

Caregiving Among the Mosuo:
Caregivers, Child-Rearing, and Childhood in a Matrilineal Society

Jue Wang and DUMALAMU

Author's Note

Jue Wang is a PhD student of the Graduate School of Education, The University of Tokyo.
Dumalamu is a Master's student of the Graduate School of Philosophy, Southwest Minzu University.

Abstract

Objective: The matrilineal kinship systems of the Mosuo have long been the subject of considerable research attention. However, issues having to do with individual child-rearing according to the specific cultural features of the Mosuo, or matrilineal societies in general, have not been fully explored. This study examined the perceptions and current status of Mosuo parenting focusing on child-rearing goals, the emphasis placed on education, current problems, and the self-evaluation of children in terms of the role of the extended family in child-rearing activities. Additionally, this paper presented an initial exploration of parent-child interactions during the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of the roles of fathers, mothers, and children resulting from the interruption of the Mosuo “visiting marriage.” Method: This paper analyzed 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with parental caregivers according to the grounded theory analysis approach (Male = 3, $M\ age = 40.63$, $SD = 6.67$). Additional interviews having to do with impacts of the pandemic were also conducted with Mosuo parents focusing on the maternal role ($M\ age = 41.10$, $SD = 5.90$), the paternal role ($M\ age = 42.80$, $SD = 4.66$), and the role of children (Male = 5, $M\ age = 14.7$, $SD = 3.62$). Results: Mosuo parenting emphasizes the importance of the child’s birth household and responsibilities to the matrilineal family. Child-rearing focuses on socialization in terms of moral and cultural etiquette norms and values having to do with the handling of relationships in the development of individual abilities. Co-parenting activities are equal in their treatment of the family’s children in both emotional and material terms. It is believed that the extended family model of parenting enables children to be more empathic but, at the same time, it fosters less capacity for self-reliance and a lack of social competitiveness. During the pandemic, children showed greater concern for their fathers’ well-being and worried in particular about their fathers’ physical health.

Keywords: Matrilineality, Mosuo, Caregiving, Extended Family, the COVID-19 Pandemic

Caregiving Among the Mosuo:

Caregivers, Child-Rearing, and Childhood in a Matrilineal Society

1 Introduction

1.1 The Sibling-based Household of the Mosuo

The Mosuo are a matrilineal group of approximately 50,000 people located in southwestern China. The Mosuo follows the matrilineal society's general rules, with the matrilineal lineage system as the center of family property distribution and inheritance (Nongbri, 2010). The Mosuo marriage system is unique in that it employs the dual residence system of SESE marriage ("visiting marriage", ethically strict monogamy). Both the man and the woman live separately, and the man comes to visit the woman's house to spend the night and then returns to his household the following day. The children belong to the woman's matrilineal family, and the man's responsibility as an uncle is given priority over his role as a father (Thomas et al., 2018; Yan et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2019).

The matrilineal family structure of the Mosuo is distinctive because of the sibling-based caregiving system, regardless of gender or reproductive stage, no family members are ever separated from their natal family. Former studies, the vast majority of which come from the field of anthropology, have revealed the basic elements and potential benefits of the cooperative care that still effectively exist among the Mosuo family (Mattison, 2016; Mattison et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2018).

1.2 Prior Studies of Mosuo Caregiving

Previous cultural anthropological researches have established the general perceptions under cultural

definitions of Mosuo caregiving (Zhong, 2011). However, psychological research on Mosuo child-rearing activities has not fully explored cultural expectations having to do with child-rearing. Furthermore, even if generalized parenting is recognized as the norm among the Mosuo, it is still unclear what Mosuo parents value in terms of their child-rearing activities and what they expect of their children in terms of the outcomes of their caregiving strategies (Mattison, 2010).

This study focuses on Mosuo caregivers' parenting concepts and strategies, as well as their self-evaluation of the effectiveness of the extended matrilineal household model. A grounded theory approach was utilized to provide full and detailed illustrations of Mosuo child-rearing activities. In addition, our research explored the impacts of the separation of fathers from their families when males could not visit their wives' house during the COVID-19 pandemic isolation period.

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

Part of the sample of participants included 15 Mosuo adults (Male = 3, M age = 40.63, SD = 6.67), who were recruited to participate in the caregiving interviews. The other part of the sample included 30 Mosuo adults and children, including 10 females (M age = 41.10, SD = 5.90), 10 males (M age = 42.80, SD = 4.66), and 10 children (Male = 5, M age = 14.7, SD = 3.62). This second group of participants was interviewed separately in order to discuss

individuals's perceptions of the impacts of the pandemic isolation period in which it was difficult for children to meet their fathers.

