

Ritual, education and performance: an anthropological study on Mosuo people's rite of passage into adulthood

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Abstract. The rite of passage into adulthood is one of the most important rites of passage for the Mosuo people. The rite of passage into adulthood ceremony is held in the Spring Festival at the age of thirteen to declare that they have a complete life and have become adults with responsibilities from now on. Changing clothes is the core of the ceremony, in which the Daba and the Daba Scriptures play an important role in the ceremony. The rite of passage into adulthood has the unique functions of strengthening self-knowledge, family education, and transmission of Mosuo culture. The exploration of the origin, process, cultural significance and cultural connotation of rite of passage into adulthood can deeply reflect the value of Mosuo culture with “harmony” as the main connotation, which is of great significance to the inheritance and promotion of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation.

Keywords:rite of passage into adulthood, Mosuo, daba, ritual process, ritual performances

1. Introduction

The Mosuo people call themselves “Na”, “Na Ri” or “Na Ru”. In modern times, the Mosuo people mainly live in Lugu Lake and its surrounding area at the Sichuan-Yunnan border in Southwest China, and are mainly distributed in Lijiang, Ninglang, Yongsheng and Wixi in Yunnan, and in Yanyuan, Muli and Yanbian in Sichuan. All along, the Mosuo people have attracted much attention from academics and other social fields because of their unique social and family structure and form of marriage. It seems that the matrilineal extended family type and the Axia heterosexual marriage (as known as “walking marriage”) have become the whole of Mosuo culture. However, as long as we understand Mosuo culture from a historical and objective point of view, we can notice that the richness of the Mosuo culture, which has been formed and accumulated in the long river of history, cannot be summarized by some simple words such as “matrilineal” and “walking marriage”. Mosuo culture is a complete cultural system containing the concepts of life, values, worldview and cosmology.

Life rituals refer to the behavioral process with certain ceremonies in several important links in a person's life, mainly including birth rituals, coming-of-age rituals, weddings and funerals. The marriage of Mosuo people is mainly Axia heterosexual marriage, and marriage is relatively rare, therefore, the rites of life of Mosuo people are mainly the birth rite, coming of age rite and funeral of three major categories.

Mosuo people have unique knowledge and concepts about life and death, and the importance of “soul” runs through the life of Mosuo individuals. Mosuo people believe that everyone has three lives, and each life is the combination and sublimation of “spirit” and “body”. The first life at birth, when the baby only has a body, the soul is not complete; the second life at the age of thirteen years old, when the teenager's body and soul complete fusion, become a real “person”; The third life in death, although the deceased's physical body will die, but the soul will return to the place where the ancestors live, which named “si³³bu³¹a³³na³¹wa³¹”, where it will be reincarnated and get a new life. Therefore, the Mosuo people go through the important points of each person's life through the rituals of birth, adulthood and funeral.

From 2010 to 2021, the author conducted five field surveys on the rites of passage of the Mosuo people in Yongning, the main settlement area of the Mosuo people, and participated in the “Mosuo Rites of Passage of Adulthood In-depth Experience Program” planned and organized by the Mosuo Museum starting from 2019, so that he has a more comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the rites of passage of the Mosuo people. On this basis, this paper will try to analyze the rite of passage ceremony of the Mosuo people, aiming to restore the whole picture of the rite in words as much as possible, discuss the essence of Mosuo

culture contained in the rite of passage ceremony, and try to sort out the clues of the change of this rite, which will illustrate the significance of the “In-depth Experience Program of Rite of Passage Ceremony of the Mosuo People” of the Mosuo Museum.

2. The rite of passage into adulthood in Mosuo

2.1. The meaning and origin of passage into adulthood

The rite of passage into adulthood is the rite of passage of a young person's life that recognizes his or her ability and qualifications to enter society, and it is an indispensable procedure for a person to move from being an individual to being a member of society. After a long process of acculturation, a person gradually matures, leaving the parental care and supervision of his or her relatives, and assumes the rights and obligations conferred on him or her by the group and society in which he or she lives. At this time, a series of rites of passage into adulthood are again held to mark the person's transition from immaturity to maturity, and this rite of passage is the rite of passage into adulthood. Some rites of passage into adulthood are very solemn and of a testing nature, and the rites of passage of some of China's ethnic minorities have more obvious reservations [1]. The rite of passage into adulthood is one of the most important of life's rites of passage and has multiple characteristics; it is a universal cultural phenomenon.

