Chapter 5: Findings and Discussions

This chapter elaborates on the findings of the three case studies – Mosuo, Bhutan kira and Scottish Harris Tweed textiles. Different phases of the research within each case study are expounded while discussions are carried out at the end of each case study to identify markers of authenticity for that particular textile. The conclusion of this chapter compares all three case studies to identify similarities while also highlighting their differences.

5.1 Mosuo Case Study
The research was conducted in Walabie village, a community with about 80 households and a population estimated to be 750, that is, an average of seven to nine individuals per household. There are about 100 weavers in the village who are members of the newly established village weaving group encompassing about 13% of the total population. Members’ ages range from 17 to 60 years, but most of the weavers are between 30 and 40 years old, which corresponds to the majority of the female population, because it is women from this age group who have the time, interest and experience to weave.

The research to understand and identify the markers of authenticity consisted of two phases. The first phase made use of semi-structured interviews while closed-optioned questionnaires were used for the second phase.

5.1.1 Phase 1
• Genesis, History and Current Situation of Weaving in Mosuo Culture
Not all of the weavers interviewed were aware of the genesis of Mosuo weaving; they could not relate any of the stories, myths or legends about weaving. Others explained that as the Mosuo language has no written script, the history of Mosuo weaving was not documented. However, some claimed that Mosuo weaving started 2,000 years ago and that these skills have been handed down from one generation to the next through material lineages. Weaving then served a very practical need because of the community’s physical isolation. Hence, every household wove their own textiles. For the gentry class, although it was not necessary for their women to weave (as they had the means to purchase commercially woven textiles such as cotton and silks), weaving was still important because it was part of Mosuo culture and a way to showcase their skills. The main fibre used then was hemp.
Older weavers recalled that weaving started to decline in 1949, coinciding with the founding and incorporation of this region into the People’s Republic of China. The common practice of weaving for self-consumption eventually stopped in the 1960s. By the late 1970s and 1980s, the period after the Cultural Revolution, although only a very few people remained weaving for their own use, weaving was still practiced symbolically as a Mosuo cultural trait.

All but the beginners stated that weaving was only fully revived in the 1990s when tourism was developed in the Lugu Lake region; it could be said that tourism has been the catalyst for the vigorous revival of Mosuo weaving as tourists wanted to purchase ‘authentic’ Mosuo souvenirs. Seizing this opportunity, the community utilized their cultural skills to satisfy this commercial demand producing hand-woven scarves and shawls to sell to tourists. Instead of weaving for self-consumption and social status, weaving became an important activity to supplement their incomes.

Interviewees further elaborated that weaving is central to Mosuo culture. In the past, when a woman was able to satisfy the basic needs of the family through her weaving skills, it symbolised the ability to shoulder responsibilities, especially for the ‘dabu’ who was able to provide for the family. Today, this act of weaving still echoes the symbolic act in spite of the change in the economic landscape. Rather than making material to clothe the family, weaving has become an income generating activity that brings in money contributing to the family’s resources. For example, one of the weavers said that income earned through weaving together with other sources of cash (some of the family members went to Lijiang to work) helped to renovate the family’s home.

The leader of the village weaving group explains that socially, Mosuo women are expected to weave as it defines a Mosuo woman; if a Mosuo woman does not know how to weave, she is not a well-respected Mosuo lady. Single Mosuo woman are required to produce hand-woven textile presents – garments, cloth and belts – for their potential partners. If she is unable to weave, a woman’s prospects of attracting a potential partner will be lower than for those who are able to weave.
An example from the mission concerned Ms A, in her late 20s and a graduate from a university in Kunming. She is currently living with her extended family in Walabie village. Although she is well educated and has lived in the city, she is only a novice weaver. It was observed that members of the community, especially women of her age group, were not impressed with her university education or her experiences in urban life. Although none of the weavers voiced their opinions, it was clear to the researcher through their behaviour and interactions, that the community had ostracized her and ‘looked down’ on her primarily because of her poor weaving skills. For example, when asked about inviting her, the participants on the UNDP training programme were dismissive of the idea and they did not seem interested in socializing with Ms A. Moreover, as a single woman in her late-20s (as compared with other weavers of similar age who were attending the UNDP weaving training along with their children), it might be inferred that Ms A’s marriage prospects in the village were limited.

- Examination of the Physical Characteristics of Mosuo Hand-woven Textiles to Identify Markers of Authenticity

Comparison of Physical Characteristics between Mosuo Hand-woven Textiles and Hand-woven Textiles from Other Communities
Interviewees were invited to identify the distinguishing characteristics of their own textiles with hand-woven textiles from ethnic groups living close to Walabie.

There are three other ethnic groups bordering Walabie: the Pumi, Yi ethnic minorities and the Han Chinese. All three groups do not traditionally practice weaving. The Pumi group only learned how to weave from the Mosuo after the successful commercialization of Mosuo hand-woven textiles, copying the designs of the Mosuos while the Yi ethnic group practice embroidery crafts.

Therefore, the weavers were unable to draw any distinctive characteristics of hand-woven Mosuo textiles as compared with those created by the Pumi people as both were similar.
Comparison Between Old and New Mosuo Textiles

Some of the weavers brought old textiles to compare with newer ones that they had recently woven. When asked if the interviewees had designed these old textiles, the majority (73%) said that the old textiles were designed by others, especially those woven on hemp fibers with traditional motifs.

The oldest hemp textile was about 50 years old. All of these old hemp textiles were rolled up in bales and were made in plain weave while only a select few had traditional motifs woven with supplementary weft float yarns. These textiles were narrow, between 30 and 35cm in width, while the length was often greater than five metres (Figure 35).

Figure 35: Example of Old Mosuo Hand-woven Hemp Textiles

New Mosuo textiles were mainly in the form of scarves and shawls, with both multi- and single coloured textiles. Patterns on these textiles included stripes (usually warped) and checks. A typical scarf was about 160cm in length and about 21cm in width. The weight of each scarf was around 126gms and it was mostly woven with cotton or mercerized cotton yarns. The wrap ends were 15 ends per inch while the weft was 12 picks per inch. The count per yarn was about 2/32 Nu (Figure 36).

Most of the interviewees (67%) stated that they designed these new products themselves. When asked about the source of their inspiration, none of the weavers

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commented that their designs drew on textiles of the past. Instead, most said that they obtained their inspiration from similar products in the markets or had seen people wearing products that they thought were interesting.

![Typical Mosuo Hand-woven Scarf](image)

Figure 36: Typical Mosuo Hand-woven Scarf

When the weavers were asked how they felt about the dramatic changes in their textiles, a majority (67%) felt that such changes were for the better. They felt that the diversity of designs and colours have made Mosuo hand-woven textiles more attractive to tourists. A minority of weavers (33%) did not offer an opinion.

When comparing new and old Mosuo textiles, the new cloth did not, in any form or function, resemble the hemp textiles. All physical and many non-physical aspects have been changed including the yarns, size, the way that the textiles have been woven and the ways that the textiles were used (contemporary hand-woven textiles were mainly woven as scarves and shawls). By comparison of modern and traditional, it seems that physical characteristics could not be used as markers of authenticity.

**Motif and Patterns**

Motifs and patterns were not a conclusive means of identifying authentic Mosuo textiles. For example, although 60% said that they would not incorporate non-Mosuo motifs and patterns in their work, around 40% said they would. The only reservation they had on such additions centred on how to apply these while still conforming to good design principles of proportion and balance, to render the eventual effect aesthetically attractive. They argued that such a product might command better sales enabling them to earn more money. Weavers who were interviewed were not particularly concerned
with cultural considerations, as they did not mention Mosuo cultural aesthetics as they might affect the integrity of the textiles.

Asking the weavers to speculate on what their predecessors would think about combining motifs from other ethnic groups into Mosuo textiles, it seemed that those who supported this notion felt that their predecessors would welcome such changes as these could be viewed as being creative, developing traditional textiles into new forms. Those who opposed the additions maintained that the older generation could not have envisaged such a possibility.

Traditional Mosuo motifs and patterns were currently not woven and could only be found on old traditional garments such as on the sashes of the Mosuo national dress as seen in Figure 37. Most weavers were unable to weave such motifs and patterns today, even if the weavers had wanted to add them.