2.2 Interviews

Through semi-structured interviews, our research adopted a psychological perspective in analyzing Mosuo individuals' perceptions of child-rearing. Our interviews focused Mosuo caregivers' child-rearing goals, their emphasis on education, their existing caregiving problems, and their self-evaluation in terms of the role of the extended family in child-rearing activities. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic isolation on the Mosuo family were also characterized ad hoc.

Our initial interviewing of Mosuo caregivers was performed in August 2019 and our interview protocol included 10 questions. Our subsequent interviews concerning the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic isolation on the Mosuo family were conducted from August 2020 to February 2021 and these interviews were specific to the three age/gender groups included in the sample (see Table 1 for details of interviews).

2.3 Analytical Approaches

Our study employed the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1965), which involved open coding (defining phenomena), axial coding (creating categories), and selective coding (building narratives) which was conducted using MAXQDA software.

3 Results

3.1 Caregiving by the Mosuo

3.1.1 Raising Goals and Emphasis

Before discussing the priorities of Mosuo child-rearing, it is helpful to be aware of how Mosuo caregivers perceive the meaning of the child's existence in order to explain the goals of their child-rearing. As shown in Table 3, almost all of the interviewees agreed that the child's purpose is to inherit the matrilineal household. Furthermore, when a child is too devoted to his or her own concerns, displays highly distinctive personality traits, or has built a very affluent life outside of the Mosuo region, this is considered to be a negative thing.

The inheritance role given to Mosuo children is meant to be more of a responsibility for the entire matrilineal household: to pass on the family house, character, and spiritual possessions.

Among the child-rearing priorities and aims of the Mosuo (see Table 2), five main categories were selected. In terms of Mosuo identity and the transmission of the Mosuo language (only in an oral form), the core of child-rearing is considered to be the development and enhancement of a child's personality as instructed by Mosuo traditional culture.

Specifically addressing the moral aspects, the Mosuo traditional culture emphasizes the individuals' ethical qualities that consist primarily of basic personal norms of etiquette (especially respect for the elderly and the young) and the development of the qualities needed in establishing relationships with others.

Mosuo children are expected to have respect for life and nature, respect their elders, and follow the rules of moral character valued in Mosuo culture.

Second, Mosuo children are also expected to embody social values; that is, to contribute to society in the future and become a benefit to society.

However, it is necessary to note that this is not the same as expecting social success. Instead, most caregivers explicitly stated that they did not expect their children to have wealth and social status in the future.

Third, the schooling of children is also valued by caregivers. The expectation is that the child should complete high school and get good grades in school. In general, the Mosuo value education as a way of gaining wisdom and they believe that higher education is important in order to be more capable of helping others and to be beneficial to society.

Fourth, concerning physical health, several caregivers indicated that the child's physical health is the primary concern during the early years.

Finally, the parents said that raising the next generation in a large family is impossible without learning to empathize and understand others in the context of multiple family members living together. It seems that empathy in this context is also meant to emphasize the sustainability of relationships within the matrilineal family and expand on empathy with people outside the family.

3.1.2 Raising Strategies

The parenting strategies can be divided into three main dimensions (Table 4).

The principles central to matrilineal family orientation requires that adopters treat the next generation in the matrilineal family equally, including their biological children and their sisters' offspring, primarily in terms of equitable economic investment.

Also, the principle emphasizes individual values based on the matrilineal family, in which the matrilineal family's heritage (emphasizing the spiritual assets including the legacy and development of harmonious relationships within the family, the family's character and reputation, and the approach to educating the next generation in the family) is the priority.

Secondly, regarding the primary method, the Mosuo raisers show a relatively consistent opinion that they prefer to do certain things together with their children for education or teaching skills. Rarely do the adults in the extended family have total time alone with the child, and the general norm is to do some of the adult's chores or tasks along with the child.

Third, adults value their children's efforts to learn, but they also believe that pressure and pushing do not contribute to academic progress and that it is up to the talent to keep studying and advance to higher education. Moreover, the parents said that girls are more independent learners than boys.

As for children's discipline, the Mosuo family generally adopts a chatting and explaining approach based on respecting children and deliberately avoids the strict discipline model like the school teacher's style.

Fourth, as an actual parenting figure, the "strict mother" image was the consensus. Those who maintained extended family living patterns reported that they completed tasks with their children and other family members to achieve the purpose of teaching. Usually, only targeted instruction would be given after the child made a mistake. The adopters who lived in the nuclear family model reported spending

more time alone with their children and intentionally creating time dedicated to caring for and teaching their children. Besides, Mosuo raisers value and respect the guidance and education of the elderly. Grandparents spend more time with their children than parents, observing them more closely and being more sensitive to their children's changes.

