

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN MARRIAGE & HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE IN A CHINESE CITY

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Marital behaviour and family institutions among minority nationalities are an understudied area in research on ethnicity in the People's Republic of China (the PRC). Using a survey data set (n = 1992) collected from fifteen neighbourhoods in Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu province in China's Northwest, in 2001, I compare patterns in marriage and household structure between the Han and Hui in urban China. The Han are the ethnic majority and the Hui the third largest ethnic minority group in the PRC. The first section of this paper briefly reviews two theoretical perspectives on family and marital behaviour, presents some basic information about the Hui, and describes existing studies of marriage and household structure among the Hui. The second section discusses sampling methods and data, compares the overall marital status of the Han and Hui respondents and their different patterns of courtship and mate selection, studies the duration of courtship and ages at first marriage among the Han and Hui respondents, and examines patterns of living arrangements and family sizes of these two ethnic groups. The final section summarizes and explains major findings from this paper.

Urbanization, Ethnic Cultures, and Family Behaviour

Are there differences in marriage and household structure between an ethnic majority group and minority group in a modern society? Existing theories make different predictions. Modernization scholars argue that industrialization and urbanization have led people to focus less on their responsibilities toward their kin and families, and more on self-fulfillment. Geographic mobility, education, social mobility, the rise of formal organizations, and individualism in

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the modern world have diminished the importance of traditional family institutions in the lives of urban residents. The shift in loyalties from kinship to self has had dramatic effects on family and marital behaviour. The extended family has been progressively replaced by the nuclear family; freedom of love rather than parental arrangements have gradually become the basis for marriages; polygamy has increasingly taken the place of monogamy; patrilocal or matrilocal residence has steadily given way to neolocal residence; and so on. The forces of industrialization and urbanization are assumed to sweep all human societies indiscriminately.² Hence, it can be referred from modernization theory that there should be no difference in family and marital behaviour among ethnic groups if they experience common urbanization processes.

Yet modernization theory has never been popular among scholars of ethnic families. They agree that appropriate attention must be paid to the effect of socio-economic conditions and urbanization on family and marital life. Nevertheless, they emphasize ethnic traditions and cultures as a key determinant of family and marriage institutions among minority nationalities.³ According to this cultural approach, family institutions are the core of ethnic culture and it is “more resistant to change than more superficial traits such as celebration of holidays and recognizing folk heroes.”⁴ Decisions about living arrangements among ethnic minorities in the West, for example, are described as “an expression of basic cultural values.”⁵

As another example, even in the West, Muslim marriage “is governed by a complex set of social rules.” In return for his financial investment, “the husband acquires authority as the head of the family as well as access to the sexual and reproductive abilities of the wife.”⁶ Marsha Carolan (1999: 218) writes that many Muslim women “consider the rearing of children a sacred honour and privilege, and they are accorded traditional respect and honour in their role as mother. Women provide much of the nurturance and sometimes schooling for their young children.”

Muslims are not the only example. Yoshinori Kamo and Min Zhou (1994) show the relationship between acculturation among elderly Chinese and Japanese Americans and the odds of their living in extended family households, arguing that this cultural effect endures long after their settling down in the US. Yoshinori Kamo (2000: 213-4, 224) argues that Asian Americans are deeply influenced by their tradition of filial responsibility derived from Confucianism. The degree of embeddedness of ethnic cultures is related to the extended family formation among the Asian Americans. “The more an ethnic minority person retains his or her culture, the more likely it is that he or she lives in an extended family household.” It is similarly argued that the emphasis on Latin familism culture leads to the formation of extended

² Goode, 1963; Gordon, 1983; Shorter, 1975.

³ Hill, 1972; Glick et al, 1997; Kamo, 2000; McAdoo, 1999; Morgan et al., 1993.

⁴ Keefe 1980: 105; also see McAdoo, 1999.

⁵ Santi, 1990: 222; also see McAdoo, 1999.

⁶ Sherif, 1999: 305; also Haddad, 1991.

family households among Hispanic Americans (Bean and Tienda 1987). From the cultural perspective, there should be significant differences in family and marriage institutions between the ethnic majority group and minority group even if they have similar urban experience.

