. He answered:

It is impossible! If I favor my wife over my sisters, once I was caught by others, I would lose my face in both families. I will be criticized by all the villagers that I am a man with very bad conscience, I can’t even raise my head in front of any other people. Of course, if my wife’s family is in poorer conditions than me, it is reasonable that I give her a bit more money so that my children and my wife can be happier, and my family members will understand it. But if my wife’s family is better than my family or the same as my family, if I favor her over my sister and my own family, I will be criticized by others and lose my reputation in the whole village. No, I won’t do that. No Mosuo man will do that! Every Mosuo man knows how to balance his relationship with his own family and his wife’s family.

I understand now that it is the moral sanction that effectively keeps Mosuo men from doing such a selfish thing as favoring his own wife over his sisters. The moral sanction can be very effective in a Mosuo’ village, considering that they have strong connections with one household and another, as we discussed before.

**ASSUMING SOME INSTRUMENTAL TASKS ONLY WHEN THE MATERNAL UNCLEs ARE PHYSICALLY ABSENT**

A Mosuo man needs to play the role of brother and maternal uncle in his own family and play the role of biological father in his wife’s family. When a Mosuo man visits his wife’s family, he can understand his children’s maternal uncle’s role very well because he is the maternal uncle in his own family. So when children’s biological fathers see that their
children’s maternal uncles are disciplining his children, he will be very careful not to intervene in them. I asked maternal uncle Danian:

Interviewer: Have you ever tried to protect your kid when you saw your kid’s maternal uncle was disciplining your kid, for example, scolding him, or even beating him?

Danian: No, I haven’t! Although sometimes I felt a little pain in my heart, but I understood that my kid should be punished when he didn’t behave well. And I believe my kid’s uncle punishes my kid is for my kid’s good. Actually, my kid’s uncle seldom beats my kid; my kid behaves well most of the time.

Danian is the maternal uncle in his own family, so he understands that his kid’s maternal uncle disciplining his kid is for his kid’s good. And he knows he doesn’t like to be intervened when he is disciplining his nephews. So when Danian saw his kid being disciplined by his maternal uncle, Danian wisely chose to respect and trust his kid’s maternal uncle even though Danian admitted that he felt a little pain.

But not all the maternal uncles can stay at home often and discipline their nephews all the time. Some maternal uncles have to live outside often if they need to make money far away from home. Young mother’s elder brother works in a local government administrative agency and he needs to take business trips and stay outside often. So he can’t discipline Diyun’s little son. Fortunately, Diyun’s husband lives close to Diyun’s family and visits Diyun and his son everyday. It is natural that Diyun’s husband takes the place of Diyun’s brother to discipline his son:

Diyun: All little boys are naughty. My son is no exception. So in our family, we all spank him when he does not behave well. We think that we not only give my son food to eat, clothes to wear, and we also need to teach him to behave well. My son’s father is the one who disciplines my son most often. Hence my son is scared of his father most. Sometime if my son does not behave well, and his father is not available, my mother or my uncle will scare my son “If you don’t behave well, you father will spank you!”

Interviewer: Usually, what does your husband teach your son?

Diyun: My husband often tells my son “You should always listen to your grandma and your grand uncle’s.”

It is understandable why Diyun’s husband hopes his son listens to his grandma and grand uncles’ words rather than his own words. Even though Diyun’s husband takes the place of Diyun’s brother to discipline his son, Diyun’s husband still is not a family member
but a visitor of Diyun’s family. So Diyun’s husband hopes some of his son’s family members can discipline his son when he is not available even though his son is scared of him most.

From the above discussion, we can see that Mosuo biological fathers play a marginal role in their wives’ families and in the socialization of their children. They are not the family members of their wives’ families, just frequent visitors. They need not take the responsibilities to raise their children, but they will try to please their wives and children by giving them some pocket money or giving them gifts. They never intervene when their children’s maternal uncles are disciplining their children. They discipline their children only under special conditions when their children’s maternal uncles are physically absent and are not able to discipline their children. So I would like to define Mosuo biological fathers’ role as expressive in the socialization process of their children.

In conclusion, from the above discussions of role allocations in Mosuo matrilineal family system, the mothers play both instrumental role and expressive role, the maternal uncles play instrumental role, the grand mothers and grand maternal uncles play expressive role, and the biological fathers play expressive role. Therefore, the Mosuo’s family system is multigenerational extended family system, in which grandmothers and grand maternal uncles are the important agent of children’s socialization. The expressive role that grandmothers and grand maternal uncles play is similar with the role the wife-mother play in nuclear family. Since the grandmothers and grand maternal uncles take some expressive responsibilities which are assumed to be the wife-mother’s responsibility in the nuclear family, so the mothers in Mosuo multigenerational families are not fully occupied with the expressive responsibilities. They can have more time and energy to take some instrumental responsibilities. Mosuo mothers therefore are more economically “independent” than the mothers in another type of family system. The findings disprove Parsons’ claim that males tends to be more instrumental while females tends to be more expressive in all human societies. The case of Mosuo’s matrilineal family system demonstrates that the social roles of instrumental leader and expressive leader are not gender specific across human societies. Instrumental role and expressive role can be allocated to different genders either female or male, or different generations either parents or grandparents.