3.1.3 Domestic Child-rearing Support Systems

The Mosuo rearing support system can be summarized into two aspects, “Matrilineal support system,” and “Support from biological father” (see Table 5).

The matrilineal family support system manifests as a cooperative parenting model based on default principles. Mosuo families are relatively resistant to intermarriage with external females, but it is not unusual for Mosuo women to marry outside males. Mosuo raisers stated that one of the benefits of bringing up children in an extended family is that you always have someone to consult with and know that you always have backup resources. In a co-parenting model, grandparents are more responsible for the details of the next generation's life, mothers and sisters share responsibility for household finances and farming, and older children help to care for younger children after three.

It can be divided into men's investment in being a father and men's engagement in being a maternal uncle about men's investment in child-rearing. As fathers, the primary focus is on economic investment in their children's education, and the interaction with their children is play-based, more lenient discipline of their children, and more indirect discipline to deal with problems, relying on the mother's

power and status to influence their children. The boundaries of parenting cooperation between couples are clear, with both partners agreeing on the other's responsibility for their natal families, the matrilineal household's superiority over the nuclear unit, and the finances' independent division. Mothers are less likely to discuss childcare concerns with fathers and would not actively ask fathers to perform their responsibilities as biological fathers, and consider children or childcare to be independent of the couple relationship to some extent. Women married to non-Mosuo men reported in interviews that their husbands' initial disagreement was over financial support for matrilineal families and sibling children. However, men from outside the Mosuo family are affected to gradually identify with the Mosuo family's rules and accept the role of raising their wife's maternal sister's children (mainly in the form of economic investment).

Maternal uncles also have more limited direct contact with the next generation in the family. Nevertheless, they are recognized as the most authoritative role in the family. Other family members teach their children to respect their uncles, who are also primarily responsible for their children's moral development and making choices and decisions about important events. At the same time, the uncle is also very concerned about the children's schooling, more than the father who seems to be more concerned about the children's academic performance, the uncle is more focused on the children in the family being educated, gaining wisdom, and contributing to the family and society.

3.1.4 Child-rearing Issues

According to multiple caregivers, they are concerned that their lower education level will limit their children's academic development and unable to guide their children's learning effectively and worry about their children's further education (Table 7). At the same time, they also reported that they usually have a heavy load of housework and other tasks, so they lack time to guide their children's learning.

The attitude of "Problems are not worries," "Less childcare worries" was more common in the above childcare issues. Similarly, the "Mosuo Caregivers' Well-being Value" (see Table 8) shows that Mosuo parents developmental expectations of their children are ranked from "Study well," "Physical health," "Ordinary life," "Well-behaved," "Have a good relationship with others," "Moral integrity," and "Have a family." The most important demand for life is "Family harmony," and on this foundation, the desire to have basic needs met, have an ordinary life that matches one's capabilities, and have a satisfying marriage relationship.

3.1.5 Comparison of the Traits of Mosuo and Han Children

Compared to the Han Chinese family model (Table 6), positively, Mosuo children are thought to be more empathic and have a more supportive family. There are no mother-in-law issues in Mosuo families, cohesiveness is strong, and children have various caregivers to choose from. On the negative side, caregivers perceive Mosuo children to be less self-expression and self-reliant and to lack the competitiveness required in modern society. Also, there is a possible risk that one child will not receive full

attention or be spoiled.

As for Han Chinese children, Mosuo raisers believe that the small family model of parenting relies strongly on the parenting quality and that children are at high risk of not growing up well if the parents' parenting is unqualified. Furthermore, children raised in small families may be more self-centered and prioritize their concerns. Nevertheless, Han children's self-reliance capability and their higher social competitiveness are affirmed.

3.2 Caregiving amid the COVID-19 Pandemic Isolation

In this section (see Table 9, Table 10), the perspectives of Mosuo males (as fathers, as matrilineal uncles), females (as mothers), and children are organized.

3.2.1 Males (Matrilineal Uncles/Fathers)

First, about spending time with maternal family members, two Mosuo males were involved in epidemic prevention work in their villages during the quarantine period and could not spend much time with their maternal family members or their wives and children. The rest of the males indicated that life pattern during the isolation was not significantly different from usual, except that they had more time with their families and to relax at home. The family would play solitaire together, tidy the house and yard, farm, and livestock care.

As for the nieces and nephews, as uncle males noticed some details of the children's lives that they did not usually pay attention to. One man also mentioned that his nieces and nephews are the ones who take care of him more at home.

Second, about getting along with their biological children. The Mosuo male expressed that, as a father, although he could not see his child during the isolation, he trusted his wife and her family to take care of the child and was not very concerned. However, at the same time, fathers also said that they would look forward to the meeting afterward and the desire to take their children out to play, expressing the feeling that they miss their children. One man said he was more worried about his child's homework due to his partner's low level of education.

