

Household Formation and Composition in China's Ethnic Minority Populations: A Case Study of Six Yunnan Villages

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Abstract

This article studies the household formation and composition in Miao and Yi ethnic minorities in six villages in Yunnan province, China. This study aims to enrich the understanding of household in contemporary China's ethnic minority populations and make a contribution to developing household formation theory on ethnic minority households. Both original fieldwork data and secondary data (Household Registration data & Family Planning data) are utilized to investigate the variation of household composition and formation in selected ethnic minority populations. The results demonstrate that: Firstly, households of Miao tend to show a smaller and simpler composition pattern than households of Yi. Secondly, household formation also varies between two ethnic groups and its changes are discovered within ethnic group. Finally, variation of household composition could be partly explained by the existed variation of household formation between two ethnic groups.

1. Introduction

There are fifty-six nationalities in China, the majority Han and the other 55 officially identified ethnic minorities. The fifty-five ethnic minorities are numbered more than 110 million people in 2010,¹ which is far greater than the total national populations of many countries. However, studies of ethnic minority populations, for example, studies of their household formation and composition, are often overshadowed because of more attention given to majority Han by scholars. It is not surprisingly merely study just specific focuses on ethnic minority populations. Firstly, although the ethnic minority shows a great number of populations by itself, the number of its Han counterpart is still overwhelmingly larger (account 92 percent) in China.¹ Moreover, within ethnic minority populations, there is a great variation among the fifty-five ethnic minority groups in terms of population size, geographical distribution, culture, social norms and linguistic competence. Thus, data collection for a comprehensive ethnic minority study is very difficult.

It is reported by 2010 census data that the number of China's ethnic minority population is keep increasing in last decades.¹ It is important to enrich the understanding on different aspects of ethnic minority population in the consideration of political and social implications. Furthermore, China has experienced extraordinary economic growth, demographic transition, modernization and globalization since the 1970s.^{2,3} As the basic unit of society, household received large attention by scholars in related study under the transformation. Changing in household size, household structure and co-residential patterns of general population has been deeply investigated.²⁻⁵ Moreover, women and old people received more attention in household study from gender and old security perspective, which provides large number of academic evidence in policy making.⁶⁻¹⁰ It has been examined that the transformation shows a positive effect on living standard, family life of general population in

contemporary.^{4,7,9} However, fewer studies are conducted based on ethnic minority households, which would also be affected by the transformation. Thus, it is worthwhile to conduct a study systematically examining how household of ethnic minority populations vary due to their unique culture and also the transformation in contemporary China.

2. Research Objectives

This case study is conducted to compare the household formation and composition in ethnic minority populations in contemporary China. It is expected to enrich the understanding of household in ethnic minority populations in China. Moreover, it also aims to make contributions in developing household composition and formation theories in ethnic minority populations. Finally, to some extent, applying systematic academic evidences to complement existed policies or set up new policies among ethnic minority populations in China. Based on the aims, the following three research questions will be specifically addressed in this paper.

- Q1. What is the household composition in ethnic minority populations in contemporary China?
- Q2. What is the household formation process in ethnic minority populations in contemporary China?
- Q3. Does the household composition affected by the household formation process in ethnic populations in contemporary of China?

3. Household Formation and Composition: Theoretical Perspective

There are several theories related to household formation and composition proposed by scholars from different research disciplines, including demographic, economic, sociological, historical and anthropological perspectives. This paper will adopt these theories from William Good (modernization theory)^{11,12}, John Caldwell (wealth flow theory)^{14,15}, Ron Lesthaeghe (cultural dynamics and fertility change)¹⁸⁻²⁰, John Hajnal (household formation systems)^{21,22} and William Skinner (family system). To focus on my research objective and study population, the comparison between two ethnic groups will mainly from cultural perspective, say, Lesthaeghe, Hajnal and Skinner's theoretical perspectives; while the comparison across villages within ethnic groups will adopt Goode and Caldwell's theories.