Figure 37: Hand-woven Traditional Mosuo Sash woven on Hemp with Traditional Designs.
Colour
The study found that colour was also not a credible marker of authenticity. When Mosuo weavers produce scarves and shawls today, they have the freedom to choose their own colours and colour combinations. Sometimes, the colours have already been chosen by those who have placed orders for them. In general, there appeared to be no pre-determined colour codes.

The research discovered that the Mosuo weavers employed a wide range of colours in their weaving and that the combination of colours seemed to be random. When visiting the homes of weavers, different colours of yarns were found in the yarn storage areas with no one colour overly represented. When examining scarves and shawls woven by the interviewees, most scarves and shawls had at least two different colours while single coloured textiles have different tones, shades and tints in their design.

According to the expert weaver in charge of the village weaving group, scarves and shawls with seven colours – ‘qi cai’ – were very popular with domestic tourists and she showed some of these textiles with these colour combinations. Subsequently, it was observed that the colours in these scarves and shawls are woven and sold in the weavers’ home and also in shops in Lugu Lake and Lijiang. However, the investigator noted that, strictly speaking, ‘qi cai’ need not necessarily have seven different types of colours and this number could vary between five and nine colours. Also, the term referred to the intensity of colours and as well as how the colours were combined and contrasted (Figure 38).

![Figure 38: Examples of 'Qi Cai' Colours.](image-url)
She reasoned that domestic tourists have the impression that these colours are most representative of Mosuo aesthetic. However, upon further investigation, there is no evidence of the concept of ‘qi cai’ within Mosuo culture; others experts dismissed it as a true Mosuo cultural concept. At best, the study found that different weavers use different combinations of colours and the colours are randomly arranged in no particular order.

80% claimed that two colours were of significance in Mosuo culture while 20% said that they did not know. The majority of those interviewed explained that yellow and maroon were colours representing Buddhism - the colours of monk robes. Mosuo women, do not commonly use these two colours, especially on skirts. The reason given was that it would be disrespectful to Buddha for women to wear these colours on the lower part of their body. (In Buddhism, the human body is divided into hierarchies ranging from good to bad, clean to dirty, top to bottom. The cleanest and most holy part of the body is the head, closest to the sky while the most dirty part of the body are the feet as they are bound to earth. For women, the genitals – because of menstruation - are also considered ‘dirty’. Hence, it is considered inappropriate and disrespectful to wear colours of Buddha on these parts of the body). However, when asked if they would use these two colours in their textiles, only a minority (27%) replied that they were not willing to do so.

The study also found that colours have changed over the years. 50% of the respondents reported that the shade, tone and tint of colours have been modified. There are more varieties of colours today as compared with former times. The other 50% of weavers who maintained that the colours have not changed were the younger weavers, below the age of 30. One possible explanation is that these younger weavers have not witnessed as much change in the colours of the yarns as they have only recently started weaving.

The majority of Mosuo weavers interviewed were not averse to using new colours as summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Experience</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Weavers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Skilled Weavers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginners</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: ‘Are You Willing to Use New Colours?’
The study also found that respondents were not attracted to, or identified with any particular type or range of colours. The majority of the reasons for favouring specific colours seemed to be based on personal preference. Moreover, the majority of the interviewees responded that new colours do not have any significance in their culture (Table 9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Experience</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Weavers</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Skilled Weavers</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginners</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: ‘Would these New Colours Have Any Meaning To You or Your Community?’

Materials (Fibres and Yarns)

The study found that there was no conclusive evidence that any specific yarn is linked with the production of authentic Mosuo textiles. This is because the types of fibres have changed considerably over the course of time. Furthermore, reaction against the use of new types of yarn were not based on cultural reasons but more on practical economic grounds.

Older weavers, experts and those weavers with intermediate skill levels explained that the material identity of Mosuo is closely intertwined with hemp. Hemp textiles are extremely important to Mosuo cultural and religious rites and rituals. For example, hemp is present at every significant milestone of a Mosuo person’s life. Hemp cloth is used to wrap the new born. When a Mosuo child turns 13, both boys and girls are required to wear the national dress on the first day of the Lunar New Year to signify their coming of age. (However, today, because of the unavailability of hemp fibres, national dress today is woven from other fibers such as cotton.)

Between 1994 and 1997, the cultivation of hemp was banned and this has impacted badly on the Mosuo culture. For example, when a person dies, the body must be wrapped in hemp cloth and bundled in a hemp sack. Without hemp, the departed soul will be unable to make its way to the next world. The villagers were extremely anxious about this matter as their stock of hemp cloth was slowly declining. Today, hemp is a scarce commodity used mainly for each individual household’s ritual purposes.
For commercial purposes, the Mosuo use a wide range of yarns. Before 2000, acetate and synthetic yarns were popular. Today, mercerized cotton is the most commonly used fibre. These cotton yarns are smooth, colours are vibrant and the quality is good; it is highly favoured by the weaving community. Weavers stated that mercerized yarns do not get easily tangled and do not break often, thereby making weaving easier. Yarns are normally sold in cones and the most common yarns are two-ply. After purchasing these yarns, weavers are free to combine different numbers of yarns to increase the count. Typical weft and warp yarns for Mosuo scarves and shawls consist of between eight to 14 different yarns.

Regarding the use of non-hemp fibres for weaving commercial textiles, the current generation of weavers thought their predecessors would appreciate these new yarns as they are convenient, saving them time and energy, and increasing their productivity.

Except for the leader of the village weaving group, weavers were not aware of the introduction of new yarns in recent years. During the field research, the leader of the weaving group was trying out a new organic wool yarn, which she had just received from Beijing, to see if it would be suitable for making scarves and shawls. When asked about her feelings about using this new yarn, she was indifferent.

Only one weaver replied that she would not be willing to use new yarns in her weaving. 50% of those interviewed replied that they were interested in new yarns. Some of the reasons offered included curiosity and the possibility of improved sales with these yarns. The remaining weavers were not willing to try new yarns because they were unable to commit to a hypothetical situation, as they had not seen the yarn before. They also needed to be sure of a positive market response before trying out new yarns. No cultural implications were raised.

Regarding the combination of both new and old yarns in their weaving of a textile, 67% seemed to be positively disposed to the idea. These weavers reasoned that they would only do so if the combination was attractive, good, interesting and if it did not reduce the cost of the product. Weavers who were unwilling cited reasons such as the difference in the cost of new and old yarns and the difficulty in calculating the eventual price of the product. More experienced weavers reasoned that the possibility of
shrinkage was greater when different types of yarns were combined and that such combinations might weaken the strength of the textiles.

As there are no commonalities in fibers used in both old and new Mosuo textiles, and it seems that weavers are not averse to using new types of yarns or opposed to combinations of new and old yarns, it can be concluded that specific fibres and yarns are not instrumental in determining the authenticity of Mosuo textiles.

**Quality**

In this study, responses from the weavers were found to be divided equally into three types of response when comparing the quality of old and new Mosuo textiles.

In the first category, weavers found that there were no major differences in the quality between old and new Mosuo hand-woven textiles. They believed that the only difference was a change in the quality of the yarns, with newer yarns giving the impression that the quality of new textiles was better than those from the past.

A third of the weavers stated that the quality of old textiles was better than new ones. Old textiles were considered to be better woven, the selvages were straighter, the density of the weave more even and importantly, they were considered more resilient than newly woven textiles.

The remaining weavers reported that the quality of new textiles was much better than old textiles. As the textiles in the past were made for home use, they did not need to be of a high standard as long as they were functional. Today, Mosuo textiles are made for sale and the quality needs to be good or customers will not be interested in purchasing them.

Nonetheless, regardless of quality of the cloth woven by Mosuo weavers or the age of the cloth, every weaver who was interviewed considered all textiles were authentic Mosuo ones, as long as they were woven by Mosuo women.

Weavers interviewed said that these new textiles (scarves and shawls) do not physically embed any cultural quality as it is not part of their traditional dress. These textile rose from a commercial need, used as a souvenir for tourists to purchase.
Function
The study found that the way in which a Mosuo hand-woven textile is used cannot be employed as a way of identifying authentic Mosuo textiles. From the weavers’ narratives, it was learned that the functions of textiles of the past, namely hemp textiles, were considerably different from those of textiles of today. In the era before ready-made products, most of the domestic textile products were made from hand-woven hemp textiles.