Finally, in terms of thoughts and feelings brought by the epidemic, in general, they were not very anxious, that the disaster was temporary and would return to normal. At the same time, they emphasized their concerns about the impact of the epidemic on the Mosuo region's tourism economy, the prolonged absence of work on the family economy, and their hope to develop stable and self-sufficient agriculture in the future.

3.2.2 Females (Mothers)

In the females' experience with maternal family members, they likewise expressed no difference from their usual lives, playing card games, doing chores, and cooking meals. There was a strong indication of their limited ability to tutor the children with homework or other additional learning with the lack of discipline and education from school teachers.

On the other hand, Mothers believed that not-seeing fathers would not significantly impact the child's well-being. Because the grandparents usually take care of the child, the child is not parent-dependent. Moreover, with multiple caregivers in

the house, the child would not be significantly affected by the father's absence.

3.2.3 Children

Children reported that they were spending time with families during the quarantine in the same pattern, as usual, helping with household chores and taking care of their younger siblings. However, children seemed to feel more attention from adults and had communicated more. At the same time, children reported that they spend most of their time with the siblings.

Regarding not being able to see fathers, although children expressed concern about their father's health, they also emphasized that it would not affect them significantly. Half of the children said they were not too worried about the epidemic and did not think much about it. The rest of the children said that they "hope outdoor activities," "hope to return to school soon," and that they hope to be beneficial to society in the future and cherish life and time with their parents.

4 Discussion

4.1 For Caregivers

4.1.1 High Ethical Requirements

The Mosuo culture places great emphasis on the development of moral character and judges morality harshly. The core principle of "no favoritism" in raising also reflects the high standard, which requires equal emotional and financial investment. Perhaps this may also indicate why outsider men are more susceptible to the Mosuo than outsider women. This may be explained by the fact that the investment in the wife's matrilineal family is expressed

chiefly as an economic investment as a foreign male. In contrast, as a foreign female, one may be required to make more detailed direct parenting investments which may carry a significant burden than financial support.

4.1.2 Natal Household Support System

There is no doubt matrilineal families hold trustworthy back-up resources. However, it appears that it is not the effective use that makes parenting more informative, but rather the knowledge that one has back-up that provides a certain level of support. It seems that grandparents are more directly involved in the upbringing than parents. The young mothers and siblings are more responsible for the family's economy and the operation of family industries. For their children, mothers tend to express more severe discipline, yet they seem to show more softness as aunts.

4.1.3 Personal Values Embodied in the Matrilineal Household

It is a pronounced tendency that the individual's value is revealed along with the contribution to the family. "Play-Doh" is an appropriate analogy. A loyal member of the matriarchal family will adapt himself to become a screw in the family, even if it is against his will. It is fascinating to see how matriarchal families raise and educate the next generation of family members with so much loyalty.

4.2 For Children

4.2.1 Highly Emphasized Schooling Issues

Modern Mosuo raisers are now beginning to pay more attention to the children's education. It is

hoped that children will achieve higher education levels and better academic performance to meet society's social competitiveness requirements. Besides, the same emphasis on learning seems to be placed more on the child's academic performance by males as father not as uncle, yet the status of the maternal uncles seem to be more concerned with the child's ability to receive more education and get farther along the educational road. However, mothers' and grandparents' actual supervision was still more often done while they are confused by their low educational level, which may hold children back.

4.2.2 Dependence and Self-reliance

A large family has multiple caregivers and children at the same time. A child in a Mosuo matrilineal family is likely to receive a great deal of adult care while also being relatively neglected. This also implies that the child may receive many favors, have many resources available to him/her, and to some extent be less able to handle and face stress independently on his/her own. On the other hand, the child may also have difficulty harvesting enough attention to meet his or her own needs, or enough attention from specific members, leading to some of the problems resulting from not being given enough attention.

4.2.3 Inhibition and Expression

Mosuo children seemed to show more positive qualities to become a valued addition to the family due to growing up in extended families with multiple siblings and multiple non-self-centered raisers. In other words, the Mosuo child needs to be tolerant, understand the needs of others, and to a certain ex-

tent over their own needs to meet the requirements of survival in the extended family. The Mosuo raisers show concern that the child cannot express himself/herself well and fear that the child will suppress his/her needs when interacting with the outside world.

4.2.4 Complicated Relationships with Fathers

This study found that there appears to be a tendency to underrate the father's role when examining the father-child relationship in terms of the mother's position. Mothers perceive that fathers spend limited time with their children and that fathers have a limited function to perform.