The rite of passage into adulthood for girls in Mosuo language is called “tha³¹tei¹³”, which means “wearing a skirt”, and the rite of passage into adulthood for boys is called “hi³³tei¹³”, which means “wearing trousers”. Mosuo children full age of thirteen years old, that is, the actual age of twelve years of age, are in the early morning of the first day of the first month of the lunar calendar, held a grand dress change ceremony, complete the rite of passage into adulthood. Traditionally, the Mosuo children of both genders in the adult before all wear long clothes, clothing does not distinguish between men and women. To the rite of passage into adulthood, the children in the presidency of the Daba and the elders of the help, take off the long shirt, change into the Mosuo men and women of their respective traditional dress (men wear trousers, women wear skirts), to complete the rite of passage into adulthood of their own. It can be said that dress change is the most crucial, iconic and symbolic part of passage into adulthood.

In the old days, Mosuo Tusi aristocrats had the habit of holding rite of passage into adulthood ceremony at the age of nine and eleven, and the Labo area also has the tradition of holding rite of passage into adulthood at the age of eleven. But on the whole, thirteen years of age to hold a rite of passage into adulthood is the most recognized by the Mosuo people. Why the rite of passage into adulthood at the age of thirteen is stipulated, the author has got the following statements in the process of investigation.

For one thing, the Mosuo people attach great importance to the twelve signs of the zodiac, the child is thirteen years old, just finished the first round of twelve signs of the zodiac, has a very important commemorative significance. In addition, the Mosuo people do not have the habit of birthday, in such a special significance of the time point of the rite of passage into adulthood ceremony, both on the child peacefully through the life of the first round of the twelve signs of the Zodiac to congratulate, but also can be counted as the Mosuo people in the life of the only birthday celebrations.

Secondly, among the Mosuo people, there is a concept of “renewal of life”, which believes that there are many hurdles in a person's life, and that a person's life can continue only if he or she can safely overcome these hurdles. Thirteen years old is the first and the most difficult hurdle. The rite of passage into adulthood at the age of thirteen is not only to congratulate the adult for having passed the first “hurdle” safely, but also to “renew his life”. At the ceremony, the adult receives blessings from elders, relatives, friends and ancestors, with the aim of providing strong spiritual support for the smooth cohesion of the life and soul of the newly-adult child.

Third, the most intuitive explanation for choosing to hold the coming-of-age ceremony at the age of thirteen is the legend of “people and dogs changing ages” widely circulated among the Mosuo people. It is said that when the world began to chaotic, there was no limit to the lifespan of humans and all animals in the world. The god Abba decided to give each life a certain lifespan, thereby changing the chaotic situation in the world. The ancestor of the Mosuo people only had a thirteen-year-old life span because he slept lazily, and he felt that the thirteen-year-old life was too short, so he exchanged his sixty-year-old life with the dog with the promise of the gods. In order to commemorate, the Mosuo people held a coming-of-age ceremony at the age of thirteen, saying that they no longer had to end their lives at the short age of thirteen, which is also in line with the view that “the coming-of-age ceremony is the second life of the Mosuo people”.

The rite of passage into adulthood is the most direct embodiment of the Mosuo people's view that people have three lives. It is only after a thirteen-year-old child has completed his or her dress changing and accepted the approval of his or her family under the auspices of Daba that his or her body and soul are fully integrated, and from then on, he or she becomes a complete “person” with strong body, spirit and flesh, and family and social responsibilities. Only after the rite of passage into adulthood, can be considered a real Mosuo people, can be entered into the genealogy after death, the soul will also be sent back to the ancestral homeland. In every link and detail of the ritual, the children are asked to be grateful and learn to take responsibility, hoping that they can contribute to the harmony of the family, the society and the country after adulthood.

2.2. The process of passage into adulthood

2.2.1. Preliminary

The preparation for the Mosuo rite of passage into adulthood is divided into three parts: clothing, utensils, and personnel.

Since dress change is the most central part of the Mosuo rite of passage into adulthood, the most important preparation for this ritual is naturally the preparation of a full set of traditional Mosuo costumes.

The traditional Mosuo women's costume consists of headdress, blouse, pleated skirt, belt, accessories and other parts. The Mosuo women's headdress is relatively complex, generally made of yak tail hair braided into a thick braid, connected to the Tibetan blue or black silk thread, clockwise winding into a ring, leaving a section of silk thread at the end of the natural hanging down, with a variety of strings of colored beads, flowers and other decorations. The headdress must be completed before the Chinese New Year, and is usually made by an elderly woman whose genus matches that of the recipient, with the maker choosing an auspicious day to begin work. The blouse consists of two parts: the lining and the jacket. The lining is worn separately inside, and the jacket has a right overlapping, standing collar with disc buttons at the center opening of the collar, at the right shoulder and under the armpit. Collar and the right lapel decorated with gold, and therefore also known as the gold-rimmed clothes. Gold-rimmed clothes are made of silk or velvet, in a variety of colors, red, black, green, pink, yellow, blue, brown and so on, according to age and personal preferences can be selected. The skirt is a long pleated skirt, made from whole pieces of fabric pieced and pressed. The fabric used is usually silk or cotton, and the pleats are fine and neat. The main colors are white, blue and black, worn by young girls, young women and older women respectively. A red line runs near the bottom third of the skirt for decoration. Belt is generally Mosuo people weave their own linen, cotton belt, belt at both ends of the more colorful wool for the tassel, tie the belt from right to left around the circle, men will tie the knot on the left side, women hit on the right side. Mosuo women's jewelry is relatively simple, with only earrings, bracelets and rings, mainly made of silver and jade. Some mothers or grandmothers will prepare a long iron or silver chain for the girl, with a hook at the end to hold the key, which will be worn on top of the dress when the rite of changing dress. Mothers or grandmothers also prepare silver bracelets, earrings, rings, etc., for the girls to wear when they dress change.

