

# Initial Study on the Operating Mechanism of Ecological Wisdom of Mosuo's Traditional Culture

Jiantao Zhang

School of Architecture and Environmental Art, Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing, 410051, China

## Abstract

With the global environmental degradation and resource shortage, ecological wisdom has raised ever more concern. This paper focuses on the traditional culture of Mosuo people, an ethnic minority in China's Hengduan Mountains. We try to research the operating mechanism of ecological wisdom in Mosuo's ideas, customs, institutions and organization. Consequently, the meaning and value of Mosuo people's ecological wisdom is revealed, followed by there flection and development guidance.

## Keywords

Mosuo's Traditional Culture; Ecological Wisdomoperating Mechanism.

## 1. Ecological Wisdom and Mosuo Traditional Culture

In 1973, the Norwegian philosopher and father of deep ecology Arne Næss(1912-2009) first coined the term ecological wisdom, a philosophy that emphasizes ecological harmony or equilibrium. It is a subjective understanding required to achieve sustainable development and harmonious relationship between man and nature. In today's world, where ecological environment is deteriorating and the relationship between human and earth is worsening, Næss's theory on ecological wisdom has raised wide concern. With an emphasis on ecological co-existence, his theory encompasses important philosophy and ethics such as the co-existence and mutual tolerance between man and nature.

Mosuo people is an ethnic minority whose habitant locates in China's Hengduan Mountains. With its long history and distinct features such as Matriarch system and corresponding practice of walking marriage (走婚制),Mosuo traditional culture serves as a valuable sample to anthropology and sociology studies. Fully aware of Hengduan Mountains' limited natural resources and fragile ecological relations, Mosuo people have developed strong subjective consciousness regarding the harmonious co-existence with the environment. With the decisive influence of its long traditional culture, Mosuo people has come to foster a regional ethic culture that maintains good relationship between people, between man and earth, and rich in ecological wisdom, which is a valuable resource for today's world.

## 2. The Operating Mechanisms of Mosuo Traditional Culture's Ecological Wisdom

Mosuo traditional culture is rich in ecological wisdom. It uses cultural control as a means and adopts a multi-level operating mechanism to ensure that the ecological wisdom can be realized and maintained in production and daily livesin the long time. These operating mechanisms include ideas, customs, institutions, and organization, of which ideas and customs are the core.

### 2.1. Ideas and Customs

Mosuo people has a rich spiritual life, for whomfaithnot only constitutes an important factor in daily social lives, but also serves as important guideline for material life. As for their ecological

wisdom, the various factors are deeply rooted in the traditional ideas and customs of Mosuo people, where its influences are most obvious.

The Mosuo Daba religion is a good example. Daba is an animistic religion that believes every natural object, such as sky, earth, stars, mountains, rivers and trees shall be worshipped. The marvelous divine mountains and divine trees neighboring the villages are all gods to be worshipped and should never be insulted. Certain rituals should be performed before cutting down trees to build houses in order to be forgiven by the gods of mountains and trees. In Daba, there is an important god "Shu (署)", who is in charge of the natural objects, such as mountains, rivers, lakes, plants and wild animals. Shu is regarded as a brother of mankind. When mankind is in a friendly relationship with the nature under Shu's command, they will enjoy good weather and happiness. Once mankind engages in uncontrolled hunting, lumbering, and ask for natural resources without restraint, Shu will be angry and human will be sick or even lost they souls [1].

Mosuo people's respect and gratitude for the natural environment are strengthened by their faith, which also created the ecological wisdom and their view of nature which features restraining their own needs and living in harmony with the surrounding environment. The elements of ecological wisdom in the form of ideas and customs are deeply rooted in the minds of the Mosuo people and have become an important criterion for social evaluation. As a result, behaviors that violate such requirements will be subject to strong pressure from both their own beliefs and social evaluation-- a cost that is extremely high. The central role of Mosuo traditional cultural control is demonstrated as such.

## 2.2. Institutions

Traditional Mosuo society has a distinctive structure and various corresponding institutions to support it. While an important means to maintain and pass on the Mosuo culture, these institutions also constitute the cultural control together with other factors of ecological wisdom. Let's consider the Tusi (土司, headman or chieftains) regulations, which is the legal system for the traditional Mosuo society during the 600 years reign by Tusi. This law has never become fully statutory law, yet it encompasses almost all walks of life. For example, it stipulates that tax collection and labor dispatch are implemented with the family as a unit. If the Mosuo family is divided, the new family must be an independent unit to bear the corresponding taxes and labor obligations. This objectively controls the size of the Mosuo settlements and population. Another example is the law of land and cattle, which states clear and severe penalties for actions that do not follow the crop rotation system or lumbering and preying lavishly. Therefore, the Tusi law directly protects the ecological balance [2].