However, for children, it appears that younger children show more dependence on fathers, but that there is a decreasing tendency for reliance on fathers as they get older. At the same time, however, children are more inclined to endorse times of playing with fathers regardless of age. These interview results suggest that Mosuo fathers must have some unexplained functioning mode for their children.

5 Conclusion

In the Mosuo family, emphasis is laid on achieving personal values based on the fulfillment of matrilineal family responsibilities. In the next generation's upbringing, moral character and etiquette based upon traditional culture are given great importance, and moral requirements are stringent. Modern Mosuo emphasize children's schooling and academic performance, have more specific requirements for learning and consider their lower education level to be a significant problem. Men's parenting investment as fathers is more focused on economic invest-

ment while as maternal uncles, they put more emphasis on children's moral discipline and supervision. As for children, there seems to be a greater tendency to engage in play with their fathers, with younger children bonding closer to their fathers. In the future, the division of labor and evaluation of Mosuo nurturers, the specific content and role of parenting investment, and the impact on children's growth and development are noteworthy to be further explored.

References

- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative sociology*, 13(1), 3-21.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1965). Discovery of substantive theory: A basic strategy underlying qualitative research. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 8(6), 5-12.
- Mattison, S. M. (2010). Economic Impacts of Tourism and Erosion of the Visiting System Among the Mosuo of Lugu Lake. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 11(2), 159-176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442211003730736>
- Mattison, S. M. (2016). The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss493>
- Mattison, S. M., Scelza, B., & Blumenfeld, T. (2014). Paternal Investment and the Positive Effects of Fathers among the Matrilineal Mosuo of Southwest China: Fatherhood among the Matrilineal Mosuo, *American Anthropologist*, 116(3), 591-610. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12125>

- Nongbri, T. (2010). Family, gender and identity, *Contributions to Indian sociology*, 44 (1-2), 155-178.
- Thomas, M. G., Ji, T., Wu, J., He, Q., Tao, Y., & Mace, R. (2018). Kinship underlies costly cooperation in mosuo villages, *Royal Society open science*, 5(2), 171535.
- Wang, L., Hu, S., Ma, M., Wang, X., Wang, Q., Zhang, Z., & Shen, J. (2018). Responses of magnetic properties to heavy metal pollution recorded by lacustrine sediments from the lugu lake, southwest china, *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 25(26), 26527-26538.
- Yan, Y., He, Z., Duan, J., Ding, D., & Zhang, S. (2008). Analysis of the role of the mosuo culture in local environmental protection in lugu lake region, *The International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, 15 (1), 48-55.
- Zhang, Y., Zhao, X., Leonhart, R., Nadig, M., Wang, J., Zhao, Y., Wirsching, M., & Fritzsche, K. (2019). A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Climacteric Symptoms, Health-Seeking Behavior, and Attitudes towards Menopause Among Mosuo Women and Han Chinese Women in Yunnan, China, *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 56(1), 287-301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461518804094>
- Zhong, Y. (2011). *Parental roles and children's socialization in mosuo's matrilineal family* (Doctoral dissertation). CiteSeer.

Appendix

Table 1 Total Interview Items

Items	
Perceptions of Parenting by Mosuo Caregivers	
1	What is your typical day like?
2	What do you usually do with your child?
3	What are your priorities for your child's education?
4	What does your child mean to you?
5	What are your expectations for your child?
6	How should parents treat their child?
7	What kinds of things does the child's father help with?
8	How do you feel about the parenting by your child's father?
9	How satisfied are you with your life now?
10	How satisfied are you with your child's development now?
The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic Isolation on the Mosuo Family For Female	
1	How do you feel about not being able to see your partner during the COVID-19 pandemic isolation?
2	How have you communicated with your partner, and what were the main topics of conversation during the COVID-19 pandemic isolation?
3	How have you spent the isolation time with your family? What is the most different thing compared to ordinary times?
4	Did you see any noteworthy changes in your child's behavior?
5	What do you find to be the most substantial effect of the COVID-19 pandemic isolation on your family's life?
6	What are your main worries or concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic?
For Male ⁽¹⁾	
1	How do you feel about not being able to see your biological child during the COVID-19 pandemic isolation?
2	How have you communicated with your biological child? And what were the main topics of conversation during the COVID-19 pandemic isolation?
3	As an uncle, how have you spent the isolation time with your nieces and/or nephews?
For Children ⁽²⁾	
1	How have you communicated with your father, and what were the main topics of conversation during the COVID-19 pandemic isolation?

Note. Participants in “The Caregiving of the Mosuo Caregivers” interviewing included 15 Mosuo adults. 30 Mosuo adults and children were included in “The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic Isolation on the Mosuo Family” interviews.

