Barbara A. Anderson

Demographic and Social Characteristics of Nationalities in Yunnan Province, China: Cultural Diversity and Development Indicators

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Abstract

Many scholars have assumed a simple relationship between different indicators of social and demographic development. The Princeton European Fertility Project severely criticized this approach, and later work by anthropologists has also criticized this simple view. But much extant work continues to embody a unilinear view of all aspects of development.

This paper examines demographic and social indicators of development of the eight largest nationalities in Yunnan Province, based on micro-data from the 1982 and 1990 Censuses of China. Yunnan Province had the largest number of different nationalities in substantial numbers of any Chinese province, the largest eight of which had more than 500,000 members in Yunnan in 1990.

It was found that social and demographic measures did not vary together in the way many scholars have expected. For example, it has been suggested that nationalities for which there is a highly masculine sex ratio at birth will also have a large disparity in the chances of boys and girls to attend school. There was little evidence of this. Hui had a very high sex ratio at birth but almost equal chances of boys and girls attending school.

The total fertility rate in 1989-90 for the eight nationalities ranged from a low of 2.3 for the Han to a high of 3.5 for the Miao. Five of the eight nationalities showed a sex ratio at birth in 1989-90 above 107 male births per 100 female births, which is strong evidence that members of these nationalities were doing something to limit the number of female infants reported in the census. Although Han exhibited the lowest total fertility rate, the Dai, an almost totally rural nationality with a relatively low level of education had the second lowest total fertility rate.

There were substantial improvements in education between 1982 and 1990. Between 1982 and 1990, the proportion of both boys and girls who had ever attended school increased for every nationality. Some have suggested that as the economic value of children increases, school enrollment will decline, especially for girls. There is no sign of declines in school attendance in the period immediately before 1990. There was no evidence that the increased economic value of children led to any decrease in school enrollment of girls.

For every nationality, boys were more likely to attend school than girls. Although the size of the gap in education by gender tended to decline between 1982 and 1990, there were large differences among groups. Some groups, such as Bai, with very high school attendance for boys, had a wider gender gap than groups, such as Dai, with lower levels of school attendance for boys.

Females age 35-39 in 1990 in every nationality except Han and Dai showed a lower proportion who ever attended school than members of adjacent cohorts. Those age 35-39 in 1990 were age 10 in the early 1960’s, at the time of the famine and its aftermath. These events seem to have had a stronger effect on the education of members of minority nationalities than on Han. This points to the special vulnerability of members of minority nationalities to the effects of economic and social hardship.

Data Used: 1% Sample of 1982 Census of China for Yunnan Province and 12.1% Sample of 1990 Census of China for Yunnan Province.
Many scholars have assumed a simple relationship between different aspects of social and demographic development. The Princeton European Fertility Project showed that in Europe there was not a direct relation between achievement of some level of socio-economic development and an increase in female age at marriage or voluntary limitation of fertility. Variables related to differences in cultural preferences, as indicated by region, language, or ethnic group membership, were important in distinguishing population subgroups that differentially responded to development (Anderson 1986; Coale and Watkins 1986).

Work since the Princeton European Fertility Project has increasingly focused on the way in which cultural differences matter for demographic outcomes, especially in the area of desire to limit fertility. Much of this work has focused on population-anthropological interrelations. Especially influential has been Caldwell’s work in South India. He has argued that given the nature of the social structure in South Indian villages, it is rational for a woman to do everything possible to assure that at least one son survives to adulthood, even if this means she has more children than she would otherwise desire (Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1988; also see Vlassoff 1990).

Policy-makers have also often assumed that development has inevitable effects. At the World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974, the slogan was "Development is the best contraceptive" (World Population Plan of Action 1975). This slogan both expressed dissatisfaction with family planning programs that had little concern with overall economic and social development, but it also expressed the view that development by itself would necessarily lead to desires on the part of the population to limit fertility and to the ability to effectively implement fertility limitation.

At the World Population Conference in Cairo in 1994, there was a concern with the expansion of population concerns beyond family planning to other areas. This was especially articulated in the area of reproductive health, but the concern more generally was with how the welfare of minority nationalities and of women can be improved. Much of the thrust of the arguments was that improving the situation of minority nationalities and of women is simply a matter of resource allocation. The assumption was often that as social and economic development proceeds, a highly interrelated set of social and demographic changes will take place and that if sufficient monies are spent social welfare will improve, fertility will decline, and the situation of women will become better (United Nations 1994).¹

This paper illustrates the point that social and demographic indicators of development do not always vary together. The complexity of the actual interrelations among various aspects of development is often obscured by consideration of the total population of a geographic area. Differences among nationalities² are often interpreted as being simply the result of differential access to resources among the groups. However, nationalities also differ in attitudes and preferences that affect the way in which development proceeds.