4. Study Population

As it is mentioned before, the fifty-five ethnic minorities are distributed across provinces. Yunnan province, which located in the southwest of China, contains twenty-five ethnic minorities and over 15 million ethnic minority populations.¹ It is considered as one of the most outstanding area in ethnic-related researches in China. The fifty-five ethnic minorities are spread in different areas but more located in rural areas in Yunnan.²⁴ Six rural villages are selected to conduct this comparing case study. There are 2435 residents from six ethnic groups (Yi, Miao, Han, Bai, Zhuang and Dai) in the selected six villages. Yi people are the majority residents in the three of the six villages. In each Yi-dominated village, the number of Yi people account for over 90 percent of total population. The rest of three villages are Miao-dominated and the number of Miao people reaches to 99 percent of total population.

Among the total study population (N=2338), there are 1516 people located in Yi ethnic group and 822 in Miao ethnic group. By looking at the population pyramids, it is clearly that both ethnic groups show almost the same age structure. Around 20 percent populations are children and nearly 10 percent populations are old people, working age people account for the largest proportion (approximately 70 percent) in both ethnic groups. (Please see table1 for more details of population).

Table 1. Selected demographic characters by ethnicity

Characters	Ethnicity	
	Yi	Miao
Sex ratio	1.04	0.98
Proportion of married people (%)	55.7	59.7
Divorce Rate (%)	0.95	0.2
Proportion of people being Christian (%)	0	100
Proportion of people engaged in agriculture (%)	66.2	81.9
Average years of schooling*	5.79	7.13

Source: *It is calculated based on reported education level in Family planning data, 2011. Other characters are from Household registration data, 2010.

5. Data

Both secondary data and original data are utilized in this research. Secondary data involves individual level household registration data, family planning data and some national level data published. Additionally, original data was collected during the fieldwork.

Household registration data in 2010 was obtained from household registration system in 2013. Family planning data were all recorded in 2011 in six villages. However, family planning service providers updated the record in 2012 in two of villages. According to the symposiums with related officers, household registration data were input based on application form of household registration, which was normally provided by parents when new born baby got formal name (around 1 to 3 years' old). Family planning data was recorded in handwritten by family planning service providers in each village. The electronic version was only formatted when it being required by government, for example, the 2011 version used in this study. Due to the different coding for these two data sources, all collected variables were matched together by individual's ID number. Furthermore, the matched data was double-checked by checking recorded name and sex.

Fieldwork data were obtained by conducted field research during January and February in six villages in 2013. There are objectives of this short field research. Firstly, collecting qualitative data, including history, culture, social norms and regulations in ethnic minority populations; secondly, obtaining social-economic indicators as lack of variables in collected data; thirdly, to clarify and update parts of recorded data in order to reduce the bias. These objectives were basically addressed by following activities:

- *Observations* Including individual level (people's daily life, celebrations, traditions, economic productivities and social activities etc.) and village level (housing, accessibility to public facilities, industries etc.)
- *Symposiums* According to conversations with village leaders, local household registration administrators and family planning service providers. It allows author to deeply understand of data collection process and examine the data quality as well.
- *Household surveys for selected households* To complement and confirm missing or misunderstood information of some variables.
- *Face-to-face interviews* 11 interviews were conducted for old people (7 from Miao and 4 from Yi). Main theme of interviews is old support as my original topic is household and elderly care among ethnic groups. However, it still contains information of household, such as conception of household, perceptions of skipped generation etc.

6. Discussion

Household Composition in Ethnic Population

In order to address the first research question, this section aims to analyze the household composition in Miao and Yi ethnic groups, which will provide a view of household composition of general ethnic minority populations. Furthermore, household composition will be compared between two ethnic groups, which will allow us to obtain a deeper understanding in household of ethnic minority populations.

There are 622 households formed by this classification. There are 389 households belonging to Yi ethnic group and the other 233 households belong to Miao ethnic group. The household composition will be demonstrated in details at household level by household size, generational structure and span, household structure and households contains children, old people or both. Selected results are present as follows.

Household size indicates the number of people presents in the household. The range of household size in this research is from one-person household to eight-person household. The mean household size of Yi ethnic group (size=4.11) is larger than it of Miao ethnic group (size=3.52). It demonstrates that there are more large size households present in Yi ethnic group. In order to discuss the variation or similarity in terms of household size, households with less than four persons are categorized in small size household group and the households with more than five persons are categorized in large size household group. Nearly 82 percent households of Miao ethnic group located in small size household groups and even show a larger proportion than households of Yi ethnic group in each small size household group, especially two-person group (Miao=15 percent, Yi=8 percent). On the contrast, households of Yi ethnic groups show a larger proportion in each large size household groups than households of Miao ethnic group. Even though, the small size household is still most common household (accounts for over 70 percent). Overall, small size household is common for both ethnic groups, but Yi people are more likely form households in large size than Miao people.