Clearly, modernization theory and the cultural approach predict different patterns of family institutions and marital life for ethnic minority groups. Which perspective can help us better understand marriage and household among minority nationalities? In this paper I weigh these two theoretical perspectives by analyzing a survey data set collected in a Chinese city in 2001, seeking to understand the extent toward which each of them can explain family and marital behaviour of the Hui, an ethnic minority group in the PRC. I present some basic information about the Hui before discussing the data and conducting analysis.

The Hui Ethnic Group in China

There are officially fifty-six ethnic nationalities in the PRC. The Han are the majority nationality representing 90 percent of China's population. The fifty-five minority nationalities comprise approximately 10 percent of the total population in the PRC (Gladney, 1998; Mackerras, 1994; 1995). Accordingly, over 130 million Chinese can be classified as members of ethnic minorities. The largest ethnic minority group in the PRC is the Zhuang. Yet for some unknown reason, there is only one book on the Zhuang in the West.⁷ The second largest ethnic nationality is Manchu, who are very much sinified (Elliott, 2001; Rhoads, 2000).

The Hui is China's third largest minority group with a population of nearly ten million. The Hui have been subject to intensive study by Western scholars because of their numerical strength, unique history, religious practice, and strong ethnic identity.⁸

Both Chinese and Western scholars believe that the Hui are the descents of foreign Muslim merchants, militia, and officials who came to China from Arabian and central Asian countries from the seventh through fourteenth centuries and later intermarried with the local Han populace.⁹ The Hui were good soldiers, traders, and entrepreneurs and played significant roles throughout Chinese history.¹⁰

The Hui make up over half of all Muslims in China and live in every province and city across the country. They are China's most urbanized minority nationality, constituting the vast majority of ethnic minorities in every Chinese city, with the exception of cities in the border regions of Tibet,

⁷ Kaup, 2000.

⁸ Dillon, 1996, 1999; Gladney, 1995; 1996; 1998; Lipman, 1984, 1990; 1997; also see Mackerras, 1994; 1995.

⁹ Dillon, 1996: 15; Gladney, 1996: 68, 96; also see Dillon, 1996, 1999; Hu, 1993; Lipman, 1997; Qiu et al, 1996.

¹⁰ Dillion, 1996, 1999; Gladney, 1996: 318; also Lipman, 1984, 1990, 1997; Qiu et al., 1996.

Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Guangxi.¹¹ The majority of the Hui are spread throughout China's Northwest, which includes Xinjiang, Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai. This vast area is justifiably referred to as China's "Quran belt."¹²

Existing Studies of Marriage & Household Structure among the Hui

Western scholars (e.g., Dillon, 1996, 1999; Gladney, 1995; 1996; 1998; Mackerras, 1994; 1995) have done excellent work on the Hui in the PRC, showing their strong and resilient ethnic identity. They also discuss certain aspects of marital and family life among the Hui, focusing on mate selection, close relation marriages, and age at first marriage. First, they point out that before 1949, parental arrangement was the dominant method in mate selection among the Hui. Available evidence indicates a rather limited change in mate choice among the Hui after 1949. Dru Gladney (1996: 127) observes that Hui men and women "rarely work together in the fields, and the majority of marriages are arranged through introductions. In a survey of 50 newly married young couples, only 8 (16 percent) met their partners on their own, without an intermediary ... While some younger Hui complain about this conservatism, change in the near future appears unlikely. In fact, 'modern' marriage practice has continued to decline since the high point of male-female 'free love' (*lianai ziyou*) encouraged during the Cultural Revolution."

Colin Mackerras (1995: 64, 167) similarly argues that among "the Islamic and the great majority of other minorities of the north and northwest, courtship was not a normal or expected part of finding a spouse, because of the tradition whereby parents arranged marriages with the aid of a matchmaker. As regards the Muslim minorities, arranged marriages were the norm among the Hui, Uygurs, Kazaks, Kirgiz and Uzbeks. Marriages were sometimes arranged many years before the wedding itself, while the bridal couple were still children or infants."

Second, the Han generally disfavor cross-relation marriages, considering such practices an inappropriate deed at least from a genetic perspective. The Hui hold a different attitude, however. Mackerras (1995) points out that although the *Koran* lays down strict prohibitions on marriage or sexual intercourse with persons of certain close relationships, there are some that do not come under the bans, such as first cousins. These marriages are much more common among Islamic nationalities than among the Han. Although the PRC is as hostile to any forms of such marriage as preceding Chinese states, marriage with close relations such as first cousins remains fairly frequent among Muslim minorities. Dru Gladney (1996) reports a high degree of ethnic endogamy in general and close relation marriages in particular among the Hui in rural China. He argues that the Hui use such marriages to protect Hui blood purity and hence ensure the survival of the Hui ethnicity.