This paper examines demographic and social characteristics of the eight largest nationalities in Yunnan Province, based on micro-data from the 1982 and 1990 Censuses of China. Yunnan is located in southwest China, bordering on Burma, Laos, and Vietnam. The population in thousands of these groups

¹ For a discussion of this general assumption, see Greenhalgh (1994). For criticism of the view that socio-economic development necessarily leads to improvement in women’s lives, see Bradley (1995).

²The term "nationality" is used in the sense it is used in China. It is roughly equivalent to the Western use of the term "ethnic group.” Nationality does not refer to citizenship in a separate country.
in Yunnan in 1982 and 1990 is shown in Table 1. Although the majority of the population of Yunnan in both 1982 and 1990 was comprised of Han, each of these eight nationalities numbered more than 500,000 in Yunnan in 1990.

Table 1. Total Population and Population of Eight Largest Nationalities in Yunnan Province in 1982 and 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32,518</td>
<td>36,748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>22,221</td>
<td>24,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miao</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi</td>
<td>3,329</td>
<td>3,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhuang</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bai</td>
<td>1,126</td>
<td>1,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hani</td>
<td>1,068</td>
<td>1,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dai</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>981</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relation of Social and Demographic Development Indicators

Three measures of social development, a measure of demographic development, and two measures of the extent of male preference are considered for each of the eight nationalities. Table 2 shows the value of each indicator for each nationality.

In Table 2, the nationalities are ranked by their "development" on each indicator, from the most developed on the given indicator at the top to the least developed on the indicator at the bottom. The value of the indicator for the given nationality appears under the nationality’s name. The name of each nationality is listed in its place for each indicator, and its value on that indicator appears below it. "Han" is shown in bold face type. The rankings are shown with the most developed value for the indicator ranked first and the least developed value ranked eighth.

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3 The author used a 1% sample from individual records from the 1982 Census of China for Yunnan Province and a 12.1% sample from the individual records from the 1990 Census of China for Yunnan Province. For a discussion of data quality in the 1990 Census of China, see Banister (1994), Jiang, Li, and Sun (1994), and Zhang and Cui (1994).
Table 2. Rank and Values of Nationalities in Yunnan on Some Development Indicators in 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>% Rural</th>
<th>% Boys 7-15 Ever in School</th>
<th>Health Personnel per 10,000 Population</th>
<th>Total Fertility Rate</th>
<th>Sex Ratio at Birth</th>
<th>% Girls/%Boys Age 7-15 Ever in School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Developed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>101.3</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bai</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Hui</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>106.3</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zhuang</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Bai</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>106.5</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yi</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Zhuang</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yi</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>108.6</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yi</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Yi</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>110.4</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yi</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Dai</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>110.6</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daia</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Hani</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>111.4</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hani</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Miao</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>112.6</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least Developed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Hani</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Miao</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>112.6</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Rank of Nationalities in Yunnan for Some Development Indicators in 1990
In the 1990 census of China, there are four levels of rural-urban designation: (1) large city, (2) small city, (3) county of city, and (4) county of prefecture. "County of prefecture" is the most rural designation. In this paper, "rural" is defined as residing in a "county of prefecture" location. The general development literature maintains that economic development leads to an increase in the proportion living in urban places.

Residence in a rural area in China is substantially the result of the population registration system, rather than simply a result of where people choose to live. Although the proportion living in urban places in China has increased with time, it might have increased more rapidly if there were not a population registration system. One purpose of the population registration system was to avoid some of the problems of "too rapid" urbanization that have occurred in other developing countries. The population registration system in China has led to people with levels of skill remaining in rural areas that might otherwise lead them to live in urban places, in China remaining in rural places.

For a discussion of this in the area of the location of health personnel, see Zhang et al. (1995).

In this paper, people are coded as having attended school at some time if their reported educational attainment is higher than the census category "Illiterate or semi-literate." For a discussion of educational status based on data from the 1990 Census of China, see Weng and Dong (1994).