The Mosuo men's costume consists of a hat, a top, a bottom, a belt and shoes. On the whole, the Mosuo men's traditional costumes are simpler and more convenient than the women's costumes, and they are only differentiated in some details. Mosuo men usually wear hats, mostly felt hats. Mosuo men's and women's tops of the same style, men's tops only in the color of the women's tops to do the difference, mostly for the more dull dark blue, green, black, brown and other colors, you can also wear red. Bottom part, the old Mosuo men wear linen trousers, tie legs. After the influence of the Tibetans who entered the Yongning area and went out to transport the horse gangs, learnt from the Tibetans to wear a long shirt, called "t̥ʂho³³ba³¹". While Tibetans generally wear only one sleeve, Mosuo men use two sleeves to tie the whole tunic around their waist. Mosuo men's traditional dress is often accompanied by leather shoes, mainly made of cowhide, but also suede and deerskin.

There are many differences in the details of passage into adulthood of Mosuo in different regions, but there is no doubt that young boys and girls are required to stand on pork and grains to dress change. They represent abundance and food and clothing. Pork is the most representative meat of the Mosuo people, usually made from a whole pig, which is also called pipa meat because it resembles a pipa. Pork is not only an important prop in the rite of passage into adulthood ceremony, but also one of the gifts necessary for Mosuo people to visit friends and relatives during the Spring Festival. The grains are usually corn, soya beans, rice and so on. In the old days, the Mosuo people in the rite of passage into adulthood ceremony, usually with a large dustpan holding grain, now for the sake of convenience and cleanliness, most of the pocket grain. In addition, ghee lamps are also one of the necessary items. After changing into traditional clothes, adult people need to light the ghee lamps to pray to their ancestors for blessings and protection.

For the rite of passage into adulthood ceremony of the Mosuo people, it is necessary to contact and arrange the important participants of the ceremony in advance. Firstly, there are the religious personnel in the ritual, mainly the two categories of Daba and Lama. In the traditional Mosuo rite of passage into adulthood, Daba is an essential role. The Daba plays an important role in admonishing, educating, and guiding in the ritual. Since the Mosuo people believe in both their Daba religion and Tibetan Buddhism, the rite of passage into adulthood is also performed by lamas in many Mosuo villages. Whether it is the Daba or the lama, although there are some differences in the specific content of admonition and education, the religious roles they assume should be the same. Next is the person who dresses the child during the ritual. Generally speaking, girls are dressed by adult women and boys are dressed by adult men. The dress change person needs to meet an important condition, that is, to be compatible with the child's Chinese zodiac. The concept of zodiac matching runs throughout the rite of passage into adulthood of the Mosuo people. At the same time, the Mosuo people believe that in the course of the ritual, the recipient of the dress change can be influenced by the conduct and morality of the person, and even their life course will also have an impact on the recipient, so the dress change is generally chosen to be a respected, many children of the old man to take the role. In addition, whether or not the mother or uncle meets the requirements for a match, they can assist in the dress change at the rite of passage into adulthood, and every member of the family is required to participate in the ritual.

2.2.2. Course of the ritual

Daba needs to arrive at the home where the rite of passage into adulthood will take place early in the morning on the first day of the Lunar New Year before dawn. Upon arrival, they make the dolls required for this ritual on the spot by the fire. Daba dolls are made of tsamba and decorated with ghee in various forms. According to the Daba's explanation, these dolls represent the various types of gods and goddesses of heaven and earth, who will witness this solemn ritual together. In a traditional rite of passage into adulthood, the Daba needs to recite multiple passages before the ritual can proceed step by step. In a complete rite of passage into adulthood, Daba needs to recite sixteen Daba passages, and the whole process can last up to four to five hours. According to the author's field research, Mosuo Daba in the rite of passage into adulthood recited Daba scripture, mainly including several parts: the removal of filth, worship God, gratitude to ancestors and relatives, casting the soul to renew their lives, and pray for blessings.