¹¹ Gladney, 1996: 171, 174; Mackerras, 1995: 19-20; also see Dillon, 1996.

¹² Gladney, 1996: 27, 112; Dillon, 1996: 1, 5.

Third, Colin Mackerras (1995: 169-170) argues that prior to 1949, the age of marriage among the minority nationalities, especially the women, was very young. As in most poor societies or those with traditional economies, high death rates in most places and lack of good birth control methods give incentive for high birth rates and early marriage. "The age of marriage has tended to rise since 1949, both in the whole country and among the minority nationalities, but certainly the rise has been more pronounced among the Han than among the great majority of the minorities. The PRC Marriage Law of 1950 specified 20 as the minimum marriage age for men and 18 for women, but the 1980 Marriage Law raised both ages by two years, to 22 for men and 20 for women. It also allows the people's congresses and their standing committees in national autonomous areas to 'enact certain modifications or supplementary articles in conformity with the actual conditions prevailing among the minority nationalities of the locality in regard to marriage and family relations' ... These 'modifications' frequently include the age of marriage, varying it downwards by two years."

For example, the "law of the Ningxia autonomous region permits marriage for Hui men at the age of 20 and for women at the age of 18, two years younger than the 1980 PRC Marriage Law. Samplings from the 1982 census showed that there were some 24,580 married people below the age of 20, of whom about 4,000 were men and the remainder women. What this shows is that even official figures acknowledge quite a few people married illegally in Ningxia, including the 4,000 men and at least as many women and probably more" (Mackerras, 1995: 171).

Mackerras (1995: 172) further points out that in the PRC, "the nationality with the highest proportion of youthful brides was the Uygurs ... apart from the Uygurs, Hui women were the earliest marriers, with 51.57 percent wedded before reaching 20 and 37.73 per cent between 20 and 24. The continuing power of cultural traditions, especially those associated with Islam, may well be a major reason why early marriage persists so strongly among the Uygurs and Hui. A major reason for the difference between the Uygurs and Hui is because the Uygurs are much less urbanised."

In sum, Western scholars show the importance of parental arrangements and matchmaking in mate selection among the Hui, report the wide range of Hui close-relation marriages, and point out early marriages within the Hui group. I use these important findings as the starting point for my comparative study of marriage and household structure between the Han and Hui in urban China. I notice that existing studies examine limited household and marital variables. I thus include three additional measures, i.e., duration of courtship, living arrangements, and family size, in my study. Also, existing studies of the Hui rely largely on field observation, which encourages me to conduct a quantitative study. Finally, many of the respondents in existing studies are rural Hui. Yet the Hui are the major ethnic group in urban China. Hence, I search for the major patterns of marital behaviour and family life among the Hui in an urban setting in this study. I also seek to find out whether the Hui differ from the Han in marriage and household structure. If the answer to this

is yes, can such differences be attributed to their different cultures and traditions? To what extent can modernization theory and the cultural approach explain family and marital behaviour of the Hui respectively?

Data

The data for this study are drawn from a survey in Lanzhou City in 2001. The study of the Chinese family has focused on changes in living arrangements and marriage institutions in urban China (Lang, 1946; Levy, 1949; Logan et al, 1998; Salaff, 1973; Tsui, 1989; Yang, 1959; Zang, 1993, 1999; Zuo & Bian, 2001). I compare patterns of marriage and household structure between the Han and Hui in Lanzhou City to maintain continuity and comparability in research on Chinese family institutions.

Lanzhou, the capital City of Gansu Province, is one of the largest cities on China's "Quran belt". Its economic and political importance in China's Northwest is secondary only to that of Xi'an City in neighboring Shannxi province. The Hui in Lanzhou and Gansu are known for their strong ethnic identity (Dillon, 1996: 5; Gladney, 1996: 3; Harrell, 1995: 33-4). Chinese sociologists organized and carried out the survey in Lanzhou City in 2001. Interviewers were recruited from students attending a sociology course at a local university and were trained for one week before the survey.