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5 In this paper, people are coded as having attended school at some time if their reported educational attainment is higher than the census category "Illiterate or semi-literate." For a discussion of educational status based on data from the 1990 Census of China, see Weng and Dong (1994).
and communication skills in light of different views of health and illness. Also, members of minority nationalities may speak only their own native language. It is important that health personnel be available who can communicate with patients in a common language. Therefore, it is thought desirable to provide nationalities with health personnel who are members of that nationality, even though members of one nationality could receive health care from members of another nationality.

The indicator of development in the health care area by nationality used in this paper is the number of health personnel who are members of the given nationality per 10,000 members of that nationality. Having a higher number of indigenous health personnel per 10,000 is coded as more developed. The Hui and Han together have the highest level of availability of indigenous health personnel. In addition, since both the Han and Hui have Chinese as native language, there is little problem with communication between health personnel from one of these groups and patients from members of the other group. Groups with a high level of indigenous health personnel also tended to have a high proportion of boys in school.

**The Total Fertility Rate**

An important part of demographic development is a decline in fertility. The total fertility rate in a population in a given year is the number of births that a woman would have if she passed through her life exposed to the age-specific fertility rates of women in that population at that date. A major part of examination of the modern decline in fertility is the decline in the total fertility rate. Having a lower total fertility rate is coded as more developed. With fairly low mortality, a total fertility rate of about 2.2 is necessary to maintain an unchanging population size.

Reduction of fertility has been a major goal of population policy in China. The later-longer-fewer policy was introduced in 1971 (Chen 1981), but active promotion and enforcement of family planning regulations increased in 1979, with application to more minority nationalities in 1982 (Chen 1981; Greenhalgh 1989).

The Han and members of nationalities with more than ten million members in China as a whole have been under the most strict family planning guidelines, although there has been a great deal of provincial and local-level discretion as to how family planning is implemented (Bannister 1987; Chen 1981; Greenhalgh 1986). Only the Zhuang minority group had over ten million members in all of China in 1982 and thus, in principle, was under similar family planning targets as Han. Most Zhuang live in Guangxi-Zhuang Autonomous Region, which is east of Yunnan. Zhuang in Yunnan have not been under the same strict family planning rules as Zhuang in Guangxi.

Although the Han had the lowest total fertility rate of the eight nationalities, the Dai, who were almost

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6 There were policies in Yunnan to promote knowledge of local languages by health personnel. However, many regions of Yunnan contain several different nationalities, each with their own native language.

7 In this study, "health personnel" are defined as those whose occupation in the census is reported as "doctor," "nurse," or "health technician," regardless of their educational attainment. This is different from the practice in overall official Chinese statistics on health personnel, in which a more restrictive definition of health personnel is employed, which excludes those with a low level of education. The number of health personnel per 1,000 population is more commonly used in the literature. This paper uses the number of health personnel per 10,000 population due to the low value of this indicator, in order to avoid using decimal points to present values.
totally rural and only covered by family planning rules fairly recently, had the second lowest total fertility rate. The low fertility of Dai and their recent rapid fertility decline has been commented upon elsewhere (Zhang 1994).8

**Sex Ratio at Birth**

The sex ratio at birth is the number of male births per 100 female births. Although there is some variation among populations in this figure, the value for populations in which nothing is being done to influence the sex ratio at birth is thought to lie at 107 or lower. 9

A preference for male children sometimes is expressed as an excess of male infants. In the past, such an excess of male infants was often achieved by female infanticide or neglect, with the existence of the female infant never reported. In China and elsewhere in Asia where excessively masculine sex ratios at birth are observed, sex-selective abortion is thought to be the main mechanism by which this occurs, although the role of other mechanisms, such as unrecorded adoptions, has also been extensively discussed for China.10

Population policy has been cited by many scholars as a reason for very masculine sex ratios at birth in China. However, Korea, Taiwan, and other areas in Asia have also reported extremely masculine sex ratios at birth, even though they do not have similar population policies to China (Kim 1994; McDonald 1991; Park and Cho 1995; World Health Organization 1992; Zeng et al. 1993). It is generally thought that with development the strength of male preference will decline. This should lead to a disappearance of excessively male reported sex ratios at birth. A lower sex ratio at birth is coded as more developed. The Han, Hani, Zhuang, and Hui all have sex ratios at birth that are so high, that it is implausible that

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8 The Dai are very closely related to the Thai. Thailand had one of the most rapid recent fertility declines in Asia. For a discussion of the rapid fertility decline in Thailand and some of the social and cultural factors contributing to this decline, see Knodel, Chamrattrithirong, and Debavalya (1987).

