

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

This paper compares household characteristics, and to an extent household formation, in two ethnic minority groups in Yunnan province China – the Miao and Yi using data from 6 villages. The abstract claims that the paper will contribute to developing household formation theory but the paper doesn't really do this although it does lay the groundwork for future work.

The key finding is that the two populations have rather patterns of household structure with the Miao dominated by small nuclear family households whereas the Yi have many more extended family and multiple family households. Even given this complexity it seems that no Yi household exceeds 8 individuals and the mean household size is small. The ethnic differences in household structure are related by the author to different patterns of marriage and post-marital household formation although I found the argument here slightly hard to follow – it would have been clearer had there been more tables or graphs. A key point which seems to contribute to the different structures is the Miao preference in old age for couples to live alone rather than with their children but the paper does not go on to examine whether this influences the intergenerational flows of support and help in either direction.

This paper is quite challenging to discuss because I have a number of questions and would appreciate various clarifications.

The author states that she uses household registration data and family planning data: very few details are really given about the data and how they were exploited, and there are few tables which document the results – either descriptive or analytic – so it is quite hard for the reader to evaluate the strength and validity of the points made. The author is particularly interested in old age co-residence and support and this indeed is where the most interesting findings lie: the residential patterns in old age are very different between the two populations.

One problem I had with the paper is that there is an assumption that everyone knows what is meant by "household" in the Chinese context. Given that there is a system of household registration this is probably the case, but for the non Chinese specialist it would be helpful to know what the definition of the household is and how well the data source reflects actual, empirically observed, living arrangements. It is stated that the household is the 'basic unit of society': this has also been stated for other populations but in Africa, for example, there is a substantial difference between the definition of household that is used in surveys (Randall et al 2011) and the local understanding of household in many contexts (Guyer 1981, Guyer and Peters 1987)

Another issue that I would have liked to have had more information on is the fertility policy as applied to these populations. Again, not being a Chinese specialist, I know that for much of the time ethnic minority populations were exempted from the one child policy but given the statement that the ethnic minority populations keeps increasing – is this growth faster than the national population? Are the ethnic minorities subject to any birth planning constraints and are both populations subject to the same restrictions?

P1-2 mentions the transformations in household size, structure and co-residential patterns elsewhere in China with the implication that this paper and these analyses will put the ethnic minority populations into this context. But the key elements of this transformation are not described – and although I could go back to the referenced papers I would have appreciated a brief summary of the key findings and why the author might expect the ethnic minority groups to be different.

Table 1: would benefit from more detail: I don't understand the figure for divorce rate – % of what and is there a time frame?

In the presentation of the results it would have been very helpful to have much more representation of the data – for example a graph just showing the distribution of all household sizes (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8) before presenting the mean and before categorising the sizes.

Guyer, J. I. (1981). Household and Community in African Studies. *African Studies Review*, 24(2/3), 87-137.

Guyer, J. I., & Peters, P. E. (1987). Introduction. *Development and Change*, 18(2), 197-214. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-7660.1987.tb00269.x

Randall, Coast, E., & Leone, T. (2011). Cultural constructions of the concept of household in sample surveys. *Population Studies*, 65(2), 217-229.