(1) Item 5 and Item 6 for female were also asked of male. (2) Item 3, Item 5, and Item 6 for female were also asked of children.

Table 2 The Child-Rearing Goals of Mosuo Caregivers

Code scheme	Case ID	Code scheme	Case ID
Traditional mosuo culture		<i>Respect for nature and life</i>	F1, F2
<i>Ethical character</i>		<i>Living habits</i>	F2, F7, F9, F11, F13
Morality	F1, F2, F3, F5, F7, F9, F10, F11, F13, F14	<i>Cultural traditions</i>	F1, F2, F11, F13 F2, F5, F7
Discipline and adherence to the law		<i>Mosuo language</i>	
Kindness		Social responsibility	
Persistence		<i>Contribution to society</i>	F1, F2, F8, F11, F13
Gratitude		<i>No desire for social status or monetary success</i>	F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F11, F13, F14
Integrity		Education	
<i>Sharing</i>		<i>Access to higher education</i>	
Tolerant	F2, F5,	Increased valuing of schooling	F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F8, F10, F11, F13
Symbiosis	F6, F7	Attainment of wisdom	
Altruistic		Increased capability of helping others	
<i>Relationships with others</i>		<i>Completion of high school education</i>	F2, F4, F7, F8, F11, F13
Development and maintenance of peer relationships	F1, F2, F4, F8, F11, F13	<i>Development of other interests</i>	F2, F7, F8, F11, F13
Independence from men		<i>High grades not required</i>	F2, F4, F5, F8, F11, F13
Reflection of personal values in relationships		Physical health	F1, F2, F4, F8, F9, F11, F12, F13
<i>Respect for the old and cherishing of the young</i>	F1, F2, F3, F4, F6, F7, F8, F10, F11, F12, F13		
<i>Mosuo cultural identity</i>	F1, F2, F5, F7, F8, F11, F13, F14		
<i>Caring for the matrilineal family</i>	F2, F3, F4, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, F11, F13, F14	Empathy for others	F3, F4, F11
<i>Etiquette and Manners</i>	F1, F2, F3, F4, F10, F13		

Table 3 Children's Meaning as Family Properties

Code scheme	Case ID
Passing down the household	
<i>Inheritance of ancestral, matrilineal family lineage</i>	F2, F4, F5, F6, F8, F9, F10, F11, F13, F14
<i>Being too good to leave the family is negative</i>	F2, F4, F7, F8, F11, F13, F14
<i>Non-independent individuals attached to the matrilineal family</i>	F7
Raising children to prepare for old age	F13

Table 4 Mosuo Caregivers' Parenting Strategies

Code scheme	Case ID	Code scheme	Case ID
Matrilineal family orientation		Working with children on tasks	
<i>Principle of non-preference</i>	F1, F2, F6, F7, F8, F9, F11, F13	<i>Intergenerational transmission</i>	F1, F2, F4, F5, F10, F13
<i>Attachment to matrilineal family values</i>		<i>Let children imitate adults</i>	
Matrilineal family is the basis of personal values		Adults need to be role models	
		Teaching by demonstration	
	F1, F2, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, F11, F13	<i>Let children summarize the rules from the attitude of adults</i>	
Fulfillment of matrilineal family responsibilities		Care for children while working	F1, F2, F4, F7, F11
<i>Matrilineal family responsibilities take precedence over personal life</i>		Not just in terms of childcare	
<i>Limited individual autonomy</i>		<i>Will not pay special attention to parent-child interaction</i>	
Respect for individual rights based on matrilineal responsibility			
Development of individual social competence based on matrilineal family responsibilities			
De-emphasis of self-assertion			
<i>Priority matrilineal family</i>		For children's study	
Support of the family with money	F2, F4, F7, F8, F11, F13	<i>Letting nature take its course</i>	F1, F2, F4, F5, F6, F8, F10, F11, F13, F14
Spending time with elders		Achievement cannot be forced	
Respect for responsibility of the maternal household		Following the rhythm of children's growth	
Patrilineal non-family awareness		Avoidance of extra stress	
<i>Matrilineal family inheritance</i>		<i>Emphasis on individual effort and dedication</i>	
Intergenerational heritage	F2, F5, F8, F11, F13, F14	<i>Girls are more care-free</i>	
<i>Harmonious relations</i>			
<i>Family character</i>			
<i>Education style</i>			
Mother as an authority figure		For children's discipline	
<i>Time spent by mother and child</i>		<i>Respect for children is fundamental</i>	F1, F2, F7, F11
Separated Family Model		<i>Avoidance of school-style discipline</i>	
<i>Mother and child spending time alone</i>		Teaching by chatting	
Primacy of taking care of children	F1, F3, F4, F6, F7, F8, F10, F11, F13, F14	Guidance of elders	
Extended Family Model		<i>Sensitivity to changes in children</i>	F7
<i>Collective activities</i>		<i>Intentional teaching after a mistake</i>	F11
Doing things together			
<i>Requirement of mother's company before the age of three</i>		<i>Raising children over personal life</i>	F1, F5, F7, F8, F13
<i>Guidance children in making choices</i>			
<i>Stern mother's discipline</i>			

