

# Cultural Representation of Mosuo Ethnic Twist Dance in Tourism Practice

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**Abstract**—With the "gaze" theory focusing on and explaining the human body and its discipline phenomena, this paper uses field investigation methods, observation and recording methods, in-depth interviews and other methods to study the body performance and cultural expression of Mosuo ethnic twist dance from the four aspects of body narrative and original code, body performance and cultural expression, and physical landscape of Mosuo ethnic twist dance. In the practice of tourism, it is mainly to investigate the "physical" behaviors such as tourists visit, photography and participation in the local residential twist dance. Mosuo people shifted from the "signalization process of the host society by tourists and an unequal force" to "reverse gaze" of "the object being stared by the camera and reflected through the lens" and to "power counterbalance and interactive adaptation", the connotation of body performance and cultural expression of Mosuo ethnic twist dance changed.

**Keywords:** gaze, Mosuo twist dance, body performance, cultural expression

## I. INTRODUCTION

Through the "body-oriented" behaviors such as visits, photography, and participation in the diet, dance, and craftsmanship experience of local residents, the "gaze" in tourism practice gradually shifts from the "signalization process of the host society by tourists and an unequal force" to the "two-way interactive development" state of "the object being stared by the camera and reflected through the lens". The purpose of this article is to explore the representative public activities of the Mosuo people under the "tourist gaze", namely, the changes in the connotation of physical performance and cultural expression of Mosuo ethnic twist dance.

## II. BODY NARRATIVE OF MOSUO ETHNIC TWIST DANCE

Mosuo ethnic twist dance is a group activity of Mosuo people, also known as jump dance, Guozhuang dance,

cuocuo dance and so on. The "甲" of Mosuo ethnic twist dance means beauty and goodness, the "搓" means dancing, and Mosuo ethnic twist dance means "dancing for the beauty".

Mosuo ethnic twist dance originated from fighting foreigners and celebrating victory. It has undergone changes from ancient fighting dance, celebration dance, autumn harvest dance, worship dance, festival dance, and welcome dance. In ancient times, Mosuo people were violated by foreign ethnic groups, and the tribal chiefs initiated the ethnic groups to set fire in the village. They shouted and stomped around the fire to create momentum and boost morale. After the enemy retreated, they sang and danced around the fire to celebrate victory. Dance music and body movements express a unified pace, coordinated exertion, seeding, rest, harvest, celebration, etc. With different storylines and emotional expressions, there are many changes in footwork. Most dancers who learn to Mosuo twist dance will feel that this kind of dances is not easy to learn at first. Mosuo twist dance is composed of many complex actions such as joint force, sacrifice, worship, farming, etc. Through evolution, the shape has been gradually abstract and simplified. However, for modern people, it is still complex and changeable, and difficult to grasp. In terms of rhythm, it is tight and slow, fast and bold.

Modern Mosuo ethnic twist dances generally have six tracks. Track 1 is "The hometown is really beautiful", mainly expressing the Mosuo people's native feelings for the living environment and praise for nature. Track 6 is "Welcoming guests from far", expressing the Mosuo people's hospitality and friendliness. It can be seen that in different tracks and physical performances, the Mosuo people express different narrative meanings through different body movements, from "praise for nature" to "instinctive emotional expression" and then to "Mosuo people's life wisdom", etc. Through music melody and physical performance, the unique culture of the nation is expressed.

### III. ORIGINAL CODE OF PHYSICAL CULTURAL EXPRESSION OF MOSUO ETHNIC TWIST DANCE

The original prototype of Mosuo ethnic twist dance acts as the following: people hold hands together, surround the fire, "gather together" to shout and stamp their feet, fight against foreign invasion, work together, encourage each other, and unite with the team. Everyone dedicates his own strength and can get the help of the tribe. They have a beautiful vision and a common goal for the future.