For example, traditional Mosuo national dress was hand-woven from hemp yarns and these were common until the 1960s (Figure 39a & 39b).

![Figure 39a (Left) and 39b (Right): Traditional Mosuo Men and Women’s National Dress in Hemp.](image)

Today, because of the availability of manufactured products and on-going ban on the cultivation of the hemp, the usage of hemp textiles is limited to its ritualistic and symbolic functions.

87% of the respondents reported that the function of Mosuo hand-woven textiles of today is radically different from the function of hemp textiles of the past. They very rarely use their own woven textiles these days. Significantly, scarves and shawls are not
part of their traditional attire and thus, there is no opportunity or desire to wear them. Weavers also noted that hemp textiles could be made into a multiplicity of products that would serve the needs of the household while woven textiles today are just limited to scarves and shawls. Fewer than 10% of weavers lamented the lack of diversity of uses of present-day Mosuo textiles.

The majority of those interviewed (73%) felt that the change of function for Mosuo hand-woven textiles was for the better. Those who felt positive about the change noted that they are now able to sell their products in return for cash. At best, hemp textiles of the past were only used for bartering.

The study also explored perceptions of the use of these textiles by foreign souvenir buyers. Two-thirds of the respondents were not concerned about the way in which foreigners use their hand-woven textiles such as transforming their scarves or shawls into tablecloths or even used as rags. They reasoned that once it has been sold, they have no rights over their product. However, the remaining one-third said that they would be upset to learn that their textiles had been used differently, especially if it were to be degraded as a rag. They would feel hurt to know that their efforts had not been respected.

• Examination of the Production Process of Mosuo Hand-woven Textiles to Identify Markers of Authenticity

Labour
Gender roles are very pertinent matters in Mosuo culture (Section 2.2.1). The research discovered that in Mosuo communities, only women are allowed to weave; Mosuo men cannot, and are not allowed to, weave. All the interviewees reported that according to Mosuo culture and traditions, should a man weave, it would mean the end of his matriarchal family line.

However, Mosuo men are able to assist in the process of weaving. For example, during the UNDP workshop, men from the village were enlisted to help make the reed for the beater (Figure 40).
Therefore, according to respondents, only Mosuo women can weave authentic Mosuo textile. Respondents could not envisage a piece of hand-woven textile woven by a Mosuo man.

Figure 40: Mosuo Men Making Bamboo Reed for the Beater.

The study found that 67% of those interviewed said that they worked alone. However, after considerable in-depth questioning, it was ascertained that the unit of production is in fact the family. In order to confirm the above information, an analysis was carried out to determine whether more mature weavers worked alone or with others. The response was that the more mature weavers usually worked together with the family. One weaver mentioned that weaving is a social activity during which members of the family come together to gossip and share news.

However, weavers also added that there is no restriction preventing weavers from working in the company of others who are not members of their own immediate family. Mosuo weavers are free to choose who they work with. Thus, weaving ‘alone’ or in company (family or non-family members) cannot be used as a marker of authenticity for Mosuo hand-woven textiles.

A quarter of the interviewees who have their own businesses (usually mature weavers) employed others to assist them in their weaving. These said that they needed assistance
when they received orders from the ‘lauban’ – the middle man between the weaver and the shop who orders the textiles.

The nature of the assistance was probed further and it was found that the majority (73%) would not employ a non-member of their community to weave Mosuo textile products. A breakdown of their replies is shown in Table 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Experience</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Weavers</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginners</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>3</td>
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Table 10: ‘Would You Employ a Non-Mosuo Weaving Assistant?’

Only two of the weavers said they would not mind hiring a non-Mosuo person to assist in weaving. However, they would only hire someone from within the village or a person they knew and were able to trust as, in this way, they are assured of the quality of the work. Upon seeking clarification, it was found that ‘assisting’ did not necessarily mean ‘weaving’. It meant doing all tasks other than sitting behind the loom to weave. All of the interviewees said that they would not be happy if the entire textile were woven by a non-Mosuo person as it would no longer be a piece of Mosuo textile. But assistance from a non-Mosuo person is viewed as acceptable.

Therefore, this line of investigation suggested a strong indication for authentic hand-woven Mosuo textiles to be woven by Mosuo person - and by a Mosuo woman, as no men are allowed to weave.

Skills
The research discovered that two out of the three groups of weavers – the expert weavers and those with an intermediate skill level – were best at articulating and sharing their thoughts on Mosuo weaving. Beginners and younger weavers were least able to express themselves. This could be attributed to their lack of experience and knowledge in weaving.

Weavers acknowledged that from the community perspective, it was very important to have good weaving skills to produce good quality textiles for sale. Bad quality hand-
woven textiles will reflect poorly on Mosuo community for they are supposedly known for their weaving skills. They felt that they would ‘lose face’ if they sold poor quality textiles.

However, the skill level of the weaver does not have an impact on the authenticity of the cloth and thus, cannot be considered as a marker of authenticity. Through conversations with the leader of the weaving group, said it was ascertained that both poor and good quality hand-woven Mosuo textiles were authentic as long as they were woven by Mosuo women.

More importantly, the study found that there were no objective standards for Mosuo weaving skills. Hence, there was no formal rule stating that textiles produced with skills below a certain level would not be considered as Mosuo cloth. There existed different levels of weaving skills; 40% of the respondent declared that they have upgraded their skills since they started weaving, through participating in weaving training workshops. When asked whether weavers would like to learn new weaving and designing skills, almost all the weavers requested more training workshops.

Table 11 shows that there are almost equal numbers of weavers who are willing and unwilling to teach weaving skills to non-locals.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Level of Experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expert Weavers</td>
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<td>Intermediate Skilled Weavers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beginners</td>
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<td>33</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Table 11: ‘Are You Willing to Teach a Non-Mosuo Person Weaving Skills?’

The respondents explained that weaving skills are extremely important in Mosuo culture. They are a means of preserving Mosuo culture and tradition. More importantly, they claimed that weaving was a means of identification, differentiation and recognition of being a Mosuo person (since, as previously stated, other ethnic groups in the vicinity do not weave). Also, weaving is a time-honoured tradition because of the passing down of weaving skills from one generation to the next, from mother to daughter. Weaving remains a source of pride for the community.
The weavers commented that if they were to teach weaving skills to other ethnic groups, it would imply losing their cultural heritage and identity, as there would no longer be a means of differentiation between themselves and other groups. Practically, the spread of weaving skills would encourage more competition in their trade.

Those that said that they would be willing (with a majority being expert weavers) to teach weaving to non-Mosuo people cited their cultural code of hospitality. This meant that they were culturally obliged to share their resources if and when requested by non-members of their community. The reasons why expert weavers might be more willing to do so could suggest that they are more secure in their vocation than less experienced weavers.

**Tools and Technology**

The study learned that authentic Mosuo hand-woven textiles could be woven with different types of handloom as long as it is manually operated. The weavers commented that besides the horizontal frame loom, they also have back-strap looms in their homes. However, these are not used today but are dismantled and kept for sentimental reasons as seen in Figure 41.

![Dismantled Pieces of Mosuo Back-Strap Loom](image)

Figure 41: Dismantled Pieces of Mosuo Back-Strap Loom.

Mosuo weavers were pragmatic about the original forms of the loom. Almost all reported that they have changed or modified their looms over the years. For example, when they needed to weave wider cloth such as shawls, the length of the heddles and beaters was extended accordingly. When asked their opinions about the changes and
modifications to their weaving tools and equipment, most of the weavers replied that such changes were good because it enabled them to earn more money and it did not affect the integrity of the cloth.

Weavers also have other weaving tools such as the warping frame, plying and winding wheels. Some of this equipment, such as the winder, was mechanically operated. Respondents reasoned that use of such mechanical tools did not affect the authenticity of the cloth as long as the actual weaving itself is manual.

When asked whether their weaving tools and equipment have any specific meaning, the majority of the artisans replied that they do. Quoting one of the respondents, ‘A loom is like a plough in the field, without a plough one is unable to feed oneself. Similarly, a house must have a loom to clothe the family’. Although no longer relevant in today’s cash economy as they do not weave their own cloth to satisfy their practical needs, the symbolism is still applicable. Having a loom in a family today means that they are able to generate income (to buy clothes, etc.). Also, those interviewed wanted their daughters to inherit their looms as it expressed continuity and the handing over of responsibility to the next generation.