The survey aimed at achieving a balanced sample of Han and Hui respondents for a comparative study. The Chinese sociologists first identified ten predominantly Han and five predominantly Hui neighborhoods in Lanzhou City and then used the disproportionate sampling method (Babbie, 1998: 224-6) to select 2,100 households from the fifteen neighborhood clusters. Households in the predominantly Hui neighborhoods were given a disproportionately better chance of selection than those in the predominantly Han neighborhoods to yield roughly similar numbers of the Han and Hui respondents in the final sample. A total of 1,992 interviews were conducted, representing a successful rate of nearly 95 percent, which approximates those reported by other survey researchers (see Bian and Logan, 1996; Zhou, 2000). The 1,992 interviews represented 1,992 individual households. There was only one interviewee selected from each household involved. Respondents were asked about their marital behaviour, family life, and the like.

To ensure a "pure" comparison between the Han and Hui families, I exclude the following two categories of cases from the sample: (1) respondents who are neither Han nor Hui and (2) respondents who intermarry with members of a different ethnic nationality. I also exclude two Hui and two Han respondents, who married before 1950, from the sample to make certain that all the marriages studied in this paper took place after the establishment of the PRC in 1949. This is because most China experts accept the notion that the significant shift from a traditional to a conjugal family structure in China occurred after the 1949 Communist revolution and the 1950 Marriage Law of the PRC that supported the freedom of marriage (Zang, 1993: 35). As a

result, a total of 1,871 cases are used in the following analysis. Among them, 1,007 are Han Chinese, and the remaining 864 are Hui respondents.

Finally, I did field work in Lanzhou City in 2001 and 2002, conducting field observation, engaging in in-depth interviews with some of the survey respondents, and exchanging views with Chinese scholars in that city. I use my fieldwork materials to deepen my understanding of family and marital life among the Hui and facilitate my interpretations of the survey data.

Table 1: Basic Characteristics of the Han and Hui Respondents

Characteristics	Han respondents	Hui respondents
Sex (%)		
Male	65.1	67.5
Female	34.9	32.5
Age (mean year)*		
	46.7	44.9
Education (%)		
Illiterate/semiliterate	6.5	23.7
Primary school	9.9	24.2
Junior high	26.2	30.9
Senior high	27.1	14.0
Community college	22.5	4.7
University and above	8.0	2.5
Occupations (%)		
Professionals	16.7	5.1
Cadres	9.2	3.2
Administrators	10.6	3.8
Soldiers/police	0.9	0.6
Workers	47.6	43.9
Part-time workers/unemployed	3.1	6.0
Housewives	1.4	2.8
<i>Getihu</i> (private entrepreneurs)	5.2	25.6
Others	5.4	9.0
Religious belief (%)		
Islam	1.3	99.7
Buddhism	2.8	0.0
Christianity	1.3	0.1
Others	0.6	0.0
No religious belief	94.0	0.2
Marital status		
Never married	4.2	2.9
Married	86.6	84.4
Remarried	1.5	2.7
Widowed	5.5	7.2
Divorced	2.3	2.9

*T-statistics=3.197, $p < .001$ level.

I show some basic characteristics of the Han and Hui respondents in Table 1. As can be seen from Table 1, both ethnic groups are similar in terms of sex ratios. The Han respondents are older than the Hui counterparts. The age difference between these two ethnic groups is not big yet statistically significant at .001 level. The Han are better educated than the Hui respondents — 30.5 percent of the Han respondents were educated at the community college or university level, as compared with 7.2 percent of the Hui respondents who had a similar educational experience. The percentages of the Han respondents who worked as professionals, cadres, and administrators are much higher than those of the Hui (16.7 percent vs. 5.1 percent, 9.2 percent vs. 3.2 percent, and 10.6 percent vs. 3.8 percent respectively). The Hui, however, are five times more likely than the Han to engage in private economic activities (25.6 percent vs. 5.2 percent), a finding that is consistent with observations that the Hui have an entrepreneurial history and a strong propensity to pursue private economy (Dillon, 1996, 1999; Gladney, 1996, 1998; Mackerras, 1994; 1995). Table 1 also shows that 99.7 percent of the Hui respondents are Muslims. In comparison, only 1.3 percent of the Han respondents hold the same religious faith. Also, 94 percent of the Han respondents identify themselves as atheists, as compared with only 0.2 percent of the Hui.