Table 5 Mosuo Caregivers' Domestic Support Systems

Code scheme	Case ID	Code scheme	Case ID
Support from the biological father		Matrilineal support system	
<i>Couple partnerships</i>		<i>Potential rules</i>	
Financial independence		Household leadership arrangement	
Points of conflict		<i>Women leading households</i>	
<i>Financial and material support for maternal offsprings</i>	F4, F7, F8	Treatment of everyone equally and favorably	F1, F2, F4, F6, F7, F8, F9, F11, F14
<i>Financial support for matrilineal families</i>		Opposition to exogamy with non-Mosuo girls	
Female strength		<i>Someone who can always be consulted with</i>	
Children over partners		<i>Someone who always stands by</i>	
<i>Couples' parenting</i>		<i>Cooperative childcare</i>	
Less frequent communication about childcare issues		Maternal grandmothers taking care of daughters' children	
<i>Rarely talks about childcare worries</i>		Complementary division of labor among sisters	
<i>Fathers are expected to financially support childcare</i>		The older child takes care of the younger ones.	
<i>More discussion of educational issues</i>	F2, F4, F6, F7, F8, F9,	Support from matrilineal uncle	
Fathers need to prioritize their biological family	F10, F11,	<i>Authoritative family roles</i>	
Limited fathers' childcare effort	F12, F13,	Children are in fear of uncles	F5, F7
<i>Rarely involved in chores</i>	F14	Leadership of household events	
<i>Not appreciating the difficulties of childcare</i>		<i>Fostering obligation to the matrilineal offspring</i>	F5, F7, F9, F13
<i>Little time spent with children</i>		More care for children	
The acculturation of non-Mosuo males		Emphasis on children's morality	
<i>Husbands asked by wives to observe Mosuo practices</i>		Value for children's education (process-oriented)	
Acceptance of maternal offspring			
Equal economic and material support for maternal children			
Fathers' authority is less than mothers			
<i>Fathers follow mothers' childcare ideas</i>			
<i>Mothers have more disciplinary power</i>			
Children are separate from the couple's relationship			
Childrearing investment		<i>Approach</i>	
<i>Content</i>		Financial Support	
Focus on the schooling of children		Relaxed discipline	
<i>Child pick-up and drop-off</i>	F2, F3,	Indirect discipline	
<i>Supervision of child's study</i>	F4, F6,	<i>Reliance on mothers to set the rules</i>	
<i>Grade-focused (result oriented)</i>	F7, F8,	<i>Lack of educational approaches</i>	
Father-child physical play	F9, F10,		
Development of basic habits	F11, F13,		
Development of social independence	F14		
Teaching how to handle relationships			
Emphasis on physical health			

Note. There were a total of 3 males (1 father, 2 maternal uncles) among the 15 interviewees, so the support system described here can be considered a maternal-raising support system that integrates the male caregivers' self-reports.

Table 6 Comparison of the Traits of Mosuo and Han Children

Code scheme	Case ID	
Mosuo negative	Han negative	
<i>Interpersonal relationships</i>	F2, F7,	<i>The lack of education on respect for the elderly and children</i> F6, F8
Not receiving adequate attention	F8, F10,	
Easily spoiled	F12	<i>Self-centered</i> F2, F9
Great ethical burdens		<i>Risks of relying on parents alone for childcare</i> F8, F12
<i>Personal traits</i>	F2, F3,	
Inability to be self-reliant	F7, F9,	
Limited self-expression	F12, F14	
The lack of social competitiveness		
Mosuo positive	Han positive	
<i>Interpersonal relationships</i>	F2, F6,	<i>Self-reliance capability</i> F14
Supportive family resources	F7, F8,	
<i>Free of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law issues</i>	F9, F12,	
<i>Solid family cohesion</i>	F14	
<i>Co-caregiver assistance</i>		
<i>Personal traits</i>	F2, F7,	
High empathy ability	F8, F9,	
	F14	
<i>Assimilation effect</i>	F6	