While traditional Mosuo society holds the natural view based on ecological wisdom, members may still act against this universal idea. In such cases, the institutions may intervene by preventing and punishing such acts as rigid and prescribed regulations.

## 2.3. Organization and Structure

Social organization concerns the specific activities conducted by two or more people. It adjusts the rigid social framework constructed by the above mentioned institutions in a more flexible way, so as to ensure the implementations of cultural functions and meaning. Social organization also relies on the traditional Mosuo society's ecological-wisdom-based view of nature to be implemented and regulated.

Take the agricultural economic organization "Yi Di" as an example. In order to implement collective collaboration, the Mosuo people widely adopts a production collaboration organization called "Yi Di" (一底, meaning the help of cows). The "Yi Di" organization carries out cooperated agricultural production in accordance with the requirements of the crop rotation and the fallow system. Each family participating in the "Yi Di" organization must abide

by the various agricultural production rules of the traditional Mosuo society. Another example is the fishing cooperative organization "Qiu De" (丘得). Each "Qiu De" composes of 1 to 20 men, who row boat and cast nets together within a designated area. Every fisherman participating in "Qiu De" must comply with "Qiu De" regulations, which sets limits on fishing time, net size, and when fishing is closed [3].

The traditional society set up all kinds of social organizations in their daily and production lives. The ideas, customs and regulations of ecological wisdom are ensured by conducting production activities accordingly.

### **3. The Value and Inspiration of Ecological Wisdom in Traditional Mosuo Culture**

Thanks to their ecological wisdom featuring self-restraint and respect for nature, Mosuo people managed to create a traditional society where people are friendly toward each other and with the environment. The historical progress and change are inevitable, but we must understand that ecological wisdom is not a compromise to low productivity, but an advanced philosophy for the sustainable development. In today's world, we have very advanced technology and greater desire, so ecological wisdom stands out with its practical potential.

#### **3.1. Ecological Wisdom--Mosuo People's Way to Harmonious Development**

As mentioned above, Mosuo people dwells in the Hengduan Mountains, where natural resources are limited and ecological environment is fragile, so they have always respected nature, valued the rational use of environmental resources, and emphasized the harmonious relationship between man and nature. To sum up, the Mosuo traditional culture is a regional ethnic culture with a high degree of ecological wisdom. The elements of ecological wisdom permeate all aspects of traditional Mosuo society, ranging from religious beliefs to details of life. After thousands of years, the Mosuo people, though facing a rather difficult natural condition, have managed to establish a harmonious home with a stable population, reasonable settlement development, and basic self-sufficiency in production and life [4].

#### **3.2. The Mosuo Traditional Culture--Place to Find Operating Mechanism of Ecological Wisdom**

As Mosuo people lives in closed areas where transportation is inconvenient, the invasion of outside culture is largely prevented, thus protecting the Mosuo people's cultural control, which waives its influence through idea, customs, institutions and organization. It raises the subjective awareness to protect nature and ensured the implementation of ecological wisdom on both spiritual and material levels. All these multi-level operating mechanisms supports the sustainable development of Mosuo traditional culture and socio-economic development.

### **4. On the Protection of Mosuo Society's Ecological Wisdom and Sustainable Development**

The current Mosuo culture has gone through drastic change. Traditional social institutions and organizational structure have disappeared, but the central systems and mechanisms, such as matriarch families and religious beliefs still exist, which provides us valuable materials of deep ecology. We believe that only by making full use of the moderating effects of the ethnic group's cultural control, respecting Mosuo people's view of nature and lifestyles, can we arouse the subjective awareness for ecological wisdom. The Mosuo culture's ecological wisdom, if it has practical value, should promote the sustainable development of Mosuo society and economy and its traditional culture.

## References

- [1] Yang Fuquan. On the history of Naxi culture [M]. Kunming: Yunnan University Press, 2006.
- [2] (USA) Si Chuangang. Yongning Mosuo [M]. Kunming: Yunnan University Press, 2008.
- [3] Editorial group of Yunnan Province. A survey of Naxi society and family form in Ninglang Yi Autonomous County [M]. Kunming: The Peoples Press of Yunnan, 1986.
- [4] Huang Yun. The cultural evolution of human settlement environment in Lugu Lake region [M]. Peking: China Architecture & Building Press, 2014.