On the morning of the first day of the Lunar New Year, the whole family should get up early. Before the start of the ritual, the housewife of the family is required to build a good fire in the fire pit, burn incense, change the purified water, and boil tea, while the recipients should freshen up and get ready. The female family members place the children's new costumes in the main room, while other relatives carry the pork and grain bags into the house, with the males placed under the pillar on the left side of the fire pit and the females under the pillar on the right side.

After the Daba has recited the first few sutras, the male members of the family raise the offerings used in the recitation above their heads and, after making an anti-clockwise circle around the courtyard, bring them to the Buddha niche in the main house, while the dress change person brings the recipient into the main house. The recipient stands on top of the grain and pig fat placed under the male or female pillar, and the most important part of the ritual, dress change, takes place.

Girls wear skirts starting with a pleated skirt, which is to be worn over the head and down and fastened at the waist. Then the blouse is put on, taking care to turn out the collar and sleeves of the lining separately as you do so, wrapping around the collar and cuffs of the gingham bodice. The sash is tied around the waist from right to left and knotted at the right side. The headdress is then put on, and the mother or grandmother puts on the silver chain and jewellery, and the girl is also given a key to wear, symbolizing that she is ready to take care of the family. Boys start by wearing a topcoat, which is worn in the same way as for girls, with the belt knotted on the left side. In addition to the boy's topcoat, he is also required to put on a Tibetan tunic, and finally the dress changer or uncle pins a Tibetan knife on his waist, symbolizing the boy's bravery and resilience as he grows up. Daba chants verses throughout this period, praying for the recipient's happiness to be long-lasting and broad-minded, for the girls to be beautiful and virtuous, and for the boys to be strong and hard-working. The names of the ancestors are also recited to report happy events in the family and to pray for their blessings on the new member of the family.

After the dress change is completed, the recipients need to kowtow in their respective home sutra halls and the main house, light up the ghee lamps placed on the potsherds and Buddha's niche in turn, and then kowtow to the elders present in turn. The elders, after accepting the recipient's worship, should give the recipient a blessing and present some money.

After the completion of the ritual, the family prepares to enjoy the first morning meal of the New Year. Before the meal begins, the host recites a blessing, takes a bit of each dish and puts it into a bowl full of rice, which a male member of the family splashes onto the roof of the main house to summon the ancestors to return for a good meal. If there is a dog in the house, the recipient is also required to feed the dog specifically before the meal to thank it for the change of years. After breakfast, there is an important ritual of paying homage to the New Year. Led by an elder (uncle, aunt or parent) and accompanied by one or two siblings of the same generation, each goes to the home of the family's eldest. If the parents go out of wedlock, it is also necessary to pay New Year's call at the father's home. The father's family usually prepares one or more sets of clothes and some money to give to the adult.

Usually from the evening of the second day of the New Year, families start to organize celebratory bonfires for their children. Families in the same village that have adult children at the same time will agree on a time with each other and take turns holding the bonfire.

3. The cultural connotation and value of passage into adulthood in Mosuo

3.1. The meaning and value of passage into adulthood

The Mosuo rite of passage into adulthood is rich in connotation and profound in meaning. The rite of passage into adulthood makes the Mosuo child become a person who enjoys religious, economic and legal rights, and bears the responsibility and obligation of the family and the society, which is the fundamental purpose of the Mosuo people to hold the rite of passage into adulthood.

First of all, the rite of passage makes the body of a Mosuo child stronger, the soul more complete, and the life and soul can be integrated. The Mosuo people believe that children who have not reached the age of thirteen or who have not had the rite of passage into adulthood are very fragile in body and soul, and cannot enjoy the rights given by the family and the society, nor can

they bear the corresponding responsibilities, so they cannot be regarded as a real Mosuo people. In the author's interviews, more than one person mentioned this point:

"The rite of passage into adulthood for the Mosuo people, first of all, the child has a life. The second is that the child has become an adult and has to take care of the household, not a child anymore. This is very crucial to the path of life." (LWMGR, personal communication, July 13, 2020)

"Before the age of thirteen, a person cannot be considered a real 'person', because there is no soul; after the rite of passage into adulthood, through the report to the ancestors, he or she will have a soul, will be accepted by the family, is a real Mosuo people." (ZBEC, personal communication, July 15, 2020)

"The Mosuo people practice cremation, picking up the unburnt bones and burying them in their own graveyard. But children who have not reached the age of thirteen are not allowed to do so. They still have to be cremated, but not in the normal place, and the ashes have to be washed down the river ditch." (AWDB, personal communication, July 16, 2020)

The Mosuo people believe that underage people (strictly speaking, people who have not held the rite of passage into adulthood) do not have souls to speak of, which can be shown in the Mosuo people's way of burying underage people who die young. Those who die before their time cannot be cremated in a normal place, nor can their bones be buried in the family graveyard. This taboo stems on the one hand from the fear and avoidance of the unlucky event of a premature death, fearing that it will bring misfortune to the extended family. On the other hand, it is also because a minor child is not yet considered a full member of the family. The rite of passage into adulthood is based on the core connotation of bolstering the soul and refining the life, and the child who successfully completes the ritual is naturally endowed with a more complete soul and more tenacious vitality. The perfect fusion of vitality and purity of soul enables the child to become a truly independent "human being" in the sense of Mosuo culture.