Generational structure is defined in this paper as the numbers of generations present in one household. The range of generational structure in this research is from one-generation household to

four-generation household. The following conclusion can be drawn after examining the generational structure of households between two ethnic groups. Firstly, two-generation household is the dominated household in both ethnic groups and the variation between two ethnic groups is not outstanding in two-generation households. However, households in Miao ethnic groups tend to have simpler generation structure than households in Yi ethnic group.

Household structure (table 2) is varied between two ethnic groups. The simpler the household structure is, the larger proportions the households distributed in for both ethnic groups. But it obviously that households of Miao and Yi ethnic groups are dominated by simple and complex household structures separately.

Table 2. Distribution of household by household structure and ethnicity

Household Structure	Ethnicity	
	Miao (%) N=233	Yi (%) N=389
Solitaries	5.58	4.63
No-family	0	0.51
Simple Family	74.25	40.62
Married couple only	13.3	2.31
Married couple with Children	58.37	31.36
Widower or widows with Children	2.58	6.94
Extended Family	14.6	33.68
Extended-up	12.45	31.36
Extended-down	1.29	0.26
Extended-lateral	0	1.03
Extended-combine	0.86	1.03
Multiple-family	5.15	20.05
Other family	0.43	0.51
Total	100	100

Source: 2011 & 2012 Family Planning data

To sum up, there are several conclusions could be drawn based on the household composition analysis between two ethnic groups at household level. Firstly, there is a highly correlation between distribution of household size and generational structures, namely, the smaller the size is, the simpler the generational structure is in both ethnic groups. In addition, although largest proportion exists in four-person household and two-generation households in both ethnic groups, it should be emphasized that the most households are likely to locate in smaller size and simpler generational structure groups in Miao ethnic group. It is contrary to the distribution of larger size and complex generational structures. Moreover, skipped generation family households are more likely to exist in Miao ethnic group in terms of generational span. Secondly, Households of Miao are dominated by simple family household

structure; on the contrary, complex family household structure prevails in Yi ethnic groups. Finally, the variations in the distribution of households with old people and/or child are closely related to the distribution of household size, generational structure and household structures between two ethnic groups.

Household formation in Ethnic Population

It has been investigated that variations existed between Miao and Yi ethnic minorities in terms of household composition. With large empirical researches conducted in household composition, it has been proved that family formation process affects the family and household composition in different societies in history^{25-27, 29, 30}; moreover, it has been claimed that the household formation process varies over time and across cultures.^{25, 27, 31} Thus, both patterns and tendency of household formation in Miao and Yi populations are investigated in this study. Firstly, the household formation process between two ethnic groups will be discussed, in order to illustrate the pattern of household formation. Besides, with the same standpoint, a comparison within ethnic group will be conducted to show the tendency of household formation among ethnic minority population.

Before presenting the findings, it is necessary to define the household formation process specifically in this research. Most of the scholars agree that marriage can be identified as the first step of family household forms, which is commonly considered as the timing of children leaving home. Then, family household expands, which is basically connected with childbearing. The last step is family household dissolution, which means family household members move out from current households.^{27, 32} To some extent, it could be considered as another starting point of new household forming in my view. There are different reasons for children leaving home. However, in the six ethnic villages I studied in, the main reason of children leaving home is marriage. In keeping with the argument of household expanding, childbearing is the most important way of expanding family household. As it is mentioned before, the dissolution could be considered as another start of household forming; hence, the discussion of household formation process will mainly focus on marriage and childbearing in this paper. As we focus on discussing the events of marriage and childbearing, women who ever married and currently in the reproductive age (aged 15 to 49) are selected and categorized into five-year age groups to conduct the analysis on individual level. It should clarify that there are only three women aged between 15 and 19 in my case. Thus, they are categorized into the group of women aged 20 to 24 group. Based on this sub-sample, variations of marriage and childbearing between and within two ethnic groups have been examined.