A Mosuo man needs to play the role of maternal uncle in his mother’s family, and play the role of biological father in his wife’s family simultaneously. The result of the roles
allocation is that a Mosuo man can’t control the two roles in the sense that he has to balance his relationship with his mother’s family and his wife’s family when he handles the money he earned. He has to carefully deal with the sensitive relationship between maternal uncle and biological father when he disciplines his sister’s children or his own children, as we demonstrated above. This supports Watson-Franke’s (1993) findings that in matrilineal societies, father’s role is separated into two roles: biological father and maternal uncle; Husband’s role is also separated into two roles, bother and sexual partner. The result is that matrilineal men can’t have absolute control in any of these roles. But Mosuo maternal uncles and biological fathers are equally economically independent by making money outside.

**MEN AND WOMEN’S POWER AND STATUS IN MOSUO’S MATRILINEAL FAMILIES**

The following part analyzes how the mechanics of gender role allocations and children’s socialization influence men and women’s power and status in Mosuo’s matrilineal families. First, we will discuss the role allocations of Mosuo men and how the role allocations influenced Mosuo men’s power and status in their families. Second, we will discuss the gender ideology socialized in the Mosuo matrilineal family system and how the gender ideology influenced Mosuo women’s power and status in their families.

**Being a Relaxed Man, Enjoying Less Power and Taking Less Responsibilities**

From the above discussions on man’s role of maternal uncle in his own family and man’s role of biological father in his wife’s family, we can see that in Mosuo families, men assume some important but not essential responsibilities for the household to sustain. The money they earned from outside is not the life sustenance for the whole household to live on. Admittedly, the money men bring back to their families can make their families live better and happier though. Mosuo men are in charge of the heavy farm work, but the heavy farm work such as plowing needs to be done only in the spring. Mosuo men are in charge of the big things of their families such as building the houses, and funerals of the dead family members, but such kind of big things happen in low frequency even for the whole village. Therefore, we can say that the responsibilities that Mosuo men are supposed to assume in their families are in fact nominal. But why? In my point of view, we should attribute Mosuo
men’s nominal responsibilities to the two roles they play simultaneously in the two families.
A man is a brother in his own family, but he is also a husband in his wife’s family; a man is a
maternal uncle in his own family, but he is also a biological father in his wife’s family. A
Mosuo man can be very burdensome because he should take care of two families at the same
time. But a Mosuo man can be very relaxed because the two families he is supposed to take
care of can be a reasonable excuse for him to get rid of all the responsibilities he is supposed
to assume as a man.

Old mother Yili’s incisive description on Mosuo men and women proves it:

I think the reason that Mosuo women are able and hardworking is because that we
don’t live together with our husbands. We practice visiting marriage. Hence
Mosuo men need to take care of their own families on one hand, take care of their
wives’ families on the other hand. Their energy and efforts are split onto two
families. But women’s energy and efforts are concentrated on their own families.
Running the household depends on women themselves. That is why Mosuo
women are able and hardworking. We have nobody to rely on. (She laughs
proudly)

What maternal uncle Danian told me about his feeling of visiting marriage verified
what Yili said that visiting marriage actually makes Mosuo women more independent and
makes Mosuo men more relaxed:

In my opinion, visiting marriage is a lot more relaxed and easier to men than the
marriage of husband and wife living together and establishing a small family,
because the man who is practicing visiting marriage does not have to worry too
much. He goes outside and makes some money. He gives his family some money,
gives his wife’s family some money, and his wife’s family will be very happy.
His family is running by his mother, if he is able to make more money, he gives
his mother more; if he is not able to make money, it is ok. As for his kids, they are
raised by his wife’s family, if he has money, he can give his wife and kids some
pocket money. If he does not have money, it is ok that he just visits his wife’s
family and gives them some help and care emotionally. So I think visiting
marriage is good for men. We don’t need to worry too much. If I live with my
wife and kids and establish a new family, I need to take full responsibilities. If I
need to spend one cent, I can’t ask from anybody. But living in a big household,
there are many people I can rely on. I can get help from others easily. All the
family members help one another. But if I establish a new family with my wife, I
have to put myself under heavy pressures. If I can’t make it, other people can’t
help me to solve my family’s problems.

Visiting marriage makes Mosuo men more relaxed. That is why visiting marriage is
still so popular in Mosuo families today. Mosuo men go between their families and their
wives’ families everyday. They take fewer responsibilities, and they enjoy less power in both
families. No wonder Mosuo men only take nominal responsibilities in their mother’s families; and are obviously marginalized in their wives’ families as we have analyzed before. Consequently, the patriarchal image of male chauvinism or patriarchal egoism can’t be created.

**Grand Household Oriented**

During the whole process of the field research, it could be obviously felt that all the participants’ conversations center around one evident theme—the harmony and prosperity of the family. Hence to well understand Mosuo people’s matrilineal family structure, visiting marriage custom, role allocations of family members, children’s socialization, and women and men’s power and status in their families, we should link them to this permanent theme, which is in every Mosuo people’s mind and is regarded as their highest value—the harmony and prosperity of the family.

For every visitor of Mosuo people’s home, it is not difficult to notice a hearth in their main room (see Appendix D). The hearth is not a common hearth just for cooking food and boiling water like our stove, it is regarded by Mosuo people as an important symbol of the harmony and prosperity of the family. On the first day when a new house was built, Mosuo people will hold a big ceremony of igniting the hearth of the household. Since that day, the hearth must be ignited by the family members of the household every day, year after year, generation after generation, who live under the roof of the house. It can never be extinguished. For every Mosuo household, the ever-burning fire in their hearth is the common goal of all the family members living under the same roof strive for in their whole lifetime. It is a goal that sounds simple, but is hard to achieve.