At the same time, the rite of passage into adulthood is an important means of strengthening the individual's self-awareness. This self-awareness refers, on the one hand, to the adult's perception of his or her own gender and, on the other, to the adult's perception of his or her own personal values. Until they reach adulthood, Mosuo children do not deliberately distinguish between the genders, the most obvious point is that in the old days, Mosuo children of both genders wore a long shirt, and there was basically no difference in appearance. As the child's body gradually develops into puberty, gender education becomes a necessity. The rite of passage into adulthood is one of the core aspects of gender education for the Mosuo people—through the difference in clothing, distinguishing between men and women in appearance, so that the adults recognize and strengthen their gender identity from the inside.

For families, the rite of passage into adulthood is an important way for Mosuo families to educate their children at home. As the author heard in the interviews:

"The rite of passage into adulthood ritual should never be dropped from Mosuo life, and it is a great way to educate children." (ZBEC, personal communication, July 15, 2020)

The educational role of the Mosuo rite of passage into adulthood is mainly realized through the scriptures recited by Daba during the rite of passage, as well as through a number of unobservable links in the course of the rite of passage. The educational objectives of the Mosuo rite of passage into adulthood are, firstly, traditional family awareness and moral education, and secondly, livelihood education by instilling in the recipients the importance of hard work. Through guidance, the adult child will recognize his/her rights as an adult and his/her responsibilities to the family and society, and clarify his/her self-worth. After the rite of passage into adulthood, the child will be trusted and respected by all family members and will assume important family responsibilities. From pedagogical point of view, rite of passage into adulthood has intuitive, vivid and vivid multiple functions, giving people intuitive, vivid and long-lasting educational enlightenment. For the Mosuo people who attach importance to education, the rite of passage into adulthood is the most important part of family education in addition to school education.

For the Mosuo society, the rite of passage into adulthood plays a dominant role in the personality shaping and cultural inheritance of the Mosuo people. The rite of passage into adulthood and the process of ritual can make children understand the history and culture of Mosuo, experience the concepts of life and death, life, values, nature and the world in Mosuo culture, and guide children to learn and follow the Mosuo behavioral norms. Those wonderful and core contents of Mosuo culture are understood and accepted by the children through rituals, and they continue to influence the children in later life and are also practiced by the children, so that the Mosuo culture can be continued and passed on from generation to generation.

3.2. Mosuo cultural connotations in the rite of passage into adulthood

As the rite of passage into adulthood ritual is a crucial part of Mosuo cultural practices, it is related to the growth of every Mosuo in the true sense of the word, and the cultural significance it implies naturally fully reflects the profound connotation of the Mosuo cultural system.

3.2.1. Matrilineal thinking in the female-origin

Although the Mosuo people educate their children about gender in a more subtle way, their understanding of the two genders is very profound, and it can even be said that the Mosuo people's worldview is based on this profound gender awareness. The Daba Sutra opens with these words: "Water has its source and trees have their roots / Life cannot be separated from the mother / It is the mother's conception that makes life possible." [2] This passage clearly points out that the Mosuo people believe in a female-centered worldview. The Mosuo firmly believe that "women are the source, men are the stream; women are the bone, men are the blood" [3]. Because women are the nurturers of life, the source of life, the woman makes the embryo into a human being in October, and the role of men in this process and the energy they expend is insignificant compared to the efforts of women. The essence of the matriarchal thinking of the Mosuo people stands in opposition to the patriarchal society's concept of "men as the basis and women as the end". The most obvious physical manifestation of this concept is the "male" and "female" pillars in the main house. The male and female pillars are taken from the same tree, the female pillar from the root of the tree and the male pillar from the upper part of the tree. This shows that the Mosuo people have a clear sense of gender, and that men and women are the most basic binary patterns that make up the world, with men and women having the same origin; at the same time, they also emphasize that women are the root.

In the Mosuo rite of passage into adulthood, this way of thinking is reflected in the different division of labor between men and women in the ceremony. The work undertaken by the male members of the family in the rite of passage into adulthood from the preparation to the holding of the rite of passage is a mere formality, and seldom touches the core part of the ritual. For example, the preparation of the most central prop of passage into adulthood, the dress, is basically out of the hands of men. The fact that the mother is emphasized in the ritual and the father is not mentioned basically also shows that the Mosuo people take women as their origin.