In the "original modality" culture of the Mosuo matriarchal family in the course of historical evolution, it can see the original code transmitted by the Mosuo body. Consanguinity and non-consanguinity family relationship represented by body, the core of family function is: endless life and emotional harmony. Regardless of whether they belong to the same blood relationship, "longevity" is the main goal. Therefore, blood-related brothers and sisters and family members without blood relationship can live together in harmony, take care and share the same pain and suffering. In the physical behavior of the sexual relationship, Mosuo people can have free love and free combination, are free from economic and legal issues. However, it does not mean "open sex" or "promiscuous behavior" in the modern sense. They respect the wishes of both parties and choose to "be with the other one" or "be divorced with the other one" based on their feelings. For them, gender issues belong to the category of "privacy" and will not be discussed openly. Even if they meet the object they like, they can make Mosuo ethnic twist dance. However, the expression of love is implicit and shy. They silently convey love with "pumping hands". At the same time, they do not accept incest or "close relatives" being in love. When the social relationship comes to conflict, physical conflicts are not advocated, and punishment for others is not violent. Physical behaviors in daily life, such as littering and chopping trees in the natural world, are things that they cannot agree to. They have their own "spiritual beliefs" and believe that "all things have spirits", they cannot be harmed at will, and people and nature must live in harmony.

### IV. PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION OF MOSUO ETHNIC TWIST DANCE BASED ON THE TOURIST GAZE THEORY

The "gaze" theory treats society as a "panoramic open-sight" prison, which performs omnipresent monitoring of people and their bodies. Foucault believes that the medical "gaze" originates from the doctor's diagnosis, treatment and gaze of the patient's body. This kind of gaze represents a kind of knowledge and power. "It is no longer the vision of any observer, but a doctor's vision that is supported and affirmed by some system." [2] In tourism practice, the "gaze" of tourists towards the residents of tourist destinations, just liking the doctor's gaze at patients, represents a kind of knowledge and rights. Liu Danping and Bao Jigang mentioned that tourists "satisfy their peeping desire" through "photography" and believe that "photographing as they please is their inherent right." [3] As residents of the tourist destinations, they also express their feelings, appeals, and

"local gaze" through the reaction in front of the camera. [4] Residents of tourism destinations show their "original ecological" body postures and national costumes through "self-stage" in exchange for returns. [5] The life and behavior of Mosuo people are undergoing such changes in the process of "tourist gaze" in tourism practice. Their original "shy culture" and body expressions of Mosuo ethnic twist drama have quietly changed with the influence of tourist behavior, economic development, cultural interaction and media effects.

Mosuo people are concentrated in Ninglang County of Yunnan Province, Yanyuan and Muli in Sichuan Province, and live in Lugu Lake with Han, Yi, Pumi, Zhuang, Naxi, Tibetan and other ethnic minorities. At the beginning of the 20th century, the outside world knew little about the life of the Mosuo people. In August 1988, Lugu Lake was listed in the second batch of national key scenic spots by the State Council of the People's Republic of China. In 1994, television entered the village, the Internet was connected, and the countryside began to develop tourism. The villagers slowly stepped in to make the life of the Mosuo people "naked" to the outside world. The Lugu Lake where tourism enters has gradually become lively. Under the tourist gaze, everything of Mosuo people has become "landscape", including "privacy", and they have been "activated" and entered the "live broadcast" mode. "Mosuo ethnic twist dance", which was only used to celebrate the celebrations in the past, events, or festivals, has also become the main activity for tourism development in various villages. Some young Mosuo people have become full-time leaders in "Mosuo ethnic twist dance". At the event venue, physical performance of "Mosuo ethnic twist dance" and interactive activities with tourists was performed in the night.

"Globalized gaze" in "Tourist gaze" published in 2002 focused on the relationship between "gaze" and the body. He believes that travel can be regarded as "physical travel" in essence, and "tourist gaze" always involves the relationship between the bodies, and there is a complex relationship between the socio-cultural "sensory landscapes" represented by various body-sensing words and languages. [6] Mosuo ethnic twist dance, the representative behavior of the Mosuo group activity, has undergone a process from "Mosuo ethnic twist dance naturally erupting emotionally" to "Mosuo ethnic twist dance performing repeatedly" in the practice of tourism. In this process, the physical behavior and cultural expression of Mosuo people are witnessed by tourists, and they are branded with "diachronic changes".