We were led in the main room where there was a hearth burning without exception when the fifteen Mosuo households were visited. Since the interviews were done in the evening, the warm scene of the whole household sitting around their hearth to have their dinner together could be seen without exception.

To keep the fire of the hearth burning every day, generation after generation, it is not a goal that can be achieved by an able man or two, struggling for a few years, with good luck. It is a goal that needs to be achieved by all the family members using their whole lifetimes. Mosuo people have their wisdom and strategies to achieve this goal.
Since Mosuo people value grand household, and regard their grand households as their career businesses to run, their households run better than Chinese predominantly patrilineal households, more harmonious, more prosperous. In the regular Chinese predominantly patrilineal household today, it is rare to see four generations living under the same roof. However, in the Mosuo village today, four generations living under the same roof is not uncommon. Among the fifteen Mosuo households interviewed, four households were households of four generations living together. After hearing about the harmony and prosperity of Mosuo households being praised, the maternal uncle of a four-generation household, Yuanhe, said:

If you visited Mosuo households ten years ago, the majority of Mosuo households were four-generation households. Some of them were even five-generation households. But now the four-generation households like us are fewer and fewer. Five-generation households have disappeared.

From Yuanhe’s words, we can see that Mosuo households went through some changes in the recent decades. But their custom of grand household is still distinctive today. How do they run their household harmoniously and prosperously?

**Strategy One: Visiting Marriage**

From the interviews, I learned that the main social function of visiting marriage is to maintain the harmony of the grand household. Even though a few Mosuo people today choose the marriage of husband and wife living together, the Mosuo traditional visiting marriage of husband and wife living separately is still the most popular way that most Mosuo people choose today. When I asked the middle age mother Hongmei:

Interviewer: Why don’t you consider letting your sons to marry your daughter-in-law into your household just like Han people do?

Hongmei: You know I have three sons and three daughters. Now two of my sons are practicing visiting marriage, and the other son is lama and can’t marry, I think it is very good. If they married their wives into our household, it would be impossible, because our household can’t accommodate them. Suppose both of my two sons brought their wives to our household, what would have to happen to my three daughters? It will be difficult to deal with. Moreover, the two wives won’t get along with each other. Our household will separate sooner or later. Hence my sons are practicing visiting marriage.

From Hongmei’s conversation, we can see two points: firstly, the marriage of Hongmei’s children is mainly decided by Hongmei. Secondly, considering the harmony of
their household, Hongmei let her sons practice visiting marriage. This is not Hongmei’s viewpoint alone but represents the majority of Mosuo parents’ viewpoints on their children’s marriage. Mosuo parents believe that practicing visiting marriage is a wise way to avoid the irreconcilable conflicts in all patriarchal extended families—in-law conflicts.

Middle age mother Suhua told me why most Mosuo young people also prefer visiting marriage:

Usually, Mosuo women don’t like to be daughter-in-laws living in their husbands’ families. Mosuo men also don’t like to be son-in-laws living in their wives’ families. If living in other’s families, their family members won’t treat you as their biological sons or daughters, or biological brothers or sisters. Such kind of things often happen in your Han people’s families, right? So Mosuo husband and wife prefer living in their own families. Such kind of things won’t happen in our Mosuo families. (She laughs) If I live with my husband in his family, his mother doesn’t like me, we will quarrel all day. We both loose our faces in front of others, which will be really humiliating. (She laughs again)

From Suhua’s laughs, I can obviously sense Mosuo people’s opinions on Han people’s marriage. In Mosuo people’s eyes, Han people way of marriage is obviously unwise, problematic, and even ridiculous compared with their visiting marriage.

**Strategy Two: Filial Piety to the Elders**

When I ask the participants the question on how they define a qualified Mosuo man or Mosuo woman, all the participants’ answers mention without exception one criterion to be a qualified Mosuo man or Mosuo woman—filial piety to the elders. To Mosuo people, stressing filial piety to the elders is indispensible to maintain a harmonious and prosperous grand household. It applies to both man and woman. Maternal uncle Tianshuo told me:

Thanks to the elders of our family, we can enjoy the happy life today. Without their efforts and hardships for their whole lifetimes, we won’t exist in this world. So we have the tradition to first worship our elders who passed away before we have our three meals every day. We ask them to share the food together with us.

To Mosuo people, filial piety should be taught since childhood and should be stressed during their whole lifetime. Young mother Zhuoma told me how she teach her two sons to have filial piety to the elders:

In our family, we teach my two year-old son to show filial piety to the elders now. For example, before we have meals everyday, I will ask my kid to give the chopsticks and food to his grand uncle first. By this way, my son will be closer
with his grand uncle. Now every time when my son eats something, he will always think of his grand uncle, and let his grand uncle to eat first. My son has lived with his grand uncle since he was born. His grand maternal uncle takes care of him, and they love each other. We often ask my son such questions as “Will you wash clothes for your grand uncle in the future? What will you do for your grand uncle when you grow up?” We talk such things with my son now and teach him to understand them “When your grand uncle grows old and is sick, will you still love him and take care of him?” By this way, we teach my son what filial piety is. Now when my son has meals, he always passes a bowl full of food to his grand uncle first with both his hands respectfully.