An interesting finding from Table 1 is the divorce rates for both the Han and Hui. Divorce rates have been frequently taken to exemplify a major difference in marital behaviour between the Han and ethnic minorities. Official figures released by the PRC suggest that since the 1980s, “the incidence of divorce has tended to rise in China, especially in the main cities. Moreover, it was in general higher among the minorities than among the Han. Figures applying to 1982 show a larger percentage of divorced people in all age groups among the minorities than the Han. In particular, in the 20 to 24 age group 1.17 per cent of minority people were divorced but the corresponding figure for the Han was only 0.07 per cent” (Mackerras, 1995: 177). However, Table 1 shows that the divorce rates between the Han and Hui respondents are rather similar (2.3 percent and 2.9 percent respectively). The difference in the divorce rates between the two groups is not statistically significant (Chi-square statistics = 1.182 only). The Hui are not more or less likely than the Han to divorce.

Table 1 also shows that 5.6 percent of the Han are widowed, as compared with 7.1 percent of the Hui. Nearly 87 percent of the Han and 84.4 percent of the Hui are married. Overall, the Han and Hui respondents are rather similar in terms of marital status.

Mate Selection

In this section, I assess courtship and mate selection in Lanzhou City. An essential feature of the family institution in traditional China was the dominant parental control over marriage. Young people were not allowed to meet freely

and determine their marriages. Many marriages were “blinds” — the bride and groom were not allowed to meet until their wedding day (Johnson, 1983; Salaff, 1973; Whyte and Parish, 1984; Wolf, 1985). However, by the early twentieth century, China became an increasingly modern society. More and more Chinese men and women married the people of their choice. The 1949 Communist Revolution accelerated the change in mate choice. By 1982, 80 percent of the marriages among urban Han Chinese were based on individual efforts or introductions by friends (Zang, 1993).

Table 2: Mate Selection (%)

Mate selection method	Han respondents	Hui respondents
Parental arrangement	8.5	23.5
Introduction by matchmakers	3.7	7.6
Introduction by friends	19.6	20.4
Introduction by relatives	7.6	9.0
Introduction by co-workers	6.8	2.6
Own effort	48.5	32.8
Missing cases/not applicable	5.4	4.1

What about young men and women of ethnic minorities? Did they, especially those residing in urban areas, experience a similar change in the aspects of freedom of mate choice? Table 2 shows that 64.8 percent of the Hui marriages are based on individual efforts (free-love) or introductions by friends, relatives, or workmates. Parental arrangement and matchmaking are no longer the dominant methods in mate selection among the Hui in Lanzhou City. The percentage of marriages based on introductions by either friends or relatives for the Han is similar to that of the Hui (27.2 percent vs. 29.4 percent). Clearly, the Hui respondents in Lanzhou City are more “modern” in mate selection than their rural cousins as discussed in existing studies.

Table 2 also shows that the Hui are much more likely than the Han to use parental arrangements or matchmakers to find a mate (23.5 percent vs. 8.5 percent and 7.6 percent vs. 3.7 percent respectively). In comparison, the Han are more likely than the Hui to find a spouse through workmates (6.8 percent vs. 2.6 percent). Also, 48.5 percent of the Han meet their sweethearts on their own, compared with 32.8 percent of the Hui. It seems that the Hui rely more on “traditional” approaches in finding a mate than the Han. I will explain this difference below.

Close-Relation Marriages

Existing studies show that rural Hui practice close-relation marriages. Table 3 shows that close relations are no longer a major source of marriage choices among the Hui in Lanzhou City. Only 4.6 percent of the Hui marry close relations, as compared with 4.5 percent of the Hui who marry their neighbors and 4.7 percent who marry workmates or friends of their parents. The Hui

are almost twice more likely to marry a workmate than a close relation (8.6 percent vs. 4.6 percent). The low frequency of close relation marriages among the urban Hui indicates that they are less “traditional” than rural Hui.

Table 3: Relationships at the Time of Dating and/or Matchmaking (%)

Relationship	Han respondents	Hui respondents
Primary school-mates	1.1	1.6
High school-mates	4.1	1.7
College classmates	2.1	0.7
Neighbours	3.1	4.5
Co-workers	17.6	8.6
Fellow churchgoers	0.0	2.7
Relatives*	2.1	4.6
Hometown fellows	12.5	19.4
Co-workers or friends of spouse's parents	3.6	4.7
Others	44.2	44.9
Missing cases	9.7	6.5

Siblings are not included.