Table 7 Mosuo Caregivers' Child-Rearing Issues

Code scheme	Case ID	Code scheme	Case ID
Child-rearing Issues			
<i>Genera1 attitude</i>	F1, F2	<i>Limited energy problems</i>	F7, F8
Problems are not worries		High cost of childcare efforts	
Less childcare worries		High work pressure	
		No time to supervise children's study	
<i>Self-education level limitation problems</i>	F6, F8,		
	F9, F11	<i>Electronic media problems</i>	F1, F8
Limitations in guiding children		Children are obsessed with phones	
Restrictions on tutoring children		Children are always watching TV	
Limitations of caregiver's own continued development			
<i>Children's schooling problems</i>	F7		

Table 8 Mosuo Caregivers' Valuation of Wellbeing

Code scheme	Case ID	Code scheme	Case ID
For children		For life	
<i>Study well</i>	F6, F9, F10, F11, F12, F13	<i>Family harmony</i>	F1, F9, F10, F11, F12
<i>Physical Health</i>	F1, F5, F6, F8, F13	<i>Mindset determines life</i>	F4, F5
<i>Ordinary life</i>	F1, F11, F12, F13	<i>Eat well and stay warm</i>	F9, F13, F14
<i>Well-behaved</i>	F6, F11, F12, F14	<i>A more fulfilling marriage</i>	F4
<i>Have good relationship with others</i>	F1, F9	<i>Match with self-ability</i>	F11
<i>Moral integrity</i>	F5		
<i>Have a family</i>	F1		

Table 9 Caregiving Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic Isolation (Thoughts and Feelings from the Pandemic and Living with the Partner)

	Code scheme	Case ID	Code scheme	Case ID
	Thoughts and feelings from the epidemic		Living with the partner	
Male	Difficulties are temporary	M2, M6, M7	Chat through WeChat	
	Value health	M9	Talk about daily life	M1, M2, M3
	Emphasis on the development of agriculture	M1, M8, M9, M10	Talk about epidemic prevention	
	Worry about family finances	M4, M5	Expresses a desire to meet	
	Worry about the life of the city people	M2		
	Concern about the impact on the tourism economy	M1, M8, M9, M10		
Female	Difficulties are temporary	F1, F2, F4, F7,	Chat through WeChat	
	Value health	F8, F9, F10	No worries about not seeing	F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F8
	Cherish family gathering	F3, F10	Fear of infection in husband	
	Worry about socio-economic decline	F3	Lack of labor helpers	
	Hope the child can contribute to society in the future	F10		
Child	Without a lot of worry and thinking	C5, C6, C7, C9, C10		
	Hope outdoor activities	C10		
	Hope to become a useful person to the society	C8		
	Hope to return to school soon	C1, C2, C14		
	Feel the preciousness of life	C1		
	Cherish the time with parents	C1, C3		

Table 10 Caregiving Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic Isolation (Living with Family Members)

	Code scheme	Case ID	Code scheme	Case ID
	Living with matrilineal household		Living with the child/father	
Male	With nieces and nephews		With biological child	
	Teach to learn and practice		Not very worried	M2, M4 M1, M3, M5, M9, M10
	Pay more attention to habits' details	M2, M4, M7, M8, M10	Misses the child	M10
	Looked after by nieces and nephews		Worry about the child's learning	M6
	With family members			
	The same pattern as usual	M1, M2 M3, M4, M5, M6, M7, M8, M9, M10		
	More time together			
	Play Solitaire game			
	Do chores together			
	Participate in epidemic prevention			
Female	With family members		With biological child	
	The same pattern as usual		Difficult to tutor children's studies	F1, F4, F5, F6 F6, F8, F10 F5, F7, F8
	More time together	F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F7, F8, F9, F10	Lack of school teacher discipline	
	Play Solitaire game		More time with children	
	Do chores together		Less time for children to go out and play	F1
	Cook for many people		Child worried about father's health	F3, F10
			Child wants to meet with the father	F5, F7
			Not seeing the father will not have a negative impact	
			<i>Less dependence on father</i>	F1, F2,
			<i>More time with grandparents</i>	F6, F8, F9
			<i>The warmth of a caregiver in Matrilineal family is enough</i>	
Child	The same pattern as usual		With biological father	
	<i>Help with household chores</i>	C2, C3, C4, C6, C8, C9	Chat through WeChat*	
	<i>Care for younger siblings</i>		<i>Ask what he did every day</i>	C1, C2, C3
			<i>Expresses a desire to meet</i>	
	Relax and play		Worried about the risk of infection	C1, C2, C3, C7 C1, C2, C4, C6, C8, C10 C1, C2, C3, C5 C9
	<i>Play Solitaire game</i>	C1, C6	Not missing my father a lot	
	<i>Do handicrafts</i>		Miss playing together	
	<i>Play video games</i>		Want the father help with homework	
	Get more attention from adults	C1		
	More communication with adults	C1		
	More time with siblings	C1, C7		

Note. WeChat is a Chinese social media app developed by Tencent.