To enjoy such high status and be respected by all the family members in their families, Mosuo elders are the happiest elders. That is why old mother Pingna, who went through extreme difficulties to raise her six children in her young age due to her mother, aunts and husband passed away early, told me proudly:

Now all my children grow up and have their own children, we live together in harmony and happiness, my efforts and hardships eventually paid off. I am this! (She held up her thumb to me proudly)

Pingna never tried to marry to another man since her husband died, because she thought if she married to another man, she would bear some kids for that man, the kids of different biological fathers could not get alone with one another well, and her household couldn’t be harmonious. So she concentrated all her efforts in raising her six children since then. Now she is the female chief of a four-generation household and is respected by all her children, grand children and grand grandchildren. Her sense of achievement could be seen from her happy face.

**STRATEGY THREE: STRICTLY OBEY THE PRINCIPLE OF FAIRNESS**

To maintain the harmony of a grand household is not easy, so Mosuo people have a long tradition to know the importance of fairness and strictly obey the principle of fairness in their daily life. When the female chiefs distribute tasks to their family members every morning before they do farm work, they always take the principle of fairness into their first consideration. Female chief Wumei told me how she values the principle of fairness in order to achieve harmony in their household:

In our family, we always work together. Everyone has his or her own work. Women work inside the family, and men work outside the family, the more people work together, the better and faster things get done. Hence we always
work together! (She laughs loudly) Our family is very harmonious. As the female chief in our family, I am in charge of distributing the work to everyone every morning. I am good at distributing the work, so we can work together, we can work without rest in four seasons. I hope all my family members can always work together, always work in harmony. I always tell my family members: “Without harmony, everybody will suffer from difficulties, we will have nothing to eat. We will feel painful when we see other families have better lives than us. Our family has so many people, if we work together in harmony, we can get anything done faster and better!” I believe that if a person works by himself or herself, he or she will feel bored, will not want to work, and can not work well either. But if all of us work together, we will feel happy and get things done faster. Then we can go home and rest sooner. So harmony is very important, I always teach my family members the importance of harmony.

Wumei regards harmony as the key to working happily and efficiently. She believes that harmony can be achieved by working together and resting together, so she obeys the principle when distributing work to her family members everyday and tries to let her family member to understand her principle of working together. The principle of working together is actually the principle of fairness.

In order to achieve harmony of the grand household, obeying the principle of fairness is not only indispensible when distributing daily work, it is also indispensible when distributing resources such as money, food, clothes and etc. Especially when adults distributing these resources to young kids. Maternal uncle Yuanhe told me:

For example, when I saw one of my grand nephews’ shoes were broken, I would buy him a new pair of shoes. But I didn’t buy new shoes for him only, I would buy new shoes for all of my grand nieces and nephews, no matter whether their shoes were broken or not. If I bought new shoes for one of my grand nephews only, my other grand nephews and nieces would feel unfairness in their hearts. Hence in a family, no matter how many kids we have, no matter the kids are born by me or not, if we all live under the same roof, all need to be considered to have new shoes, and to have the same kind of new shoes. Or else the kids will be hurt in their young hearts, I am specially treated, or I am not specially treated. They will have complaints in their hearts. They will feel that the adults in our family show partiality to them. We can’t give them such feelings. So we buy things equally to every kid of our family. When one kid has some need, we satisfy all the kids’ needs.

From Yuanhe’s conversation, we can see how strict the principle of fairness is in Mosuo families. Because they live in collective life, no fairness means no harmony. In a Mosuo’s grand household, the kids are born by different mothers, and the question of fairness is surely more sensitive than in the household where kids are born by the same mother. That
is why Mosuo families strictly obey the principle of fairness to a surprising degree. Old mother Hongmei told me:

Interviewer: Have the kids in your family ever quarreled for anything?

Hongmei: Never! In our family, we deal with such problems like this: Take new clothes as an example, if we want to buy new clothes to our kids, we buy new clothes to all of them. If we don’t want to buy, none of the kids will get new clothes. By this way, the kids in our family have nothing to quarrel about and everybody is happy!

Mosuo families’ strict principle of fairness even makes it very complicated when Mosuo adults reward their kids. Old mother Pingna told me:

Interviewer: Will you reward your kids when they behave well?

Pingna: We seldom reward the kids. If some kids behave well, we sometime favor them a little more secretly, so only the kids themselves can feel it. But actually in a family, you give this kid something if he or she behaves well, give that kid nothing if he or she doesn’t behave well. If you do this, it will create conflicts within the family. So we usually don’t reward our kids. We may occasionally reward someone secretly, but will be very careful when doing this. For example, every New Year celebration our family members go to shopping in the fair. I give everyone 200 yuan (about 30$) in public, but I will give those who are hard working 50 yuan more (about 8$) secretly to reward them. But I will ask them to keep it as a secret very carefully. But if I give some people more money, and give other people less money in public, our family will have conflicts. Some families even separated because of such kind of conflicts. So we need to be very careful when we reward someone.

From Pingna’s conversation, we can imagine that to run a grand household harmoniously is not easy at all. Mosuo people accumulate many valuable experiences in dealing with such kind of sensitive problems.