Table 3 also shows that the Hui seem to live in a more closed society than the Han in terms of mate choice. They are more likely than the Han to find a mate from hometown fellows (19.4 percent vs. 12.5 percent). The Han however rely more on workmates as a source of potential marriage partners than the Hui (17.6 percent vs. 8.6 percent). This is probably because the Hui operate in a smaller marriage market than the Han. The Hui insist on marrying Muslims or persons who promise to convert to Islam after marriage (Gladney, 1996; Mackerras, 1994, 1995). This requirement reduces the odds for a Hui to find a mate from his or her workmates since there may not be many workers of the Hui ethnicity in his or her workplace. Chinese scholars and local Han people told me that there were no incentives for Han women to convert to Islam and marry Hui men since the level of educational attainment among the Han is higher than that among the Hui. The Han also found it hard to adjust to the Hui lifestyle. The Hui have to mobilize their community resources to enlarge the pool of prospective mates. Hence, the Hui are more likely than the Han to use parental arrangement and matchmaking to find a mate, which explains why the Hui are more likely than the Han to marry their relatives, hometown fellows, and workmates or friends of their parents.

Duration of Courtship

Little is known about the duration of courtship among the Hui people or the difference in courtship duration between the Han and Hui. Dru Gladney (1996: 127) claims that in a survey of 50 newly married young Hui couples, the “average courtship period was less than 5 months for 76 percent of the

couples surveyed.” It is likely that this short period of courtship results from the fact that 84 percent of these marriages are based on matchmaking.

Table 4: Length of Dating and/or Matchmaking Period (%)

Duration	Han respondents		Hui respondents	
	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Right away	0.9	0.9	1.1	1.1
1-5 weeks	2.7	3.6	7.5	8.6
6-10 weeks	1.2	4.8	3.7	12.3
11-15 weeks	2.0	6.8	3.7	16.0
16-20 weeks	0.8	7.5	2.3	18.3
21-25 weeks	2.3	9.8	3.6	21.9
26-30 weeks	8.9	18.7	10.2	32.1
31-35 weeks	0.7	19.4	0.5	32.6
36-40 weeks	1.4	20.8	0.9	33.5
41-45 weeks	0.3	21.1	0.4	33.8
46-50 weeks	3.0	24.1	4.6	38.4
51-55 weeks	30.3	54.4	32.3	70.7
56-60 weeks	3.3	57.7	3.2	73.9
61-65 weeks	0.5	58.2	0.7	74.7
66-70 weeks	0.8	59.0	0.4	75.0
71-80 weeks	3.6	62.6	2.0	77.0
81-90 weeks	0.9	63.5	0.4	77.4
91-100 weeks	1.2	64.7	1.7	79.1
101-200 weeks	28.9	93.5	16.6	95.7
201-300 weeks	4.7	98.2	3.6	99.3
301-400 weeks	0.9	99.1	0.7	100.0
401 weeks and over	0.9	100.0	0.0	100.0
Mean length*	83.0 weeks		61.1 weeks	

*T statistics=7.326, $p < .001$ level.

Table 4 shows that the average duration of courtship among the Hui (61.1 weeks) in Lanzhou is nearly three times longer than that reported by Gladney. The difference may be due to the fact that Gladney studied rural Hui. In comparison, the Hui in Lanzhou are urban residents.

Table 4 also shows that 70.7 percent of the Hui get married after fifty-five weeks of courtship, as compared with 54.5 percent of the Han. On an average, the Hui tend to have a shorter duration of courtship than the Han. The mean courtship period for the Han is 83 weeks, which is nearly 22 weeks longer than that for the Hui. The difference in courtship duration is very large and statistically significant. The difference may be due to the fact that the Hui rely more than the Han on parents or matchmakers to find a mate. Many of the Han marriages are love matches or based on introductions by friends or colleagues (Table 3). For this kind of marriages, it usually takes a lot of time

for the parties involved to get to know each other and each other's family background. It does not for marriages based on the traditional mate selection methods, however. Marriages among churchgoers, close relatives, and hometown fellows may also reduce the length of courtship among the Hui.

Age at First Marriage

Existing studies show that 51.57 percent of the Hui women are married before the age of 20. Many of these women are rural farmers and hence tend to marry at a younger age. In comparison, Table 5 shows that 35.9 percent of the Hui women in the sample get married below 20. It seems that the Hui women in Lanzhou City are less constrained by tradition and hence are less likely to marry young. Nearly 46 percent of the Hui women are married between 20 and 24. Over 96 percent of the Hui women marry before reaching 29.