Appealing to the practical nature of Mosuo weavers, they were asked if in the future, there were more efficient, quicker, better quality looms and equipment, would Mosuo weavers be willing to use them? Interestingly, most expert weavers (67%) were reluctant to change their existing weaving equipment for more productive and efficient ones while intermediate skilled weavers (67%) were open to explore means to improve their productivity.

However, both groups agreed that as long as the loom was not mechanized (operated by non-human power), they were willing to consider using it. Older and expert weavers who were interviewed articulated that income generated by using one’s hands is very important. It is meaningful as it symbolizes direct human input where the source of the work can be traced to the individual. If machine operated looms were used, the symbolism of individual contribution would not longer be evident. Hence, the power of the ‘dabu’ would no longer be applicable. At a macro level, it would mean the demise of Mosuo heritage and tradition as a matriarchal society. Also, weavers commented that only the wealthier people in the village were able to afford a mechanized loom. If such
looms were introduced more widely, it would upset the harmony of the community through the widening of the income gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’.

Those who were in favour (46.7%) of using machine-operated looms reasoned that the textiles produced would be only for sale but would not be considered Mosuo textiles. Therefore, this finding was an indication that the ‘hand-woven’ is an important marker of authenticity for Mosuo textiles.

Insightfully, all weavers said that they were able to tell the difference between hand-woven and machine woven textiles. Although machine woven cloths are finer and quality superior, the essence of Mosuo textiles would be lost if they were to be made by machines. Therefore, even though the structures of the Mosuo loom have changed, it remains essentially a manual loom. Machines for winding can also be used as long as the weaving is manually conducted. Within the consciousness of the weaver, looms are very important symbols as they represent Mosuo women’s economic independency, empowerment and the continuation of their cultural heritage and tradition. Finally, it confirms that authentic Mosuo textiles can only be hand- and not machine-woven.

Construction
Authentic Mosuo textiles do not depend on any specific type of construction technique. Hence, although the most common type of weave used is the tabby or plain weave, expert weavers stated that in the past twill weave was also common. Samples of twill-weave textiles were shown but the researcher did not witness anyone using this form of construction method during the field mission.

Interviewees stated that the way in which textiles were constructed has remained the same from the time they began weaving; previous generations of weavers would have used such construction methods to weave their textiles too. However, one expert weaver said that the density of the weave has changed. She explained that the scarves and shawls woven today are denser than textiles of the past. The majority of the weavers was not reflective enough and had not noticed that there had been a change in density of the textiles.
However, almost all (83%) of the weavers interviewed showed an appetite for learning new weaving methods. The sole weaver who was not interested reasoned that as she was already in her 80s she would not absorb new information and knowledge.

The study also found that new types of weave structures would not affect the special quality and uniqueness of Mosuo textiles as seen the responses tabulated in the Table 12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Experience</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Weavers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Skilled Weavers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginners</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: ‘Will New Weaves Affect the Uniqueness of Mosuo Textiles?’

Therefore, the authenticity of Mosuo textiles does not depend on any particular type of weave. Rather, weave structures can be used to weave authentic Mosuo textiles. This can be confirmed by weavers’ interest in learning new types of weaving methods.

Process of Making

While Mosuo culture does not dictate a specific time during the day or seasons to weave, most felt that the best times to weave were during the spring months of March, April and May. Hence, authentic Mosuo textiles do not depend upon being woven during specific periods or seasons.

To weave Mosuo textiles, there are some 11 different stages of production. Different categories of weavers are involved in specific combination of aspects of production ranging from three to nine separate stages. Table 13 shows the different stages of weaving undertaken by the different groups of weavers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Executed By</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Purchase of Yarns</td>
<td>Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Plying of Yarns</td>
<td>Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers</td>
<td>If yarns are un-plied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Winding of Yarns</td>
<td>Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers</td>
<td>If yarns are unwounded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Selection of Combination of Colours | Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers | If colours have not been selected and combined
5. Designing of Product | Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers | To decide what product to weave – scarf or shawl
6. Warping | Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers and Beginners
7. Setting up the Loom | Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers and Beginners
8. Weaving | Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers and Beginners
9. Quality Control | Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers
10. Cutting the textile from the Loom | Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers and Beginners
11. Packaging | Expert Weavers, Intermediate Skilled Weavers

Table 13: Stages and Process in Mosuo Hand-woven Textiles

Core processes (Stages 6, 7, 8 and 10) that are shared by all categories of weavers because these are directly related to weaving. According to interviewees, if one is to weave, it is essential for her to warp up the loom herself, set up the loom and to finally cut the finished cloth from the loom. Working on these tasks ensures fewer mistakes will be made. All other stages of the production are optional, depending on their role.

While 47% of weavers replied that the process of weaving has remained the same, older weavers said that the process had changed. This is because in the past, yarns were unplied and weavers would have to ply the yarns before weaving. Older weavers also commented that the process of weaving for older generations of weavers would have also been different, especially when weaving with hemp fibres.

However, in spite of all these changes, the core activity – weaving – remains the same across the different generations of Mosuo weavers.
Having established the core element of the weavers’ craft, the study examined whether sub-contracting was the practice for Mosuo weavers. The results are tabulated in Table 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Experience</th>
<th>Yes. Sub-contracted</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Weavers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Skilled Weavers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginners</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: ‘Do you Sub-contract Part of Your Weaving Work?’

Only a third of the respondents said that they practice sub-contracting. Most of the sub-contracted work was given to other Mosuo women in the village although this only involves weaving (Stage 8) rather than other processes or stages as described in Table 13.

Only one weaver also mentioned that for a Mosuo textile to be truly Mosuo, she would have to complete the process herself. However, her opinion was not widely agreed upon by other weavers. 67% of the respondents answered that sub-contracting would not affect the nature of Mosuo hand-woven textiles as long as it has been sub-contracted to another Mosuo woman within the community.

When Mosuo weavers faced a particularly difficult task during weaving, the study found that not all weavers would practice symbolic or ritual acts to mitigate against production difficulties. Only one expert weaver was able to point out a symbolic act during the weaving process. She said, ‘When a person is warping, he or she must not be disturbed. The person must be left alone. If she is disturbed or interrupted, the textile will not be well constructed and bad luck will fall upon the family’. When this was mentioned to others, they said they were unaware of such an act. When asked if the absence of such an act would affect the nature of Mosuo hand-woven textiles, all of the weavers replied that it would not.

In summary, the study concludes there are no specific seasons to produce authentic Mosuo textiles, and that although there are different stages in making the cloth, the only stage that is needed to make a cloth authentic is the weaving itself and its related processes by a Mosuo woman. Sub-contracting will also not jeopardize the authenticity of the textile as long as it is woven by another Mosuo woman. Finally, there are no special ritual acts involved in weaving authentic Mosuo cloth.
Examination of the Economy of Mosuo Hand-woven Textiles to Identify Markers of Authenticity

Forms of Exchange
Older weavers explained that in the past Mosuo hemp textiles were used for bartering while younger weavers were of the impression that hemp textiles were only woven for self-use. Novice weavers shared that they were only aware of non-hemp textiles and that these were sold to tourists. By the time the novices had started weaving, the weaving of Mosuo hand-woven textiles had been commercialised.

In the past, as narrated by older weavers, hemp textiles were used in bartering with communities beyond Walabie in order to obtain products that were not available locally. The weavers mentioned that the Han Chinese were their main bartering counter-parts. Today, weaving is still an important economic activity, a means for Mosuo women to supplement their family income by responding to the needs of the tourism sector. Income from weaving is mostly funneled towards the purchase of luxury products such as electronic goods (flat screen televisions), to support education for children, to obtain medication for the sick and elderly, and also to buy products that cannot be obtained or grown in Walabie. Hence, weaving today is not an ‘essential’ activity but one that enables a weaver and her family to afford items beyond their subsistence livelihoods.

Respondents revealed that the way in which weavers traded their cloth had changed since the commercialization of their textiles. During the initial periods of the commercialization of Mosuo textiles, the Mosuo community prospered as the tourism industry boomed in Lugu Lake. A few families from the village with an entrepreneurial spirit invested in retail outlets or signed contracts with retailers to regularly supply hand-woven textiles directly to the shops in Lugu Lake or Lijiang city.