In conclusion, Mosuo people have their traditional wisdom and strategies in the socialization process to run their grand household harmoniously and prosperously. The fire of their hearth is always burning from generation to generation until today and will be burning in the future. All these efforts in achieving household harmony and prosperity, the symbol of their burning hearth indicates one thing. That Mosuo people value their families, and regard their families as the most important thing in their whole lives.

Woman Centered Culture

As we discussed above, Mosuo people put family over anything else. To Mosuo people, in order to keep the fire of their hearth burning forever requires the efforts of both
men and women. However, Mosuo people further believe that it mainly depends on the abilities of the women in their families. Because according to their traditional division of labor that men are in charge of external affairs while women are in charge of internal affairs, the “internal affairs” mean their family, mean the burning hearth of their family. Mosuo women are in charge of everything about their families as we analyzed before. Therefore Mosuo people value women, value women’s abilities in running their households. That is also why the whole family is named after their mother. All the generations in their family line are all identified by women. To Mosuo people, the internal affairs are very broad, are not the backing support of the external affairs. On the contrary, the internal affairs are regarded as the center and ultimate goal of their life, the external affairs seem to be the backing support of internal affairs. This is different from Chinese predominantly patrilineal families. In Chinese predominantly patrilineal families, the internal affairs that women are in charge of are regarded as the backing support of the external affairs that men are in charge of. So there is an old saying in China that a good wife is “xian nei zhu” (the backing support of her husband). Old mother Yili had to let his eldest son to drop out of his school in his early age so that his younger sisters and brothers could go to school. When I asked Yili:

Interviewer: Why didn’t you favor your sons over your daughters just as Han families do under such poor and difficult conditions?

Yili: To Mosuo people, we sometimes will favor daughters over sons. Because whether the fire of our hearth can be burning depends on the abilities of daughters, not sons, because it is Mosuo women who are in charge of running the household. (She laughs)

Young mother Zhuoma gave her incisive answer when I asked her why Mosuo women are able and hardworking:

Women focus their energy on running their own households. Whether their households can sustain or not depends on women. That is why Mosuo women are able and hardworking, they have nobody can rely on when running their households.

Obviously Zhuoma imply that Han women always rely on Han men, but Mosuo women can’t rely on Mosuo men, this difference causes Mosuo women to be more independent, and more able and hardworking. In my opinion, it is not because Han women are born dependent on men. It is patriarchy and the patrilineal family system that makes Han women have to depend on men.
Mosuo people value women, and value women’s abilities to run their grand households. Therefore, in their families, girls are treated more strictly than boys. Maternal uncle Yuanhe had a long and detailed conversation with me on this issue. Yuanhe’s opinion represents all the fifteen Mosuo families’ opinion I interviewed on this issue.

Interviewer: If your nephews show some behaviors that you think are gender-inappropriate, for example, your nephews like staying at home and doing household chores instead of going outside with you to do plowing, what are you going to do?

Yuanhe: It doesn’t matter, I am not going to do anything about it. It is a good thing that my nephews like doing household chores. Actually, we have some boys who don’t like going outside and prefer staying at home all day. It doesn’t matter at all in our Mosuo families.

Interviewer: If your nieces show some behaviors that you think are gender-inappropriate, for example, your nieces don’t like staying at home and doing household chores but like staying outside with you…..

Yuanhe: (He interrupted me and said:) We need to discipline such kind of girls! We must discipline such kind of girls!

Interviewer: Why?

Yuanhe: Because if girls don’t learn to do household chores, when they grow to a certain age, they have to be the female chiefs to run the household, they won’t know how to run the household. Under such conditions, the whole household will be in a mess. You see, although our Mosuo households are not very clean and well organized…..As you said, if girls stay outside all day and never care about their families, when the female chiefs in their families are too old to run the household, who will take their place to run the household at that time? It is not realistic to let elders or men to run the household. So we must teach girls how to run the household from their childhood so that the abilities and experiences of running the household can be inherited generation after generation. If the girls are not willing to learn these things, we must discipline them. We always tell the girls to stay at home after dinner and do things they are supposed to do and don’t go outside. If we don’t teach the girls these things, our yards will be dusty, our domestic animals won’t be taken care of, and everyone’s life will be in a mess. We can’t let such things happen! So we can’t tolerate the girls staying outside all day, even though they can earn lots of money outside. Especially if we have only one girl, who will be the only candidate of the future female chief! Women are very important in our Mosuo households, they are the center of our daily lives. For example, the daily farm work, who should do what, how many persons are required. All of these things are led and arranged by them. As a female chief, she needs to arrange every family member’s life. So women are very important to our households. You think about it carefully. to manage the daily work and daily life well is not easy, it is much more difficult and important than men to be in charge of the big things occasionally such as funerals, and house building. So we can’t
tolerate girls staying outside all day and not doing things they are supposed to do. We must teach girls and discipline girls to be a qualified female chief from when they are young so that our household and our lives won’t be in a mess in the future.

From Yuanhe’s explanation, we can understand why Mosuo people treat girls more strictly than boys. In Mosuo people’s ideology, it is difficult to be a qualified female chief to run the household. It is not an easy thing that can be done by anybody. It requires strict training and learning since childhood in order to inherit the valuable experiences and abilities from the old generation to run the grand household well. This is more interesting when compared with the patriarchal ideology on the issue of gender crossover behaviors.