During the inspection in Lugu Lake, the author observed and experienced the bonfire party and Mosuo ethnic twist dance in detail in many places, and communicated and exchanged with relevant personnel in private, and gained a lot. Mosuo ethnic twist dance in Luoshui Village was organized by the special person. The leaders are local residents, aged between 16-40 years old. Both men and women wear very colorful Mosuo costumes. At the opening, the leader surrounds the campfire and overflows happy expression on the face, with music and humming accompaniment. The host will make the thermal field

(Mosuo costume, Mandarin, professional hosting style), and the following should be the participation and experience of tourists. The local Mosuo people will intersperse between tourists. The host will use a password that is "easy to understand" to teach tourists to learn Mosuo ethnic twist dance. There is a link of singing in antiphonal style during the process. Generally, tourists and local dancers are selected on behalf of their respective teams. The losing team accepted the punishment of "being thrown high in the air" from the Mosuo team. There will be a short break after dance music. Tourists can take pictures freely and invite the Mosuo leader to take pictures. Every Mosuo who takes photos with tourists will pose in a variety of classic photographic poses and reveal signature smiles. During Mosuo ethnic twist dance, the heterosexual Mosuo people will also make some suggestibility body movements. Moderator will ask: have anyone get suggestibility body movements? When the tourists answered loudly, the host said: Don't say it out loud if you haven't got suggestibility body movements. It proves that your charm is not enough ... there is no hope for "male-leaving marriages"... This kind of interaction has attracted applause from tourists. At the end, the tourists seemed to have a lot of fun. In the aftertaste, the tourists will talk about all kinds of fun things, the details of Mosuo ethnic twist dance, and a link in the tour, or discussed "marriage" issue, etc.

It can see that the "shocking hands" and "male-leaving marriages" that originally belonged to the shy culture of the Mosuo people have been publicized, and they have been questioned and answered loudly in the public. This is not considered a tourist without local cultural literacy. For the local Mosuo people, it is a trample on culture and a looting of traditional culture. It is a phenomenon that they are reluctant to see and participate in. However, under the pressure and coercion of various joint forces, today they have also changed from being shy and embarrassed to being unfamiliar and panic, and then to being "lightly familiar". In the field and scene of tourism practice, they have been as generous as foreign tourists, naturally discussing their own privacy, performing the action of "shaking hands" without shyness in public, and also being curious about the reaction of tourists. "Mosuo people's physical and cultural changes" are quietly changing the original Mosuo people's living mode and values with "tourist gaze" knowledge and rights.

## V. BODY LANDSCAPE OF MOSUO ETHNIC TWIST DANCE UNDER TOURIST GAZE

### A. *Under the tourist gaze, the cultural expression of the Mosuo people's body performance was deform and distorted*

In the field of tourism practice, the Mosuo people use the body performance of Mosuo ethnic twist dance to perform scenes imagined by outsiders. The Mosuo costumes are bright, sincere, enthusiastic, and bold. They are also lovely and attractive for tourists. Tourist gaze strengthened the symbolic process of Mosuo people's "ethnic twist dance", "male-leaving marriage" and matriarchal family through

hearing, sight, touch and perception. This "pretend" or unreal symbolic process allows visitors' cognition and understanding of Mosuo culture to stay at the surface level of these cultural fragments, and they could not understand the connotation and did not think deeply about the overall picture and deep cultural spirit behind these cultural fragments. However, the ethnic characteristics represented by the Mosuo ethnic twist dance, shy culture, and male-leaving marriage customs were abstracted out, becoming the symbol of "gaze" and the tourist landscape. In the eyes of countless tourists, Mosuo people perform Mosuo ethnic twist dance, shake hands, and make the smiles, etc. for tourists again and again, constantly freeze in the lens of tourists, and then flow into the cultural vortex of the city. After a reprint and adaptation, there are some ambiguous words of tourism promotion. With the male-leaving marriage of "Daughter Country of Lugu Lake" and the erroneous rendering of film and television works, tourist gaze was led astray. Later, tourists believe: I could "marry" casually at the place where the Mosuo people live, and even equating it with "picking up hot chicks girl". The tour guide also deliberately named the "wave-leaf seaweed" as "wanton". Tourists have fantasies and guesses. Tourists with a "hunting beauty" psychology want to have a romantic and fascinating "romantic history" here. Tourism is imagined as a novel, mysterious and exciting physical experience.