Table 5: Age at First Marriage (%)

Age at first marriage	Han women	Hui women	Han men	Hui men
Below 20	19.8	35.9	2.9	9.1
20-24	48.0	45.9	26.3	37.7
25-29	29.4	15.2	53.6	40.0
30-34	1.5	1.9	14.2	10.5
35-39	0.6	1.1	2.2	1.6
Over 40	0.6	0.4	0.8	1.3
Mean age	23.0	21.5	26.5	25.4
	T-Statistics = 4.533*		T-Statistics = 4.990*	

p < .001 level.

The Hui tend to marry at a younger age than the Han. For example, 35.9 percent of the Hui women get married below 20, as compared with 19.8 percent of the Han women. The mean ages at first marriage for the Han and Hui women are 23.0 and 21.5 respectively. The difference in age at first marriage is statistically significant at .001 level.

Table 5 also shows that 9.1 percent of the Hui men are married before 20, as compared with 2.9 percent of the Han men. The mean ages at the first marriage for the Han and Hui men are 26.5 and 25.4 respectively. The difference in age at first marriage is not very big yet statistically significant at .001 level.

Living Arrangements and Family Size

Little has been written about the living arrangement and family size among the Hui in urban China. Table 6 shows rather similar patterns of living arrangements between the Han and Hui families — 5.2 percent of the Han and

4.2 percent of the Hui are childless couples. Nearly 70 percent of the Han live with spouses and unmarried children, as compared with 65.5 percent of the Hui. In other words, the vast majority of both the Han and Hui families are nuclear and conjugal in nature. Such family structures characterize modern society that de-emphasizes primordial ties and parental control embodied in the traditional extended family. The Hui value freedom and autonomy as much as the Han in organizing family life.

Table 6 also shows that more than 11 percent of the Han share the same roof with spouses and married children, as compared with 13.8 percent of the Hui. Almost 8 percent of the Han families and 12.2 percent of the Hui families can be classified as stem families as they live with their parents and children. Overall, there are no significant differences in living arrangements between the two ethnic groups. The Hui differ from the Han in mate selection, duration of courtship, and age at first marriage, but not in living arrangement.

Table 6: Living Arrangements

Living arrangement	Han respondents	Hui respondents
Living alone	4.5	3.1
Childless couple	5.2	4.2
Living with spouse and unmarried children	69.5	65.5
Living with spouse and married children	11.2	13.8
Living with married children and parents	7.7	12.2
Living with grandparents	0.4	0.2
Others	1.5	1.0

Table 7: Family Size (%)

Family size (No of People)	Han respondents	Hui respondents
1	2.0	1.3
2	10.9	8.2
3	48.3	28.2
4	20.5	27.7
5	9.0	16.7
6	4.3	8.7
7	1.9	3.6
8	1.2	1.6
9	0.5	1.3
10	0.4	0.7
Over 11	1.1	2.0
Mean*	3.81	4.34

*T-statistics=3.733, $p < .001$ level.

Table 7 shows the family size of the Lanzhou respondents. Nearly 80 percent of the Han live in the households with 2-4 persons, as compared with 64.1 percent of the Hui. These figures are consistent with the above finding that the vast majority of the Han and Hui families in the sample are nuclear in nature. Table 7 also shows that more than 25 percent of the Hui families and 13.3 percent of the Han families contain 5-6 persons. Clearly, this is due to the fact that more Hui than Han live with their parents and married children. Not surprisingly, the average family size of the Hui is larger than that of the Han (4.34 vs. 3.81). The difference in family size between the two ethnic groups is not very big although statistically significant at .001 level.

Summary and Discussion

Murry et al. (2001: 912) point out that research on the impact of race and ethnicity on family processes can contribute not only to family sociology but also to racial and ethnic studies. A large number of studies have analyzed racial and ethnic differences in household structure and marriage in the West (e.g., Bennett, Bloom and Craig, 1989; Kamo, 2000; Kamo and Zhou, 1994; Morgan et al., 1993; Pagnini and Morgan, 1996). They show that family background and living arrangements influence marital search behaviour (Avery, Goldscheider, and Speare 1992; Lichter et al. 1992; Michael and Tuma 1985). Family structure and marital behaviour are intricately associated with various circumstances such as ethnic group identification, aging, poverty, premarital birth, elderly care, educational attainment, and socioeconomic success (Kamo, 2000: 212, 214, 227; also see Biblarz and Raftery, 1993, 1999; Hogan and Kitagawa 1985; Kamo and Zhou, 1994; McLanahan, 1985; Powell and Steelman, 1993; Thomson, Hanson, and McLanahan, 1994; Wu and Martinson, 1993). Murry et al. (2001: 911) thus call for the need to include families of racial and ethnic minorities in research on ethnicity.