3.2.2. Fire pit culture and ancestor worship

The main house, known as "Yimi" in Mosuo language, is the core place of passage into adulthood for Mosuo people, and also the centre of Mosuo matrilineal family, which is the core part of the family's diet, hospitality, deliberation, rituals, and worship to the gods, and the core of this place lies in the fire pit. The traditional Mosuo main house, generally have two fire pit, the lower fire pit tends to be practical, the upper fire pit is more for hospitality. The fire pit plays a very important role in the life of the Mosuo people, and almost all the daily activities are centered around the fire pit. It can even be said that the culture of Mosuo people is a kind of fire pit culture. The most basic starting point of Mosuo people's ideology is "revering ancestors and honoring the elders, and the harmony of the family house", and the fire pit is not only a symbol of "home" for the Mosuo people, but also a place for the Mosuo people to communicate with their ancestors. There is an altar up the lower fire pit, called "za³¹ba⁵⁵la³¹" in the Mosuo language, and before three meals a day, the family must offer some of the finished food to the altar for the ancestors to enjoy, and then the members of the family can eat. This ritual is called "sho³³to³¹" in the Mosuo language, and its essence is to worship the ancestors.

The links that reflect the ancestor worship of Mosuo people in the rite of passage into adulthood are as follows: firstly, in the course of the ritual, Daba not only recites the blessing sutra to educate the adult not to forget the kindness and virtue of the ancestors, but also recites the genealogy of the family, so that on the one hand, they report the good news of the family to the ancestors and ask for their blessing, and on the other hand, they also let the adult know the history of the family. Secondly, after the dress change is completed, the adult person first worships the altar to show respect to the ancestors. Thirdly, after the completion of the ritual, the ancestors are ceremoniously worshipped to thank them for coming back to participate in the family's happy events.

3.2.3. Embodiment of interpersonal relationships in Mosuo society

On the surface, the rite of passage into adulthood seems to be only about the growth and transformation of an individual, but it is a major event for the whole family and even the small society related to it. From this simple event, what we can see is the reconciliation between competition and mutual assistance, which are the two characteristics of interpersonal relationship among Mosuo society.

There is a sense of competition implicit in Mosuo society, which has been discussed in the writings of many scholars [4, 5]. This sense of competition is different from our general understanding of the meaning of this is a kind of competition based on the concept of "family harmony", the starting point is not to make their own behavior or the behavior of others to make the family "shame". The Mosuo rite of passage into adulthood ritual, this competition can be seen everywhere. The degree of splendor of the recipient's clothing shows the status and wealth of the family. At the same time, the ritual is also an important opportunity to demonstrate the "harmony of the family house":

"The whole family can come back in unison for the rite of passage into adulthood, which is also a kind of competition and performance with each other in the village, as well as something that is crucial to continue the traditional Mosuo culture."

(ZBEC, personal communication, July 15, 2020)

Organizing a decent rite of passage into adulthood is an invisible competition in Mosuo society. At the same time, the rite of passage into adulthood ceremony can also reveal the mutual supportive side of Mosuo society. This is reflected from the preparation to the whole ceremony. Due to the limitations of many objective factors, when preparing the traditional dresses for the adult, the women in the family may not be fully competent in the whole process of making the dresses, so they may seek the help of qualified women in the village. The best person to officiate at the rite of passage into adulthood is usually a member of the family, but when there are constraints, it is also possible to invite a qualified person from another family to officiate at the rite of passage into adulthood. In addition, a bonfire party is held to congratulate the recipient. The recipient's family sends invitations to every household in the village, and all invited households send their own participants, while households in neighboring villages are free to participate even if they have not received an invitation. This is the best way to wish the recipients of the ceremony a happy and joyful bonfire party with the concerted efforts of everyone.

3.3. Changes in the rite of passage into adulthood of the Mosuo people

3.3.1. Material changes

The most important props for the rite of passage into adulthood of the Mosuo people are the traditional Mosuo costumes, and thus the changes in materiality are mainly concentrated on the changes in costumes. According to the author's understanding through interviews and observations, the content of these changes can be summarized in the following two points.