However today, because of the availability of imitation products (mainly machine woven textiles being passed off as hand-woven Mosuo cloth), and due to the lack of differentiation between these textiles, the market of Mosuo hand-woven scarves and shawls has collapsed. Other factors such as the lack of labeling, certification market, label of origin, branding, publicity, and consumer education have also played a part.
Reflecting on the history of Mosuo textiles, it is clear that there were different types of exchange systems but Mosuo weavers have commented that this diversity does not affect the authenticity of Mosuo cloth.

**Time and Value**
Unfortunately, the study found that the interviewees were not able to comprehend the concepts of ‘time and value’. Interestingly, they had immense difficulty in understanding the idea of ‘value’ and to appreciate the difference between ‘value’ and ‘cost’.

Therefore, in the face of this complexity, and due to time limitations, it was decided not to pursue this issue during the interviews.

- Examination of the Context, Setting and Spirit of Mosuo Hand-woven Textiles to Identify Markers of Authenticity

**Site and Geographical Location**
In general, all the weavers interviewed agreed that it was very important for Mosuo textiles to be produced in areas where the Mosuo community lived. Most of the reasons they gave were economically driven. They said that if these textiles were to be produced elsewhere, the greater community would not be able to reap the benefit from the commercialisation of the textiles. Most of the weavers commented that they would not be happy if Mosuo textiles were produced elsewhere as it would ‘take away our business’.

Judging from the responses from weavers, there seems to be a need to geographically indicate authentic Mosuo hand-woven textiles. However, this is further complicated by the non-political definition of Mosuo land and the mobility of the community. These will be discussed later.

87% of the respondents felt that if the textiles were produced by Mosuo women, then they should be considered as Mosuo textiles even if the place of production was not one where Mosuo communities traditionally live. However, if foreigners – non-members of
the Mosuo community – were to move into traditionally Mosuo areas to weave textiles, 80% of the respondents felt that these could not be considered as Mosuo textiles.

Interestingly, when asked what constitutes a ‘Mosuo woman’, most referred to the genealogy of the woman, i.e., the community was able to trace her ancestral roots. One means of tracing her roots was to ascertain from whom she had learned her weaving skills, with most identifying either her mother’s family or her own immediate relatives.

Concept, Context and Meaning
From Phase One the following major influences in recent history on the course of Mosuo textiles were noted:

- Banning of hemp cultivation;
- Transformation of weaving from a self-sufficient, non-commercial activity to one that is engaged with the cash and market economy, and
- Availability of ready-to-weave yarns.

In spite of these changes, the weavers said that weaving practices had remained constant throughout. Importantly, respondents emphasized that only Mosuo women were allowed to weave; men were not even allowed to sit behind the loom. Also, weaving skills could only be transmitted from mothers to daughters, with a culturally enforced ban on teaching their sons to weave.

In answer to the question about which single lesson they would pass on to future generations, all the weavers replied that it would be their weaving skills but telling their daughters to pass these only to their own daughters. Such transmission, according to the respondents, would ensure the continuation of their Mosuo culture and traditions, distinguishing them from other ethnic groups such as the Pumi, the Yi and the Han.

Another significant observation was that weavers are proud of their weaving skills as these enable them to be self-sufficient. As a source of income, the women can provide for their families. Some expert weavers stated that the self-actualization – to think of a textile and then physically produce it – makes them proud of their achievements.
5.1.2 Phase 2

The aggregated information has been tabulated and attached as Appendix F. Following the method of analysis outlined in Chapter Four, the results of this phase are described below.

- Assessment of Identified Markers of Authenticity Based on Indication of Support

Very Strong Evidence (100%)

Table 15 identifies statements where all of the respondents (100%) had agreed on textile characteristics that are definitely markers of authenticity for Mosuo textiles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No</th>
<th>Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Typical Mosuo textiles are hand-woven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am proud because my weaving skills enable me to generate income to subsidize my family’s income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mosuo textiles must be hand-woven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Weaving is not only a way to generate income but also a way to protect Mosuo culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Statements with Very Strong Evidence Supporting Markers of Authenticity for Mosuo Textiles

Strong Indication for Not Supporting Textiles Characteristics as Possible Marker (80 - 99 %) (Table 16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Marker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mosuo hand-woven textiles can be woven using different types of yarns (R)</td>
<td>Material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The authenticity of Mosuo hand-woven textiles does not depend on any particular fibre or type of yarn.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The usage of different colours, motifs and pattern does not affect the authenticity of Mosuo textiles</td>
<td>Colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>An electrical powered-mechanized loom can be used to weave authentic Mosuo textiles (R)</td>
<td>Tools and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Although electrical powered mechanized looms are more productive and efficient, the textiles produced are only for commercial purpose, and they are not authentic Mosuo textiles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Electrical powered-mechanized looms will change the essential traits of Mosuo textiles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Besides tabby/plain weave, new types of weaving construction will not affect the authenticity of Mosuo hand-woven textiles</td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>New types of weaving methods will not affect the uniqueness of Mosuo textiles</td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Authentic Mosuo textiles need not be executed from the beginning to end by the same single Mosuo woman</td>
<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are no special symbolic acts to be conducted/executed for Mosuo textiles to be considered as authentic.

A change in the intended function/usage of Mosuo hand-woven textiles will not affect their authenticity.

Different types of transaction of Mosuo hand-woven textiles will not affect their authenticity.

Upgrading of Mosuo women’s weaving skills will not affect the authenticity of Mosuo hand-woven textiles.

The authenticity of Mosuo textiles does not depend on the size of the textiles.

Table 16: Statements showing Strong Indication that Specific Aspects of Textile Characteristics are Not Markers of Authenticity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Marker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>The most important marker of authenticity in Mosuo hand-woven textiles is that they must be hand-woven by Mosuo women.</td>
<td>Labour; Concept, Context and Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Authentic Mosuo hand-woven textiles need to be woven in places where Mosuo community traditionally resides.</td>
<td>Site and Geographical Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>As long as a Mosuo woman sits behind a loom to weave, all other processes can be changed/modified/substituted and will not affect the authenticity of Mosuo textiles.</td>
<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Mosuo weaving skills can only be transmitted from one Mosuo women to another.</td>
<td>Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hand-weaving is part of Mosuo traditional cultural heritage</td>
<td>Concept, Context and Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>The most important marker of authenticity in Mosuo hand-woven textiles is that they must be hand-woven by Mosuo women.</td>
<td>Labour; Concept, Context and Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Mosuo men cannot weave.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: Statements showing Strong Indication of support for Textile Characteristics as Markers of Authenticity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Marker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I will avoid/refrain from using solid yellow and maroon in the textiles I design and weave, as these are religious colours.</td>
<td>Colour: Yellow and Maroon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Regardless of place, as long as textiles are woven</td>
<td>Labour, Site and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inconclusive Aspects (55 – 79%) (Table 18)
by Mosuo weavers, they will be considered Mosuo hand-woven textiles. | Geographical Location
---|---
36 | Textiles woven by non-Mosuo women in Mosuo villages are not authentic Mosuo hand-woven textiles. | Labour, Site and Geographical Location

Table 18: Textiles Characteristics that are Inconclusive as Markers of Authenticity

No Agreement (55% or Below) (Table 19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Marker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>An authentic Mosuo textile can be woven on any hand-loom; it need not be woven on the family heirloom loom.</td>
<td>Tools and Technology: Heirloom Hand-Looms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Quality is an essential characteristic of Mosuo hand-woven textiles</td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: Textiles Characteristics that Received No Agreement as Markers of Authenticity

- Analysis of Results from Phase 2

Analysis of the results from this phase is framed against the various theories of authenticity described in Chapter Two. Discussions are classified into two categories – Object: Objective / Material and Non-Material and Experience, both from the perspective of the weavers.

Proposed Object: Objective/Material and Non-Material Markers of Authenticity

- Hand-weaving
  
  Hand weaving is one of the strongest markers of authenticity (S/Nos. 1 and 12 in Table 15). The respondents indicate that typical and authentic Mosuo textiles must be hand-woven. If a textile is machine woven, it cannot be considered as authentic Mosuo textile (S/Nos.15, 16 and 17 in Table 16).