According to Bem, in the context of patriarchal culture, boys are more rigidly socialized to gender norms and allowed less crossover behavior than girls. It is easier for girls to be tomboys than for boys to be “sissies” (Bem, 1993) According to Coltrane’s explanation, because we have a male-dominated or androcentric cultural bias that values masculine traits over feminine traits, we are more likely to approve of those traits whether boys or girls exhibit them. (Coltrane, 2006) On the contrary, Mosuo people values feminine traits of running household and taking care of family over masculine traits of making money outside, Mosuo people are more likely to approve of feminine traits whether boys or girls exhibit them. That is why Yuanhe thinks they can tolerate boys to show gender crossover behaviors but can’t tolerate girls to show gender crossover behaviors. Therefore, I define Mosuo’s culture as woman-centered culture.

Young mother Liwen told me her understanding of the difference between a qualified Mosuo women and a qualified Han women who live in the city. Her conversation is in accord with what Yuanhe said about Mosuo women above.

Mosuo women’s abilities are very broad, because women have everything to do with whatever relates to our lives. Unlike the Han women who are living in the cities, besides their work, the things that need them to be taken care of in their small families are just a little. Say, cooking dinner, and that’s it! (with a contempt tone) But things are different to Mosuo women.

Since Mosuo people value women’s abilities to run their households, in Mosuo men’s eyes, women’s abilities are more attractive than their appearances or figures too. Maternal uncle Tianshuo told me:

Interviewer: Describe for me your perfect mate.
Tianshuo: As a man, I have some criteria of an attractive woman in my heart. It is true that I like good-looking women. But this is not a must. For example, if a woman looks very gorgeous, but she is not able to take care of her family, and she is not able to do any household chores, what will happen to her family and her children? Such kind of good-looking women are unsuited to our Mosuo families. Therefore, appearance and figure are not my criteria of an attractive woman. A physically healthy woman is ok to me. In short, hardworking, abilities to take care of her family, and good conscience are my criteria of an attractive woman.

In Mosuo men’s eyes, women are not their properties but independent individuals who need to raise their children. Therefore, Mosuo women’s abilities to take good care of her family and children, rather than their appearance and figure, are attractive to Mosuo men.

In conclusion, Mosuo people value grand household, and regard it as their lifetime goal to pursue and achieve as I try to demonstrate above during the socialization process from their visiting marriage custom, their filial piety to the elders, their strict principle of fairness and their ever burning hearth in their main rooms as the symbol of the harmony and prosperity of their grand household. Hence they value women’s abilities to run their grand household. They can’t tolerate girls’ gender crossover behaviors. Their culture is therefore defined as woman-centered culture. In Mosuo’s matrilineal culture, feminine traits have never been depreciated as that in our patriarchal culture. The evidence above supports Watson-Franke’s findings that rather than ascribing negative value to motherhood and femaleness, matrilineal mother is defined by powerful and usually positive female imagery (Watson-Franke, 1993). Therefore, matrilineal women enjoy more power, but need to take more responsibilities in their families.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this study, some findings from a series of in-depth interviews with twelve mothers of three generations and three maternal uncles from fifteen Mosuo matrilineal families have been presented. The purpose of this study was to explore how Mosuo matrilineal culture defines parental roles in their families; how Mosuo adults socialize their children gender appropriate behaviors and attitudes; and how the mechanics of gender roles allocations and children’s socialization influence both men and women’s power and status in Mosuo’s matrilineal families.

The analysis of the data collected from the fifteen in-depth interviews was conducted by applying Parsons’(1955) theory of the role-structure of the nuclear family and Mischel’s (1966) social-learning theory from structural functionalist’s perspective. The combination of these two theories allowed for a complete understanding of gender roles socialization within the family system.

The conclusion reached is that in the Mosuo matrilineal family system, mothers play both the instrumental role and expressive role, maternal uncles play instrumental role, grandmothers and grand maternal uncles play expressive role, biological fathers play expressive role; the gender ideology socialized in Mosuo matrilineal families indicates that Mosuo culture is grand household oriented and women-centered culture. The finding is unique in three aspects:

Firstly, in Mosuo matrilineal families, the grand mothers and grand maternal uncles share some expressive responsibilities with the mothers, so that the mothers can assume some instrumental responsibilities. The result is that Mosuo mothers are more economically independent.

Secondly, a Mosuo man is the brother and the maternal uncle in his mother’s family, but he is the husband and biological father in his wife’s family simultaneously. On the surface, a Mosuo man has to take care of two families at the same time. But in fact the responsibilities a Mosuo man is assumed to take in his mother’s family are not essential but
nominal responsibilities. The responsibilities a Mosuo man is assumed to take in his wife’s family are very marginal. The result is that a Mosuo man can’t take full control of the two roles he has to take in his mother’s family and his wife’s family. The patriarchal image of male chauvinism or patriarchal egoism can’t be created. Rather, the image of a Mosuo man is a relaxed man, enjoying less power and taking less responsibilities.

Thirdly, Mosuo’s culture is grand household oriented and women-centered culture as we analyzed above. Mosuo people value the harmony and prosperity of their households, therefore, they value women’s abilities to run their households. The result is that feminine traits have never been depreciated as that in the patriarchal culture and the patrilineal families. Therefore, Mosuo women enjoy more power, but need to take more responsibilities in their families.