The first is loss, that is, the gradual loss of simplification from tradition. The most important point is the loss of the traditional dress-making process. In the past, when the Mosuo people held the rite of passage into adulthood, the whole set of clothing was made by the mother (or the grandmother or the mother's sister, and the female recipients could also participate in the production by themselves), mostly made of cotton and linen. Nowadays, the production method of Mosuo clothing only a small part of the people to master, people are also more willing to spend a little money to buy those well-made silk material clothing, but also to save energy and time. In addition, there is also a simplification of the Mosuo traditional dress. For example, the traditional Mosuo clothing tops and linings are separated from each other, but now many people combine the two into one for the sake of convenience, and even more so, they only use the lining fabric to symbolically sew on a section at the neckline and sleeves. Originally, the Mosuo women's headdress is the material of hair accessories and their own hair together with the proper weaving and then disc to the head, now only the elderly to maintain this habit. Young people make their headdresses into fixed rings for convenience, so that they can simply fasten them to their heads when wearing them. In addition, the simplification of the belt is also obvious. Many belts today are made to be purely decorative, with the length cut down to a circle, the tassels removed from the ends, and a nylon bond used as a connection.

The second is borrowing, such as additions to traditional dress. This is mainly reflected in the men's clothing, with the Tibetan long shirt (ṣho³³ba³¹) becoming an important part of the Mosuo men's clothing. In addition, the Tibetan belt has replaced the Mosuo's traditional linen belt. The Mosuo area is in the important area of Sichuan, Yunnan and Tibet junction, and the Tibetan area has long maintained economic and religious ties, and the Mosuo people's horse gangs have been in and out of the Tibetan area for a long time, so the borrowing is a natural thing. Women's clothing in this point is not too obvious. But I found that in recent years gradually popular in the girls draped in sheepskin hanging on the silver jewellery, Chinese knots and other decorative situations. In particular, the appearance of the Chinese knot in the traditional Mosuo clothing can be seen in the influence of mainstream culture on Mosuo culture.

3.3.2. Changes in perception

As the Mosuo people's living environment, lifestyle and perception of the world continue to change, their understanding of their own culture has changed greatly. The importance attached to the rite of passage into adulthood ceremonies is also the same:

"People who are often away from home may become less attached to the rite of passage into adulthood ceremonies, and people who are generally in the countryside may be less prone to change. And the two perceptions lead to two situations, where young people are inclined to simplify the rite of passage a little bit, and older people, as well as families in the countryside and living in the Yongning area, don't simplify the rite of passage." (LWMGR, personal communication, July 13, 2020)

"Rite of passage into adulthood rituals used to be more of a hassle and had to be done meticulously, back in the days when the old man did what he was told, but now it's slowly dropping the ball on some of the details." (AZMCDZ, personal communication, July 14, 2020)

From the above, it is easy to see that just within the Mosuo people, the importance attached to the rite of passage into adulthood ceremonies varies from person to person. The changes in the Mosuo's own conception of passage into adulthood rituals are mainly manifested in the following aspects.

Firstly, traditionally speaking, Mosuo people cannot wear traditional Mosuo clothing before the rite of passage into adulthood, but nowadays many people no longer observe this taboo. With the popularity of Tibetan and Naxi children's clothing

in the Mosuo area, there are some people who make the Mosuo clothing style into children's clothing, and there are many children under the age of thirteen years old who have not held the adult style before they have been wearing the traditional style of clothing, which in the past was absolutely not allowed to appear.

Secondly, the most important point is that the Mosuo people's understanding of the original significance of rite of passage into adulthood has been gradually insufficient. The author believes that this situation is caused by the gradual dilution of the educational role of rite of passage into adulthood. The dilution of this role is caused by three reasons. For one thing, the recitation of blessing scriptures and genealogies by Daba at rites of passage into adulthood is an important way to educate adults about traditional morals and livelihoods, while Daba is currently one of the few remaining in the Yongning area, and the rite of passage into adulthood ceremonies without Daba have weakened the purposefulness of their education, and thus even teenagers who have already gone through the rite of passage into adulthood are not able to develop a deep understanding of them. Secondly, the replacement of traditional family education by school education and the popularity of various media have made it possible for the Mosuo youths to receive a lot of information from the outside world about the difference between the sexes and to form a clear concept of gender before they become adults, so that they are no longer strongly shocked by the implicit education of gender identity at the rite of passage into adulthood, and they are unable to pay attention to the transformation of their own identity roles in the process of the rite of passage. Thirdly, the gradual change in the traditional family structure of the Mosuo people has made the concept of the "family house" no longer the only dominant one, and in the rituals, there is no longer any emphasis on the different responsibilities of boys and girls in the extended family after they have come of age. When the elders give their blessings to the adult, they generally include wishes for success in school, a successful life, and so on. As for their responsibilities, they generally only say that they should listen to their parents and elders and do their best to ease their parents' burdens, etc., which is different from the traditional "family" education.