- Woven by Mosuo Women in Walabie Village
  
  Because of the linkage and inter-connectivity of labour, site and geographical location, all these factors will be considered within this section of the discussion.

Throughout the research, there has been a strong emphasis by weavers on the fundamental characteristic of Mosuo textiles, that it must be woven by Mosuo women only. However, it was surprising to learn from the closed-structured questionnaire that the statements reflecting this opinion did not received 100%
support from the respondents. For example, regarding the statement ‘Mosuo men cannot weave’ only 78% agreed while 17% disagreed and four percent stated that they did not know (S/No.38, Table 17).

At the end of the session when the researcher penned his thoughts in the reflective journal, analyzed the results and discussed the results with the translator, it was found that the phrasing of such statements was not clear.

Some of these statements were phrased negatively and respondents were confused in having to ‘agree’ to a negative statement in order to express their disagreement. When these statements were read out in the presence of the respondents during the closed-questionnaire exercise, these statements appeared to bewilder some of the weavers; one of the respondents was so confused that she explicitly stated that she did not know and could not understand.

The next day, the translator together with the researcher called upon these weavers to attain clarification (fortunately, the translator noted the names of these weavers as they were very vocal in their concerns). When these statements were presented to them as a positive statement, such as ‘Mosuo men can weave’, they readily disagreed, corresponding with the general opinions of the community.

Therefore, it can be safely concluded that authentic Mosuo hand-woven textiles can only be woven by Mosuo women (S/No. 37, Table 17).

As it was inconceivable for independent Walabie weavers to leave their village and weave elsewhere (and also because the unit of production is the family and not the individual, as described in Section 5.1.1), they have indicated that authentic Mosuo hand-woven textiles need to be woven in places where the Mosuo community traditionally resides and with particular relevance to this study, in Walabie village (S/No. 34, Table 17). As observed in Yeh (2001) and referred to in Section 2.2.1, residency in the community is important in establishing the identity of a Mosuo person as it facilitates the practice of Mosuo culture.
Interestingly if a non-Musuo weaver comes into a Mosuo village, a significant majority of respondents said that any textiles produced by that individual would not be regarded as authentic (S/No.36, Table 18). Hence, physical location itself does not entitle an outsider to weave Mosuo authentic cloth.

Proposed Subjective Abstract/Intangible Markers of Authenticity (Existential Experience by Weavers/Communities)

From the weavers’ perspective, markers of authenticity also incorporate the following intangible characteristics:

- **Meaning and Spirit of Weaving**
  The findings (S/No. 29 in Table 15 and S/No. 3 in Table 17) indicate that when a Mosuo weaver sits at the looms to weave, although the cloth is capable of generating an income, the act is also part of her culture.

  From conversations with elders in the community and in observing the weavers, there was a sense that weaving is an intrinsic part of Mosuo culture. For example, in every household, there is a loom and someone is always weaving. When asked to show their work, they were eager and full of pride, often emphasising that weaving is a traditional Mosuo skill. Elders in the village and other officials often comment that weaving in this region is unique to the Mosuo as no other communities in the region engage in it. Observations in Walabie also found that little girls often play with yarns, mimicking weaving activities. Building on notes made at the time in the reflective journal, it is proposed that although the Mosuo weaver does not express it explicitly, at some level in her consciousness, she realizes that with every textile she makes, she is contributing to the preservation, conservation and protection of her Mosuo culture and traditions. Her skill and knowledge of weaving identifies her as a Mosuo person, differentiating herself from other ethnic groups living within the vicinity of Walabie.

  Significantly, the study proposes that weaving is embedded with symbolism of ‘becoming’ a Mosuo (Vannini and Williams, 2009) as an individual, as part of her family and being a member of Mosuo community. When weaving in this context and in such a spirit, the cloth she produces is authentic. Furthermore,
through this piece of cloth, she is able to provide for her family, signifying her contribution in a matriarchal society (S/No. 4, Table 15).

Transmission of Skills

The way in which weaving skills are transmitted to a weaver is very important as it defines authenticity in her work (S/No. 27, Table 17). There is strong support for the proposition that authentic Mosuo hand-woven textiles can only be realized if, and only if, weaving skills are transmitted from one generation of Mosuo women to another. This inter-generational transmission of knowledge and skills enables a continuation of Mosuo identity and acts as a binding element of the community. Importantly, as weaving continues to be practiced, it further enforces the identity of the community through successive generations (Trilling, 1972). From the matriarchal culture, coupled with the strict codes for gender division of labour (men are not allowed to weave), it is possible to understand why respondents maintain that their only source of weaving knowledge is other Mosuo women and it would be unconceivable that a Mosuo man would be knowledgeable about weaving.

Also, as the researcher learned from speaking to other members of the community, the transmission of skills is one means of tracing a weaver’s lineage or genealogy, a proof that she is a real Mosuo woman.

Yet, interestingly, during the UNDP weaving training workshop conducted concurrently with this investigation, Walabie weavers and the respondents were keen to learn new weaving techniques from non-Mosuo trainers such as the (male) investigator. They were not concerned that receiving such interventions would endanger the authenticity of their products.

The tentative conclusion from this study is that weaving skills and techniques could be transferred by anyone except Mosuo men. Learning to weave from Mosuo men would render the eventual product non-authentic.
Physical Characteristics that Cannot be Considered as Markers of Authenticity

- Materials
  The statements (S/No. 6 and 7 in Table 16) reveal that Mosuo hand-woven textiles can be woven using different types of yarn. As the study shows, throughout the history of Mosuo weaving, different yarns were employed ranging from hemp and acetate to mercerized cotton. As such, authentic Mosuo textiles are not identified with just one or any specific type of yarn. Therefore, specific yarns cannot be considered as a marker for identifying authentic Mosuo hand-woven textiles.

- Form, Design, Motifs, Patterns and Colours
  There is a strong indication of support that it would not be possible for one to determine the authenticity of Mosuo textiles by merely examining their size and shape (S/No.13, Table 16). Mosuo woven scarves and shawls are new products produced for the tourist market. The form, size and shape of these products are different from the rolls of hand-woven hemp textiles that they used to weave. Yet, both types of products are authentically Mosuo. Therefore, size, shape and form are not reliable indicators of authenticity for Mosuo hand-woven textiles.

Motifs and patterns are also not credible markers of authenticity (S/No.10, Table 16) as both decorated textiles of the past and plain textiles of today are considered as authentic Mosuo textiles.

The authenticity of Mosuo hand-woven textiles is not dependent on any specific colour (S/No.10, Table 16). The colour concept of ‘qi-cai’ or seven colours seem to satisfy tourists’ perception of Mosuo aesthetic without any relation to Mosuo’s own authentic values. The selection of colours for scarves and shawls is mainly based on personal preferences and hence, any authentic Mosuo textiles can be in any colour.

This could be due to the simple dyeing culture used by the Mosuo weavers. They practiced limited dyeing in their work and most hemp textiles in the past were not dyed. If coloured yarns were used, these were mainly imported. Therefore, the development of their colour palate is simple and Mosuo peoples do not observe strict colour rules, at least not on woven textiles. Hence, there is a
strong indication that use of specific colours or colour combinations is not a candidate marker of authenticity for Mosuo textiles.

Tools and Technology

There is a clear indication that when textiles are woven on electrically powered mechanized looms, they will not be considered as authentic Mosuo textiles. Reinforcing this proposal, 96% of respondents replied that although such looms are recognized as more productive and efficient, the textile products are only made for a commercial purpose; they are not authentically Mosuo textiles (S/No. 15, 16 & 17 in Table 16). Moreover, from the interviews, it appears that weavers are reluctant to use electrically operated looms because this would jeopardize the harmony and sense of equality in Walabie. Therefore, in order to retain the harmony within the community, none of the weavers would consider weaving with electrically powered mechanized looms with textiles woven by such looms being considered inauthentic.

Apart from the electrically powered mechanized loom, the Mosuo weavers use different types of handloom (S/No14, Table 19). Furthermore, the structure of these looms is not static. Alterations have been made on looms to enable them to weave different thicknesses of yarn, different densities and different widths of textiles. Hence, there is no one form of loom to weave authentic Mosuo hand-woven textiles. As long as it is woven by a Mosuo woman on a handloom, the textile produced will be considered to be authentically Mosuo.