From the analysis above, we can conclude that the mechanics of the gender roles allocations and the socialization of gender ideology balanced man and woman’s power and status (Both Mosuo women and men are economically independent; Mosuo women take more responsibilities and enjoy more power; Mosuo men take less responsibilities enjoy less power) in Mosuo’s matrilineal families so that the huge bias of the gender inequality in Chinese predominant partrilineal families is decreased to a minimum in the Mosuo matrilineal family system and culture. The findings of this research support structural functionalist’s perspective that cultural norms and parents’ roles do play an important influence in children’s gender roles construction in the aspect of gender roles’ power and status. Further, the role allocations in the Mosuo matrilineal family system disprove Parsons’ claim based on psychoanalysis theory that it is universally true in all human societies that males tend to be more instrumental while females tend to be more expressive. The findings of this research prove that instrumental role and expressive role are not gender specific across societies.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

IRB’S APPROVAL LETTER
May 20, 2010

Yushan Zhong, Graduate Student
Dr. Norma Ojeda, Faculty
San Diego State University
5500 Campanile Drive
San Diego, CA 92182

v1RB Number: 476050
Protocol Title: PARENTAL ROLES AND CHILDREN’S SOCIALIZATION IN MOSUO'S MATRILINEAL FAMILY
Risk Level: Minimal
Regulatory Determination: Expedited per 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1), Category (6)(7)

Dear Yushan Zhong,

The referenced protocol was reviewed and approved in accordance with SDSU’s Assurance and federal requirements pertaining to human subjects protections within the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46: 21 CFR 50). This review is valid through April 30, 2011, and applies to the conditions and procedures described in your protocol. Please notify the IRB office if your status as an SDSU-affiliate changes while conducting this research study (you are no longer an SDSU faculty member, staff member or student).

The IRB determined that a waiver to obtain signature on the informed consent document may be granted per 45 CFR 46.110(a). 1. The research is minimal risk. 2. The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects. 3. The research could not practically be carried out without the waiver or alteration, and 4. Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

The approved consent form(s) labeled, “consent statement revised[IRB STAMPED].pdf” has been uploaded to your protocol file within the v1RB system, within the Supporting Documents section. This document bears the IRB’s stamp of approval. Please print a copy of this stamped form to use when documenting informed consent from research participants. Changes may not be made to the consent document(s) without prior review and approval of the IRB. You are required to keep signed copies of the consent document(s) for three years after your project has been completed or terminated, unless this requirement has been waived as per 45 CFR 46.116.

Please note the following:

a) For studies requiring consent translation: The SDSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) does not verify the accuracy of the translated document. IRB approval of this document for use in subject recruitment is based on your assurance that the translated document reflects the content of the IRB approved English version of the document.

b) If recruitment will take place through an outside agency or organization, confirm with that institution that you have permission to conduct the study prior to initiation of any study activities.

c) Approval is contingent upon the completion of the SDSU human subjects tutorial (found at: http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~gra/login.php) by all members of the research team. This certification must be renewed every 2 years.
For questions related to this correspondence, please contact the IRB office ((619) 594-6622 or e-mail irb@mail.sdsu.edu). To access IRB review application materials, SDSU's Assurance, the 45 CFR 46, the Belmont Report, and/or any other relevant policies and guidelines related to the involvement of human subjects in research, please visit the IRB website at http://gra.sdsu.edu/research.php.

Graduate Students: This notification may be used as documentation to register in Thesis 799A. Attach a hard copy of this notice to your Appointment of Thesis/Project Committee form prior to submitting the completed form to Graduate and Research Affairs - Student Services Division.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Nichols
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Amy McDaniel
Regulatory Compliance Analyst

Choya Washington
Regulatory Compliance Analyst
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE
Questions on personal and household background
1. How old are you? Do you have any kids? How many kids do you have, are they girls or boys?
2. How many people live in your household? Could you briefly tell me who they are, what are their relationships with you?
3. Do you have a paid job? What kind of job do you have? Besides you, who else have a paid job in your family? What kind of jobs do they have? How do your family members run the household?
4. Do your family members assume any public positions in your village? If they do, what kind of public positions do they assume?

Questions on gender norms and values defined by Mosuo culture
1. Describe for me what kind of man (or woman) you expect your sons (or daughters) grows up into?
   Prompts: personalities such as smart, strong, tough, filial piety or etc; job positions such as doctor, teacher or etc.
   Follow-up queries: different expectations for sons and daughters and reasons

2. Describe for me your perfect mate.
   Prompts: personalities such as smart, strong, tough; job positions such as doctor, teacher; rich
   Follow-up queries: rationale behind the standards

3. From your personal experiences, describe for me what is most important for a Mosuo woman (man)
   Prompts: family and children, work and money, virtue and knowledge
   Follow-up queries: cultural and social rationale behind the standards

Questions on gender socialization process
1. What kind of toys to give your sons (or daughters) to play? Describe for your last experience when you observe you sons (or daughters) playing games with the toys.
   Follow-up queries: different toys given to boys and girls and the rationale behind the difference; what role boys and girls play in the game, their behaviors, dialogues
2. What kind of hobbies your sons (or daughters) have? Do you intentionally develop their hobbies you expect? Describe for me how you develop your sons or daughter’s hobbies?
   