In addition, the traditional Mosuo rite of passage into adulthood ceremony, due to the special marriage pattern of the Mosuo people, generally speaking, the father and his relatives are not within the scope of participants, only after the ceremony to be led by the mother to his father's home to pay homage to the New Year, and the father's home will be prepared for his gifts. Nowadays, due to the gradual development of the mainstream family model in the Mosuo region, there is no lack of fathers and their family relatives in the rite of passage into adulthood of the Mosuo people. This is the case with the family that the author investigated. On the day of passage into adulthood, not only the relatives of the mother's family were present, but also the father and some of his relatives participated in witnessing this important moment in the recipient's life.

4. Rite of passage into adulthood rituals on display at the Mosuo Museum

In order to better present the charm of the Mosuo rite of passage into adulthood, the Mosuo Museum started to prepare as early as the beginning of 2019, organized a group of excellent Daba from Yongning, Labo, and Zoshuo area, made a complete record and comparison of the content and process of the rite of passage into adulthood ceremonies in each region, and collected rich first-hand information through a large number of visits and investigation activities. Combined with the museum's accumulation of Mosuo culture over the years, after a large number of adequate preparations, the large-scale live experience activity "Mosuo ChengDing Ceremony" (rite of passage into adulthood) was officially opened to the whole society on 1 October 2019 in the Mosuo Folklore Museum. Activities presented in the ceremony, not only strictly follow the traditional ritual content, but also combined with the needs of the majority of tourists, increased more interactive links, arranged for the host to explain the whole process, guiding the participants to devote themselves to, and personally feel the charm of Mosuo culture. For the participants, this is not only the experience of Mosuo culture, but also a baptism from the body to the soul, a real life ritual.

A fourteen-year-old girl from Beijing, accompanied by her grandmother and mother, attended the museum's Chengding Ceremony. At the beginning of the event, the host invited the girl's grandmother to the most honorable seat by the fire pit according to Mosuo customs, but she repeatedly declined, only willing to help her granddaughter with her clothes and schoolbag, and refused to take her seat. Finally, the grandmother was invited to sit down. The ritual was carried out in an orderly manner, and after the dress change was completed, the girl, led by the host, lit a ghee lamp and kowtowed to "za³¹ba⁵⁵la³¹", the Buddha's niche, Daba and the elders in turn to show her gratitude. When the little girl kowtowed to her grandmother, her grandmother, who had been fidgeting, could no longer contain her tears. Respect for the elderly, love for the young, respect for elders is a traditional virtue of the Chinese nation, but also the Mosuo people have always followed the tradition, but in many families today, children are unlimited spoiling and indulgence, the elders did not give due respect, the lack of this traditional virtue is undoubtedly heartbreaking. The mother said that this experience made her feel the essence of Mosuo culture, and she believed that this experience could also help her daughter a lot in her future life path. The grandmother said with emotion: "I am very pleased to see my granddaughter's maturity and stability, and I wish her a lifetime of good health. I am respected by everyone here, and I am really happy to be a Mosuo elder!" The little girl said happily, "Today's ritual is very sacred, I understand that everything I have now is not for nothing, I want to be grateful to the world, to my family, and to them for everything they have given me. In the future, I will also help my family to share the responsibility and be a real adult!"

The activity of “Mosuo Chengding Ceremony In-depth Experience” created by the Mosuo Museum has been highly praised by the majority of participants and valued by the local people. In order to further spread the excellent Mosuo culture, the museum will continue to explore more excellent Mosuo cultural experience projects, actively attract the compatriots to participate in and promote the excellent Mosuo culture, and expand the influence of the excellent traditional Mosuo culture. It is of great practical significance to promote the excellent traditional culture in the Mosuo society where tourism is constantly developing.

5. Conclusion

Mosuo people are a nation full of wisdom and romance. Every Mosuo person has to go through many rituals from birth to death, in which they communicate with the gods, communicate with nature, dialogue with ancestors, and get to know themselves as well as their own nation and culture. As an important ritual of passage into adulthood, the ritual has become a shining pearl in the Mosuo cultural system because of its profound cultural connotations of commitment, gratitude and harmony.

However, with the development of society, Mosuo culture, like many other national cultures, is facing the risk of breakage and disappearance. Although there have been many people who are committed to rescue and protect the precious Mosuo culture, both outside and within the Mosuo group, there are still more young Mosuo people who can't wait to go out into the big world. More cultural protection is only a cure, but the inheritance is the root. If the Mosuo young people cannot realize the importance of cultural inheritance, they will eventually face the lost situation of losing history, losing fundamentals and losing faith. A culture that cannot be passed on has no vitality, and no matter how well it is protected, it can only be sent to a museum. For any kind of culture, there must be a constant infusion of vitality so that it will not become a specimen. At a time when we are struggling to realize the “Chinese Dream” of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, it is of profound and long-term significance to cultivate outstanding young people who are responsible, grateful, dedicated and harmonious, and to pass on and carry forward the excellent national culture.

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