Firstly, age of first marriage varies between two ethnic groups. Miao women are likely to get married earlier than Yi women. Secondly, by looking at the post-marital residential pattern, women aged 15 to 29 years old tend to live in large and complex structure household for both ethnic groups. For women older women after that age, Yi women still remain staying in the large and complex households; however, Miao women move to small and simple households. Both Miao and Yi women have late marriage age. However, only Miao women aged 30 to 49 fit for his theory that living in small and simple household. Thirdly, both Miao and Yi women are likely to give birth soon after they get married, but Miao women tend to have more children than Yi women. Overall, marriage and

childbearing varies between two ethnic groups and these variations are partly explained by related theories. Additionally, variations also can be explained by the field research and the most significant factor of variation is religious belief. Miao ethnic group believe in Christian for a long time; thus, their traditional perceptions, behaviors and other aspects of life are strongly affected and assimilated by western cultures. The most representative point is their post-marital residential patterns. Miao couple will shortly live with parents after they get married, in order to seek support in childbearing. However, after their children grow up, they will build another independent household and be in charge. That is the reason why more households belong to small size and simple structure category in terms of composition. Furthermore, old people in Miao ethnic group prefer to live just with partners other than children due to different behaviors of daily life. Hence, number of households containing both old people and children is smaller in Miao ethnic group. It is also different from the traditional residential pattern in Chinese society that parents live with at least one child to seek the later life security. It is clearly that household formation differs between two ethnic groups due to different cultures, and then, the household composition well represents the formation process in different ethnic groups.

As variations of household formation between two ethnic groups has been identified in a time-point. Lots of empirical studies implied that household formation is changing overtime. Thus, a further analysis based on different villages in the same ethnic group is conducted to investigate the changes. By holding political, cultural and social factors constantly, modernization was found to have impacts on household formation process. Firstly, women from developed villages tend to have the late marriage age than women in developing villages. Based on the assumption of marriage is the time of children leaving home, than it means that age of people form an independent household is delayed as the development of society. Secondly, after getting married, women from developed villages are more likely to live in small and simple household. Thirdly, women from developed villages choose to have less children than women in developing villages, which could be a reason of small household size. Moreover, it should be emphasizes that premarital birth rarely occurs among both ethnic population; nonetheless, the exited cases are from developed villages. It proves that not only religion but also modernization could affect people's perceptions. Overall, changes were identified in terms of marriage and childbearing.

7. Conclusion

This case study provides the evidence that household composition and formation vary in terms of ethnicity. The variation existed not only because the social-cultural factor but also the modernizations. However, as it is mentioned before, there are fifty-five ethnic minority groups in China and they are distributed across regions. Further research could be conducted to focus on variations among more than two ethnic groups. If variations of different ethnic groups can be identified and then categorized, it will be meaningful for policy makers. For example, old generation and younger generations' wellbeing is becoming a hot issue in contemporary China. Furthermore, it is affected by household composition. Basically, it is important to implement different policy in terms of household composition, such as family support program for skipped generation household, or pensions for old people living alone.

Overall, understanding of household composition and formation make it is possible to run an efficient policy in ethnic minority residential areas and then improve their living standards.

Notes

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Appendix

List of household members and their belonging generations

Code	Generations	Relationship to the household head
1	Peers	Head
2		Wife
3		Husband
4		Older Brother
5		Younger Brother
6		Older Sister
7		Younger Sister
8		Sister-in-law
9		Brother-in-law
10	Grandparents	Grandfather (father's side)
11		Grandmother (father's side)
12		Grandfather (mother's side)
13		Grandmother (mother's side)
14	Parents	Father
15		Mother
16		Father-in-law (Head is male)
17		Mother-in-law (Head is male)
18		Father-in-law (Head is female)
19		Mother-in-law (Head is female)
20	Children	First son
21		Second son
22		Third son
23		Fourth son
24		Fifth son
25		First daughter
26		Second daughter
27		Third daughter
28		Fourth daughter
29		Fifth daughter
30		First daughter-in-law
31		Second daughter -in-law
32		Third daughter -in-law
33		Fourth daughter -in-law
34		Fifth daughter -in-law
35		First son -in-law
36		Second son -in-law
37	Third son -in-law	

38		Fourth son -in-law
39		Fifth son -in-law
40		Nephew
41		Niece
42	Grandchildren	First grandson
43		Second grandson
44		Third grandson
45		First granddaughter
46		Second granddaughter
47		Third granddaughter
48	Great-grandchildren	Great-grandson