9 African and African background populations seem to have a somewhat lower sex ratio at birth than other populations. However, a sex ratio at birth of over 107 is a strong indication that something is being done to influence the reported sex ratio at birth, whether it is underreporting of female births through unreported adoption or some other mechanism, lack of reporting of female babies who died early, whether due to infanticide or neglect, or sex-selective abortion (Chahnazarian 1986; Coale 1994).

10 There has been an extensive Chinese and Western literature on this topic, including Anderson and Silver (1995), Arnold and Liu (1986), Coale (1994), Hull (1990), Johansson and Nygren (1991), Li (1994), and Zeng et al. (1993).

11 It is interesting that in the Republic of Korea the sex ratio at birth became more masculine between 1988 and 1993, although it was excessively masculine at both dates. This increase in the sex ratio at birth was probably due to availability of increasingly effective ultrasound machines. In addition, in 1993, the sex ratio at birth in Seoul was as high as for Korea as a whole. Thus, for Korea, there is no evidence that economic development led to a reduction in the sex ratio at birth toward the normal range (Korea 1994). In China, there is a lower sex ratio at birth in some large cities, and there seems to be a substantially lower level of male preference in Beijing than in many other parts of China (Liu 1994).
they occurred naturally.\textsuperscript{12}

**Chances of Girls in School Compared to Chances of Boys in School**

In most developing countries, boys are more likely to be sent to school than girls. A major concern with women’s status has been both with improvements in their status in an absolute sense and in closing the gap between males and females. An aspect of the gap between male and female status is the gap between male and female education.

\%Girls/\%Boys 7-15 in School is the proportion of girls age 7-15 in the nationality who ever attended school divided by the proportion of boys age 7-15 in the nationality who ever attended school. Having a higher ratio is coded as more developed, since the higher the ratio, the more equal the educational chances of girls and boys.

Some scholars have argued that as schooling for males from a nationality becomes more common, the gap between schooling for boys and that for girls will narrow, as both sexes approach a ceiling of 100\% of members of the nationality attending school at some time. This would imply that those nationalities with the highest percentage of boys ever in school would also have the highest ratio of boys to girls in school. This is clearly not the case. Although the Bai have the highest proportion of boys in school, they are fourth in the ratio of girls to boys in school. Also, although the Dai rank sixth in the percentage of boys in school, they are second in the ratio of boys to girls in school. With only 67\% of Dai boys age 7-15 ever having attended school, they clearly were not hitting any “ceiling” of complete school enrollment of both boys and girls. Thus for Dai, although neither boys nor girls had very high levels of school enrollment in absolute terms, girls were about as likely to attend school as boys.

**Changes in Educational Opportunities Between 1982 and 1990**

Figures 2A through 2C show information about schooling by gender in 1982 compared to 1990. In each of these figures, the value for 1982 is plotted on the horizontal axis. The value for 1990 is plotted on the vertical axis. If there were no change between 1982 and 1990, the value would lie on the diagonal of equal values in 1982 and 1990. This diagonal of equal values is shown in each figure. In Figures 2A and 2B, values plotted above the diagonal show that educational enrollment increased between 1982 and 1990; values below the diagonal show that educational enrollment decreased between 1982 and 1990.

Figure 2A refers to boys. For every nationality, the chance that a boy ever attended school increased between 1982 and 1990. For most nationalities and most families, whenever the chance of schooling for their sons increase, they are likely to try to take advantage of this. Figure 2A shows that although there were large differences among nationalities in the chance that a boy would ever go to school, the opportunities for boys from every nationality improved between 1982 and 1990. The relative improvement was especially large for the nationalities with a low level of schooling for boys in 1982.

\textsuperscript{12} The 1990 census of China asked about births that occurred in the 18 months prior to the census. The sex ratio at birth reported in this paper is based on births in the 12 months before the census.
Figure 2A. Proportion of Boys Age 7-15 Ever in School, by Nationality in Yunnan, 1982 and 1990

Figure 2B. Proportion of Girls Age 7-15 Ever in School, by Nationality in Yunnan, 1982 and 1990

Figure 2B shows similar information for girls. In almost every developing country, school enrollment rates of boys are higher than for girls. This also is true for every nationality in Yunnan. Even in 1990, only 26% of Miao girls age 7-15 had ever been to school. However, there were changes in the schooling opportunities for girls between 1982 and 1990. For every nationality, the chance that a girl ever went to school increased between 1982 and 1990.