Other than not using electrically powered mechanized looms, other types of mechanization will not affect the authenticity of Mosuo textiles. For example, some families were using electric plying and winding machines to assist them in their weaving. The employment of these machines does not affect the authenticity of Mosuo textiles.

Construction

The evidence points to an inability to identify authentic Mosuo textiles through the way they are constructed (S/No. 18 and 19, Table 16). This is because Mosuo hand-woven textiles can be constructed using different types of weaves and also, new types of construction methods will not affect the authenticity of
Mosuo textiles. Examining the Mosuo weaving culture from a historical perspective, although the most widely used weave is the plain/tabby weave, twill weave has also been used by the Mosuo weavers, even though the latter’s use has been limited. Significantly, weavers in Walabie village were keen to learn new weaving techniques with the possibility of incorporating new designs into their textiles. Examples of such new innovative weaves are seen below in Figures 42a and 42b. Yet, all these textiles with new weave designs are recognized as authentically Mosuo.

![Mosuo Hand-woven Textiles New Weave](image)

Figure 42a & 42b: Mosuo Hand-woven Textiles New Weave

- Process of Making

It would appear that an authentic Mosuo hand-woven textile remains authentic even if all stages of production are modified and changed to render weaving of the cloth more efficient. Therefore, the process of making is not likely to be a candidate indicator of authenticity.

Significantly, it is not at all necessary for a single weaver to complete a hand-woven textile from beginning to end for it to be considered authentic (S/No. 22, Table 16). Furthermore, as explained earlier, some weaving processes require two persons to complete them, which blurs the line between individual and group work. As weaving is also a social activity and not a formal industrial process; the fluidity of work argues against the concept of the individual as the unit of production.

Finally, it is highly unlikely that the authenticity of Mosuo textiles is dependent on any symbolic acts (S/No. 23, Table 16). There are no rituals or rites for a weaver to perform before, during or after the weaving process to be considered as a Mosuo textile.
Function
The study has demonstrated that the functions of the cloth cannot be engaged as a marker of authenticity for Mosuo hand-woven textiles (S/No. 31, Table 16). The versatility of Mosuo textiles can be attributed to the beginnings of Mosuo textile culture when hemp textiles were made into a variety of household products including bags, sacks, cushions, covers, saddle cushions, straps, clothes, etc. Similarly today, there is no specified usage for Mosuo hand-woven textiles.

Forms of Exchange
It is highly unlikely that the way in which Mosuo hand-woven textiles are transacted could affect their authenticity (S/No. 32, Table 16). This is evident throughout the history of Mosuo textiles.

Skills
Concerning the identification of skills as a means of recognizing authenticity, there is a strong indication of support for the proposition that upgrading of weaving skills will not affect the authenticity of Mosuo hand-woven textiles (S/No. 26, Table 16). Both poor quality and good quality hand-woven textiles are authentically Mosuo. However, because of the inter-connectedness and strong linkage between the weavers, the identity of the community and their cloth, poor quality hand-woven textiles are an embarrassment to them.

Inconclusive/ No Agreement on Markers of Authenticity for Mosuo Textiles:

Colour: Yellow and Maroon
Statement S/No. 11, Table 18 has 65% of the respondents said that they would avoid or refrain from using yellow and maroon in their textiles. Therefore, support for the absence of use of these two colours in the identification of authentic Mosuo hand-woven textiles is inconclusive.

Migration of Mosuo Weavers to a Non-Traditional Mosuo Area
When a Mosuo weaver moves away from a traditional Mosuo area, her work might not be considered as authentically Mosuo as only slightly more than half (57%) said that the textiles she weaves in these non-traditional regions would be
considered as such (S/No. 35, Table 18). Hence, the decision as to whether such a piece of woven textile is Mosuo is inconclusive.

The ambiguity of this is attributed to the porosity of being Mosuo. This study has shown only those women whose lineage or genealogy can be traced are considered as Mosuo, and then be proved through the transmission of skills from her ancestors.

However, as explained by reference to Yeh (2001) in Section 2.2.1, being a Mosuo or not is based on the usage of the language, the practice of Mosuo religion or way of life. Hence, through inter-marriage, a foreigner could become a Mosuo person if and when the person speaks the language and conducts his or her way of living according to its practices. Following this logic, after becoming a Mosuo person, the products of her weaving, although genetically and biologically non-Mosuo, could be considered as authentically Mosuo.

To further confuse the issue, when a Mosuo person moves away from traditionally Mosuo areas but retains her cultural practices, in theory, she could still be considered as a Mosuo person. Thus, her weaving would be authentically Mosuo. Yet, according to Yeh (2001) residency in the community is also important because being a Mosuo involves interaction in the community.

These rules are unspoken and non-institutionalized. Further aggravated by their non-legal and non-political status, the comprehension of being a Mosuo is generally tacit. Therefore, when the study presented the variables of labour, site and geographical location for consideration as markers of authenticity for Mosuo textiles, confusion arose with no apparent conclusion among the respondents.

Tools and Technology – Heirloom Looms

There is no agreement on whether weaving on a family heirloom contributes to the authenticity of Mosuo textiles, with just over half of the respondents disagreeing with the proposition (S/No. 14, Table 19).
5.1.3 Discussion

With reference to the concept of notationality (Goodman, 1976; Winglet, 2005), Mosuo textiles do not follow any prescribed symbolic system. Each piece of work is individually made, as an expression of the weaver’s inner thoughts and ‘autographic’ (Goodman, 1976) in nature. Therefore, according to this concept, scarves and shawls woven by Mosuo are indeed authentic. Furthermore, Benjamin’s concept of aura (1936) can be applied as no two pieces are exactly identical.

Examining the physical characteristics of Mosuo hand-woven textiles through the lens of theories such as the Object Being and Object Authenticity (Sagoff, 1978), Toured Objects (Kolar and Zabkar, 2010), Cool Authenticity (Selwyn, 1996), Conspicuous Authenticity (Love and Sheldon, 1998), the study found that there are no unifying physical attributes between old and new Mosuo textiles. One of the most obvious differences is in the types of yarns used. Old Mosuo textiles are woven from hemp. Moreover, old Mosuo textiles are decorated with supplementary weft designs which are not present in today’s cloth. Hence, modern Mosuo textiles do not resemble the cloth of the past in any form or means. Lastly, the functions of the cloth have also changed. Today, the textile is woven as scarves and shawls for sale, and not intended for domestic use, which was the primary function of weaving in the past. Therefore, Mosuo textiles do not embrace the principles of Conservative Conception (Cohen, 1998[b]; Cohen, 1993) as new textiles do not follow the forms or functions of old material.

Comparing textiles of today as woven by various weavers, Mosuo weavers do not pay particular attention to unifying the physical attributes of the cloth apart from ensuring that the size and the yarn count of the cloth is suitable for scarves and shawls. Therefore, one could propose, using the above theories, that size and count of the textiles could be candidate markers of authenticity because they are uniform physical characteristics to be found in all Mosuo textiles. However, this study argues that it is not a credible marker because these attributes can change, depending on the design. For example, the size is pre-determined by its function and thus, if the function of the textiles changes, such as from a scarf to a tablecloth, would it mean that the cloth could no longer be authentic as the size is no longer similar to that of a scarf?

Surprisingly, the one uniform characteristic observed is that because the textile is hand-woven, there are imperfections such as uneven selvage, inconsistent tension,
imbalanced designs, etc. In the view of Carroll and Wheaton (2008), it is because of these variations and the presence of these imperfections that these textiles are indeed authentic.

Concerning the colours of Mosuo textiles, if analyzed through the paradigm of Object: Objective / Material authenticity, it would be concluded that colour is definitely not a credible marker of authenticity as there is no one colour that unites all Mosuo textiles. However, when employing Constructive Authenticity theory (Burner, 1989; Hughes, 1995; Cohen, 1988[a]; Olsen, 2002), a story emerges that perhaps, in the eyes of both the tourists and weavers, ‘seven-colours’ or ‘qicai’ could be a marker of authenticity. This is because of the growing belief by tourists that these colours (the combination, number and intensity of colours) are perceived as Mosuo textile characteristics. Such colour schemes could eventually be considered as authentic through Conspicuous Authenticity theory (Love and Sheldon, 1998) when distinguishing Mosuo textiles from other types of hand-woven cloth made by Chinese ethnic minorities.