The outside world has forgotten the body perception and free will of the Mosuo people, and the body view and values behind the "Mosuo" body landscape representation that they think. This kind of cultural symbols "refracted" by tourists "misreading deeply hurt Mosuo people's emotions, and triggers the sentimental, memories and nostalgia of the traditional looted Mosuo people. From the perspective of the "gaze" rights, not only tourists, the tourists, local governments, tourism agencies, and media authorities, etc., have "marketized" the Mosuo culture. However, this result often makes cultural expression "deform. If this result goes back and forth, creating a vicious circle, the culture of the Mosuo people will no longer have a unique appeal, and will no longer be noticed by the outside world. In the end, it will not be able to attract tourists. When the Mosuo people awakened from their injuries, they began to rebuild their culture.

### B. *Power balance and interaction adaptation of tourist gaze and reverse gaze of Mosuo people*

In the face of tourists and the "peep" under the camera, the early reaction of the Mosuo people was to dodge and avoid the lens, and they do not want to come forward. It is understood that in the early days of the bonfire party, the performers of Mosuo ethnic twist dance need to do repeated ideological work before they reach the scene, and perform "shaking hands" and talk about "male-leaving marriage" in front of the public. It is embarrassed. Some local Mosuo women were even questioned face to face by tourists: "will you marry me tonight?" They will quickly "run" to avoid such tourists when being asked these issues. In the subsequent development, Mosuo people also noticed that the people who participated in the front-end tourist development

had much better economic conditions than those who worked at home to make the farming. The concept of the Mosuo people began to change rapidly, and the Mosuo people began to adapt to different tourist demands, and slowly began to face the various questions raised by tourists. In order to meet the needs of tourists, the architectural pattern and hotel functions have been rapidly transformed. Life has changed from "front -stage performances" to "back-stage privacy". The differentiation is becoming increasingly apparent. On the one hand, they saw the improvement of tourism development brought to their lives. On the other hand, they also saw the distortion and deformation of traditional body views and cultural expressions. Disillusioned from the sadness, Mosuo people began to understand the "needs" of tourists, and clearly understood the value of their own culture and tourists' desire and appreciation for this foreign culture. In places where tourism development was earlier, the Mosuo people also learned how to better please tourists and treat different guests with different coping strategies. During the interactive part of the bonfire party, many phenomena such as cooperating with tourists taking pictures and helping tourists to pose appeared, keeping "body performance" as close as possible to the "traditional" state that visitors appreciate or want to see, rather than the "distorted" state. After communicating and dancing with the mother of Bieqiduzhi and Bimabuchi in Walabie countryside of Wenquan county, they also repeatedly invited the author to go back to see them, expressing their friendship and wish for further exchanges. This is the "reverse gaze" of the stared person through "self-stage". Local residents express their feelings, appeals, and "local gaze" through "picture" feedback and interaction under the lens of tourists. Residents of tourist destinations clarified the role of "self-stage" through the "reconstruction of self-culture" under the lens. They perform "the original ecological body posture and national costumes that tourists want to see" in front of the visitors, forming a "reverse gaze". In the process of tourist gaze and the "reverse gaze" of the Mosuo people, "power counterbalance" and "interactive adaptation" appeared. Eventually, the two sides reached an agreement, and "cultural expression" tended to "identify".

## VI. CONCLUSION

In tourism practice, the change of Mosuo people is obvious. "Tourist gaze" changed the closed life and traditional concepts, and created the main differences between the host society and the consumer society through the body culture and physical landscape of the Mosuo people. Through the process of body performance from the privacy to the public, the body of the Mosuo people and its representations are disciplined and reconstructed into an imaginary "original ecological" cultural symbol, while the traditional body views inevitably changes. This is the result of the "gaze" of local, government, tourism agencies, and tourists, including the Mosuo people. Tourists and photographers can obtain cultural tourism experiences and landscape cognitions different from their own through "gazing" on other body symbols, satisfying their "gaze" desire and "peeps" complex. The government, local elites,

etc. promote Mosuo culture by creating Mosuo body logo and reconstructing national culture and tourism capital. Mosuo people's "gazing" to all parties is not completely passive. Mosuo people actively carry out cultural adjustment and reconstruction, strategically play new social roles and realize new personal values. The "tourist gaze" power practice, the adaptation of Mosuo people and their transformation will be a long-term process. "The physical landscape of the Mosuo people in tourism and the gaze effect of tourists should be based on the "mutual view structure". It is both subjective and objective interweaving and blending. It is the interaction and communication between tourists and hosts, and the competition between various knowledge and values. Also, it is the process of adaptation, development and creation in modern reproduction activities.

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