Figure 2C looks at whether the difference between schooling changes for girls and boys changed between 1982 and 1990. In Figure 2C, a value above the diagonal means that the chances of girls going to school improved compared to the chances for boys between 1982 and 1990; a value below the
diagonal means that the chances of girls going to school worsened between 1982 and 1990.

For every nationality except Dai, the schooling chances of girls in comparison to boys improved between 1982 and 1990. Among Dai, girls and boys had comparable chances of schooling in both 1982 and 1990.

**Long-Term Changes in Educational Opportunities**

There are reasons for different expectations about long-term changes in educational opportunities related to economic development in China. On the one hand, as economic development proceeds, the economic returns to schooling increase. This encourages increases in school enrollment rates for both boys and girls. This should also lead to a closing of the gap in educational opportunities between boys and girls. However, as income becomes more strongly related to household production, the economic value of children increases, especially among agricultural households. In this situation, there is a conflict between schooling for children (in terms of investment in human capital) and keeping children out of school, so they can add to household production. In a situation of strong male preference, marketization may lead to increased school enrollment rates of boys and decreasing school enrollment rates of girls. It has been suggested that school enrollment rates for girls in China already have declined (cf. Greenhalgh 1992).

Figures 3A through 3C look at changes in schooling opportunities over time for nationalities in Yunnan. In each figure, the proportion of members of the nationality by age who ever attended school is shown. This is based on reports in the 1990 Census of China. Looking at these graphs gives a picture of schooling over time. In China the age of the highest enrollment in school is usually 10. Looking from right to left shows a history of schooling over time, roughly related to when the cohort was age 10. Thus, those age 65-69 would have schooling that essentially reflected opportunities in the early 1930s, those age 35-39, would reflect opportunities in the early 1960s, etc.
Figure 3A shows the situation for males and Figure 3B shows the situation for females. Figure 3C shows the ratio of the proportion of females to the proportion of males who ever went to school by age. It is clear that for young people, there had been no decline in the chance that they would ever go to school in the period shortly before 1990. The proportion ever attending school for those under age 25 in 1990 increased for both sexes for every nationality. In addition, the chances of girls attending school compared to boys increased in recent years. Thus, although there have been reports of households keeping girls out of school in recent years for economic reasons, up to 1990, there is no evidence of this occurring.13

Generally, school enrollment has increased over time, and Figure 3A shows that the gaps among nationalities in primary schooling opportunities for males have narrowed. Figure 3B shows that females increasing have split into two groups of nationalities over time, the Hani and Miao, for whom enrollment levels remain quite low, and the other six nationalities, for whom there has been considerable convergence over time. Thus, although recently schooling opportunities for females from all groups have improved, the rate of improvement for Hani and Miao females has lagged behind that of other nationalities. For the oldest group considered, those age 65-69, for several nationalities, more than 30% of males had at least some schooling. For all of the nationalities, schooling for females age 65-69 in 1990 was virtually unheard of. Figure 3C shows that in recent years, the gap between primary school opportunities for girls and boys also has narrowed.

A striking feature of Figure 3B is the decline in schooling of females who were age 35-39 in 1990. This decline occurs for every nationality except for Han and Dai. For males, only Miao show a decline in schooling for those age 35-39 in 1990, in comparison to those somewhat older and those somewhat younger.

13 It is important to keep in mind the difference between low school enrollment rates for girls or a large difference between school enrollment rates for girls and boys on the one hand, and a decline in school enrollment rates for girls on the other hand. We know that for some regions and some nationalities in China, school enrollment rates for girls remain low. However, that is a different issue than a decline in school enrollment rates for . It is also possible that economic hardship or marketization could lead to a slower increase in school enrollment rates than would have occurred otherwise, but a more detailed analysis is necessary to determine whether such a slowdown has occurred recently.
Those age 35-39 in 1990 were age 10, the age of highest primary school enrollment, in the early 1960s. This was the period of the Great Famine and its aftermath, a time of great economic hardship in China. In China as a whole, the rate of increase in education slowed during and shortly after the Great Famine, and the chances of schooling for girls compared to boys worsened, but school enrollment rates of girls did not actually decline (Hannum and Xie 1995). The results in Figure 2B suggest that the education of girls from minority nationalities was more severely affected during the Great Famine and its aftermath in Yunnan than for girls in China as a whole.
Figure 3C shows that the primary schooling changes of girls compared to boys worsened during the Great Famine and its aftermath for every nationality in Yunnan except Dai. This is similar to what is found for China as a whole.