   *Follow-up queries: different hobbies expected boys and girls to have and the rationale behind the difference; conflicts and difficulties in developing a hobby and how to deal with.*

3. What kind of household chores you assign to your sons or daughters? Describe for me your last experience when you assign your sons or daughters to do household chores.
   
   *Follow-up queries: different chores assigned to boys and girls and the rationale behind the difference; difficulties in assigning chores and how to deal with them.*

4. Describe for me how do you dress your sons and daughters.
   
   *Follow-up queries: different styles, colors, images expect to create for girls and boys and the rationale behind the difference.*

5. Describe for me how you decorate your sons and your daughters’ bed-rooms.
   
   *Follow-up queries different sizes, colors, equipments, furniture for boys and girls and the rationale behind the difference.*

6. Have your sons or daughters ever showed some behaviors or hobbies that you think are not appropriate as boys or girls before? If yes, describe for me your last experience of it. If no, tell me how you would response to it if it happens.
   
   *Follow-up queries: what kinds of behaviors or hobbies are gender-inappropriate; the different responses for girls and boys to behave gender-inappropriately and rationale behind the difference.*

7. Describe for me how is your division of labor in child-rearing between you and your sister (or brother)
   
   *Prompts: who in charge of sons, who in charge of daughters, who in charge of study, care, discipline*

   *Follow-up queries: who plays instrumental roles, who plays expressive roles in child-rearing and why*

8. In your kids’ eyes, whom you think they respect more, yourself or your brother? Whom you think they are more emotionally attached to, yourself or your brother? Describe for me what experiences make you have such judgments.
Follow-up queries: the interactions between adults and kids, the different roles adults play to kids.

9. If your sons and daughters do something wrong, how do you punish them? Describe for me your last experience when you punish your sons and daughters.

Follow-up queries: the different punishment and behavior norms for boys and girls and why.

10. If your sons and daughters do something right, how do you reward them? Describe for me your last experience when you reward your sons and daughters.

Follow-up queries: the different rewards and behavior norms for boys and girls and why.

Questions on gender power and status within family

1. Describe for me the decision making process under critical occasions to your whole family

Prompts: when using household’s savings; some family member is in great trouble and need help

2. Describe for me how your family deals with the conflicts, disputes among your family members

3. Describe for me how your family distributes the resources such as bedroom, money, food, clothes and etc

Follow-up queries: who has the power to make the distribution and why.

4. Describe for me how you deal with the troubles when your economic ability can’t simultaneously meet all your kids’ needs.

Follow-up queries: which kid is favored more and why
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANTS’ FAMILY STRUCTURE CHARTS
Old mother Hengmal
60 years old

Daughter, live with husband now
in charge of farm work, household chores, domestic animals, neighbor relationship
discipline children, but as a comforter when her husband is disciplining child

Wife, chef, hope her children can continue the custom of visiting marriage for the harmony of her household

Husband
has many sisters and brothers in his household, so moved to his wife's household
male chief, used to be an agricultural technician, retired now
in charge of the farm of his wife's mother
discipline children, career planer for his children

Daughter 1
work in a hotel in the city nearly unmarried

Daughter 2
school teacher

Daughter 3
went to college, work as a local police officer unmarried

Son 1
dropped school early
go farming work with mother
good at cooking
have a personality like female

Son 2
be a labor in the farmery nearby

Son 3
long trip transportation driver
doing farm work with mother

Husband

Grandson 3 yrs old
Middle age mother Fuolan
55 years old
in charge of household chores, domestic animals, farm work
discipline daughter

sister
separated from her household many years ago
living with her husband now

mother
passed away many years ago

maternal uncle
passed away many years ago

brother
farm work
discipline nephew
help nephew to plan his career

husband
gives children and wife pocket money often

daughter
looks after brother, helps mother with household chores
working as cheap labor in the city and remit money back often
unmarried
is expected to be back home and run the household in the future

wife

son
dropped school early
worked as cheap labor in the city but failed
returned home and now earns money by operating farm tractor
if his sister isn't back home, he is expected to run the household and marry his wife to his household
middle age mother Milan
53 years old
farm work, household chores, domestic animals
separated from her maternal household a few years ago, but still have close relationship now
her maternal household build the house for her to live now
discipline daughters strictly
expect her daughters can take care of their maternal uncles and aunts when they are old
hope at least one daughter can come back home and run the household in the future

husband
living with his wife now
spoil children, blame wife for her strictness to the children
farm work, carpenter

brothers and sisters
living with their mother
help Milan with farm work in busy season
take care of Milan’s daughters when they are little kids
helped Milan to do farm work when Milan was pregnant

daughter 1
25 years old
unmarried
work as cheap labor in the city
send money back home often
emotionally attached to her father most
be scared of her mother most

daughter 2
24 years old
unmarried
work as cheap labor in the city
send money back home often
emotionally attached to her father most
be scared of her mother most
mother
female chief
take care of grand children, household chores, domestic animals

young mother Suhwa
40 years old
farm work, household chores, domestic animals
discipline daughters

elder sister
farm work, household chores, domestic animals

husband
help wife's household
with some heavy farm work

nephew
23 years old
work as cheap labor in Ninglang county
bring money back sometime

daughter
21 years old
go to college in Kunming city

daughter 2
7 years old

husband
spoil daughters
help wife's household with some heavy farm work
APPENDIX D

PHOTOS TAKEN IN THE FIELD