There is a much greater need to include ethnic families in the study of ethnicity in the PRC. A significant number of scholarly publications on ethnic minorities in China have been published in the West since 1990, most of which deal with issues such as relations between Han Chinese and minorities, ethnic identity, minority cultures and traditions, and the like (Constable 1996; Elliott, 2001; Gladney 1996; 1998; Hali, Li and Luckert 1998; Hansen 1999; Harrell, 2001; Harrell et al. 1995; Heberer 1989; Mackerras 1994; 1995; Rhoads, 2000; Rudelson 1997; Wu 1990). Oddly, ethnic family and marital behaviour have not occupied a prominent niche in this research program although they lie at the center of ethnicity and ethnical relations such as ethnic culture, identification, and assimilation.

In this paper, I compare the similarities and differences in household structure and marital behaviour between the Han and Hui in Lanzhou City and use this comparison to assess the relevancy of modernization theory and the cultural approach for research on marriage and household structure among

the Hui in China. I show that close relations are no longer a major source of prospective mates within the Hui group. The frequency of early marriages among the Hui is low. The degree of freedom in mate selection is high as parental arrangement and matchmaking account for 31.1 percent of the Hui marriages only. These findings differ significantly from those reported by Gladney and Mackerras. This is because the subjects Gladney and Mackerras study include a significant proportion of rural Hui, while the Hui in my sample are urban residents. This difference in sample compositions suggests tentatively that urban experience reduces the constraints of tradition and religion on marriage and household structure among the Hui, a suggestion that is consistent with modernization theory.

However, modernization theory does not explain all aspects of family and marital behaviour among the Hui in Lanzhou City. The urban Hui are clearly not as modern as the urban Han in certain aspects of marriage and household. For example, nearly half of the Han marriages are based on “free love”, as compared with only 32.8 percent of the Hui marriages. I also show the heavy reliance of the Hui on their parents and matchmakers in finding a prospective mate. Furthermore, the Hui are more likely than the Han to marry hometown fellows. As mentioned above, these differences may be due to the Hui’s insistence on marrying Muslims, which compels them to operate in a small marriage market and hence increases their reliance on parents, matchmakers, and other sorts of community resources for mate selection. Religion and tradition do have an impact on family life among the Hui in Lanzhou City.

Then, what have we learned from the Lanzhou survey data regarding modernization theory and cultural explanations of family and marital life among ethnic minorities? Modernization theory predicts convergence in family life between the ethnic majority and minority due to the forces of urbanization and industrialization. The cultural approach insists on distinctive patterns of family and marital life among ethnic minorities because of ethnic cultures and values. However, the above analysis shows both differences and similarities in marital and family behaviour between the Han and Hui in Lanzhou City. In other words, both perspectives receive some empirical support, yet neither can adequately model family and marital life in Lanzhou City since they cannot explain differences and similarities at the same time.

The findings reported in this study by no means reject the relevancy of modernization theory and the cultural approach for Chinese studies. Rather, they suggest the need for an innovative use of the two perspectives in the study of marital and family life among the Hui. One possible approach is to combine the two perspectives to explain the observed patterns in Lanzhou. The Hui are more likely than the Han to use traditional approaches in mate selection, i.e., parental arrangement or matchmaking. Yet they are as “modern” as the Han in organizing family life (living arrangements). Nuclear families are as much a favorable option of living arrangement to the Han as to the Hui. Clearly, in organizing marital and family life, the Hui rely on ethnic networks in areas beyond their control (e.g., parental arrangements,

matchmaking, and finding a mate from hometown fellows). However, they become as modern as the Han in areas that they can control (e.g., living arrangements). The impact of urbanization and ethnic culture on family life and marital behaviour among the Hui is highly selective. Modernization theory and cultural preferences explain different aspects of family and marital life. They need to be combined to better estimate patterns of marriage and household structure among ethnic minorities in urban China.

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