**Implications for Policy**

This study has shown that social and demographic patterns of nationalities in Yunnan are not consistent with a simple unidimensional view of development. Also, it is clear that in the long-term, there has been a narrowing of differences among the nationalities. However, there remain large differences among nationalities, especially in the education of girls. While the general policy of improving educational opportunities for all has been effective, differences by nationality for boys are much less than they are for girls. If one had as an explicit policy objective the improvement of educational opportunities for girls, it would seem, from this analysis, that a general policy of improving education would need to be modified to provide for specific incentives to encourage families to enroll their daughters in school.

It is important to recall that there was a period in the early 1960s, during and shortly after the Great Famine, when school enrollment rates for minority nationality girls declined. As marketization proceeds in China, the short-run economic value of children will increase, particularly in agriculture. This may lead to pressures not to enroll young children in school. We saw no evidence of declines in school enrollment by 1990. Examination of the 1995 Mid-Censal Survey data for Yunnan can reveal whether educational trends similar to those in the early 1960s have returned.

The ratio of girls’ to boys’ enrollment in school and the sex ratio at birth are two indicators of male preference. If they were different indicators of the same thing, a nationality should hold a similar position relative to other nationalities on both indicators. However, this is clearly not true. There is no statistical relation between the two -- there is a Pearson correlation for the eight nationalities of .16. In addition, the Hui hold the most developed position on the ratio of girls’ to boys’ schooling but the least developed position with respect to the sex ratio at birth.
It is clear from Figure 1 that no nationality has a totally consistent ranking. Also, the Han nationality is not the most developed on all indicators, although it is first in the total fertility rate and virtually tied for first in health personnel per 10,000 population. Although the Hui are often thought to behave very similarly to Han, they hold very different places from the Han in the total fertility rate and the sex ratio at birth.

This analysis shows that it is important for policy-makers to take cultural differences among nationalities into account. This means that in the design of policy one needs to be explicit about the objectives sought and the relationship of these objectives to the attitudes, preferences, and past experiences of a particular nationality group in a given area of development. As noted above, if one had as an explicit objective the expansion of opportunities for schooling for girls, then the incentives provided in a policy would need to be tailored to fit the differences among nationalities. If the target nationality were Dai, for example, any incentives to increase educational opportunities overall would be likely to benefit Dai girls as much as Dai boys. However, if the target nationality were Miao, an increase in the overall availability of schooling would be likely to disproportionately benefit Miao boys.

Differences among nationalities in attitudes toward boys and girls affect schooling and other opportunities not only for China, but also in other multi-ethnic developing countries. Sub-Saharan Africa has been known as a region in which women have traditionally had fairly high status, compared to men (Boserup 1970). However, even within South Africa there are clear differences among African nationalities in the status of women. For example, women have fairly low status among Zulus in comparison with Xhosa. This difference among nationalities in the status of women has likely been one source of friction between the African National Congress and the Inkhata Freedom Party over issues, such as women’s empowerment. Many South African leaders are Xhosa, while the Inkhata Freedom Party’s major supporters are Zulus.

Researchers and policy-makers usually explain differences among nationalities as a consequence of differences in the social and economic resources available to nationalities. They rarely invoke cultural explanations in terms of difference in values and attitudes. There are two reasons for a preference for resource allocation explanations over cultural explanations. One reason is that raising the topic of cultural differences sometimes implies that one culture is superior and another culture is inferior. Another reason is that a discussion of the role of values and attitudes is often assumed to mean that providing social and economic resources to some nationalities is ineffective.

This analysis challenges that view. Cultures are not inferior or superior to each other, but they are different from each other. This analysis shows that cultural differences among nationalities should be taken into account in explaining social and economic outcomes. It is important for all nationalities to receive adequate social and economic resources, but if values and preferences of nationalities are not taken into account in designing policies, the policies often will be ineffective.
References