In examining authenticity according to the Liberal Concept framework (Cohen, 1988[b]; 1993), it is noted that apart from the actual weaving itself, weavers do not uniformly execute the same process. Even the type of looms used to weave differs, as both back-strap and horizontal frame looms can be used. Furthermore, the structures of these looms have also been modified to accommodate changes in the textile.

From the weavers’ personal perspective, it can be acknowledged that all the respondents feel good about their weaving skills and the cloth they make. There exists a sense of pride in knowing that their works are appreciated as they are sold commercially. The money generated enables them to be self-sufficient and provides an income for their families. Also, weaving is personally meaningful as it is part of a self-actualization process. Significantly, weaving is part of who they are, a defining element of being a Mosuo woman. From this perspective, Existential Authenticity (Wang, 1999) is evident and in the eyes of Existentialist philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Sartre, Mosuo weavers would be seen as authentic persons, who choose to live their lives, reflecting and acting in synchrony with their individual, social and cultural values.

Beyond their individual self, it is also important to consider weaving and authenticity from a social-cultural standpoint as a collective experience. Hence, reflecting through
the concept of Nominal and Expressive Authenticity (Dutton, 2003), weavers’ intentions will give insights concerning how they reason what authenticity means in the context of their work and product.

The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) identifies one of the aspects of authenticity as the ‘spirit and feelings’ as acknowledged by the peoples who produce an object. Using this insight, the individual intentions of the weaver are superimposed on the concept, context and meaning of weaving from the community’s understanding and also in its relationship with other communities. Therefore, to truly appreciate the authenticity of Mosuo textiles, it is important to understand the spirit in which the textile is woven. The meaning and the spirit of weaving for the Mosuo community will be examined at three levels: the macro (national), meso (communal) and micro (individual) levels.

At the macro level, seen against the course of history, the context of Mosuo society has changed, in tandem with the macro changes of China as a nation state. From the formation of The People’s Republic of China in 1949 and through more recent periods of history such as the Collectivisation and the Cultural Revolution eras from 1956 to 1981, and the rapid liberalization in today’s economy, the Mosuo community has managed to retain its culture, identity and traditional heritage. However, on account of Mosuo’s non-legal and non-political status within China’s official listing of Ethnic Minorities, there is a more urgent need for the community to establish itself as a separate entity, albeit informally and without official sanction.

As weaving is an integral part of Mosuo’s culture and an expression of their identity, Mosuo weavers are determined to preserve this heritage as a means to voice and practice their distinctiveness. Weaving, within the macro perspective, is a tenacious political representation of being Mosuo, a call for recognition and acknowledgement through their material culture of hand-woven textiles. These can be related to their replies in Phase One stating that if there was one lesson they would like to pass on to future generations, it would be their weaving skills which could only be transmitted from mothers to daughters, as this is the one distinctive cultural factor that sets them apart from other ethnic groups in the region.

At a meso / communal level, weaving represents a Mosuo woman’s economic and symbolic position as head of household, reinforced by the matriarchal culture of the
Mosuo society. The matriarchal culture in return contributes to their community’s distinctiveness and strengthens their identity regionally, separating them from other neighbouring peoples. Seen from this perspective, weaving is both a cultural phenomenon as well as a physical expression of their matriarchal culture.

Because of the onward march of commercialism in the form of tourism, the contention is that the change of the mode of production from subsistence agriculture to tourism would effectively impact on Mosuo’s matrilineal culture (Section 2.2.3). Thus, weaving in this new context is no more than tokenism of Mosuo’s matriarchal culture as a tourism attraction, suggesting that the economic reasons might be an equally strong driver for the Mosuo women to weave, with the matrilineal aspect being part of the economic strategy, rather than cultural identity.

This strict demarcation of weaving as women’s work in spite of commercialisation appears unusual. From the researcher’s extensive experience of working with other Asian communities who hand-weave textiles such as in Bali, it certainly appears that in most traditional societies, weaving is usually to be found in the women’s domain. However, once weaving becomes a commercial activity, men, in these societies, seem to take over the work. It could be argued that following the commercialisation of Mosuo hand-woven textiles through tourism development, men could take over the task of weaving. However, as this study shows, weaving is still very much within the domain of Mosuo women. This study proposes that the barring of men from weaving could be attributed to the importance and strength of Mosuo matriarchal culture.

Furthermore, tourism has also strengthened Mosuo’s identity (Horth, 2002; Stacey 2009) rather than their cultural identity being subsumed by commercialisation. Mosuo weaving, as both a production activity and a symbolic representation of authority, preceded the arrival of tourism. Thus, Mosuo weaving today does not owe its existence to tourism. Rather, Mosuo women drawing on their cultural resources, knowledge and skills, and working in tandem with the development of tourism, have empowered themselves.

As seen in Section Five, 13% of the population in Walabie are weavers. The study witnessed that during the UNDP weaving workshop in 2012, the response to an invitation to take part from younger women (below the age of 30) was overwhelming,
considering that the participation at the workshop was voluntary. This demonstrates that younger Mosuo women were still interested in weaving.

Echoing the positive impact of tourism on Mosuo culture (noted in Section 2.2.3), this study adopts an optimistic view maintaining that the form of matriarchy is fluid and adaptable to changing circumstances. This is evident in Mosuo’s weaving; although no longer undertaken to clothe their family members, weaving is still a means of contribution, fulfilling its symbolic representation in a matriarchal household.

At the micro / individual level, besides being an existential experience which defines and identifies a weaver as a Mosuo woman, as stated above, weaving is both an economic and authority symbol, beyond the concept of work, strengthening their positions at the head of households. Therefore, it is seen as an essential skill to pass on to their daughters to enable them to achieve the same status and to continue the Mosuo tradition.

From this perspective, it is possible to see how the transmission of weaving skills and knowledge from one generation of Mosuo women to the next can be a strong marker of authenticity for Mosuo hand-woven textiles. Only women hold the repository of weaving knowledge. The passing of such knowledge through generations is a testament to their heritage, a constant throughout the major disruptions in the macro environment, and a precious asset in today’s world.

Therefore, today’s genuine piece of a Mosuo hand-woven textile can only be woven through the knowledge and skills passed down from other women, in an unbroken link to the remote past.

The importance of a Mosuo woman’s weaving, as a marker of authenticity, takes precedence over the place of production. As a non-entity within the Chinese framework of ethnic groups, there is also no ‘legal’ place that can be defined as a ‘Mosuo Land’. At best, ‘Mosuo Land’ is associated with Lugu Lake as a marketing proposition advanced by the tourism industry. According to experts (Gatusa, 2005; Lee and Zhao, 2008; Shih, 2010), the true Mosuo cultural heart land is Yongning, and yet, this place is totally off the tourism map. Hence, as Mosuo cannot lay claim to any legally or politically recognized lands, it is far more important to distinguish themselves culturally than
geographically. The physical expression of their matrilineal culture is realized through the Mosuo woman’s hand weaving of textiles, with authenticity not determined simply by weaving in a specific place populated by Mosuo peoples.

These sentiments echo Cohen’s (1979; 2007) view of authenticity reflecting a customary practice, a continuous flow of life without interruptions or intrusion. It constitutes a Mosuo’s core value and weaving is an aspect of its spiritual core and ultimate meaning.

5.1.4 Interim Conclusion
Depending on the lens employed and theory used, the physical examination of Mosuo scarves and shawls yield markers of authenticity that are non-conclusive. Instead, in order to produce markers of authenticity that are constant, credible and universal, it is important to draw upon both the existential experience of the weaver and also the context and spirit of what weaving means in the Mosuo community.

Within this framework, the markers of authenticity of Mosuo textiles are far more sophisticated than initially conceived. The markers of authenticity for such cloth are intangible, remaining invisible to the outsider. When each textile is woven in the spirit and the context of Mosuo’s reality – and seen in its macro, meso and micro perspectives, it embeds and tells a story of the Mosuo people. It is a story that is founded on the tenacious spirit of the people in the midst of a challenging environment, and is also a story of pride and integrity with women placed in the centre of private and public spheres.

Therefore, this research proposes that when a (necessarily female) Mosuo weaver weaves a textile in such a spirit, the textile is authentically Mosuo, regardless of its physical form, function or the process of production.