Ethnic Minority Girls on Chinese School Benches: Gender Perspectives on Minority Education

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This essay looks at how Chinese school education may influence minority students' gender and ethnic identities by changing their attitudes toward religion, their roles as men and women, and their expectations of life. I argue that for many women belonging to ethnic minorities in China, participation in school education offers the opportunity to find jobs outside their villages and thereby enhance their status in Chinese society, while at the same time it instills in them feelings of cultural inadequacy. As a result, many of these women express contradictory feelings of, on the one hand, having gained pride as women through their (successful) participation in the state education system and, on the other hand, of having developed feelings of inferiority based on their ethnic affiliation.

This essay introduces a subject—Chinese education of ethnic minority girls and women—that has so far received little attention in the existing scholarly literature, both Chinese and Western, on women, education, or ethnic minorities in China. To be sure, Chinese scholars (and officials) have long shown an abiding concern with the development of school education among the peoples officially recognized as national minorities (shaoshu minzu). Numerous books, articles, and statistical compendiums are published every year describing the continuous development of "minority education" (minzu jiaoyu). These sources mostly demonstrate the low existing level of education among the national minorities and suggest ways for improving the condition of schools and education in minority areas. The Chinese state regards low levels of education among national minorities as an obstacle to
modernization as well as being inconsistent with the official ideology of equality among the country's constituent nationalities and therefore also a potential source of ethnic conflict. Developing education among the minorities and paying attention to their own demands and needs for special educational measures is considered crucial to achieving the "unity of the nationalities" (minzu tuanjie) and is therefore accorded ideological (though not necessarily corresponding economic) priority. Yet the specific question of providing educational opportunities to women belonging to ethnic minorities is rarely given special consideration in scholarly and political publications in China. While it is often noted that women belonging to national minorities have the highest illiteracy rates in China, Chinese discussions of minority education seldom discuss the issue in a local context or seek to analyze in depth the reasons behind this phenomenon.

This essay seeks to shed light on how minority women experience the Chinese educational system through a discussion of the ways in which gender perceptions were presented and discussed by female minority students during recent fieldwork in the province of Yunnan. Research was carried out in two locations in Yunnan: the Tai Autonomous Prefecture of Sipsong Panna and the Naxi Autonomous County of Lijiang. There are certain similarities between the political status and educational situation of women and national minorities as social groups in China: women and minorities alike have constitutionally guaranteed rights to equality, with the Han nationality and men, respectively, and, generally speaking, both groups also have a lower educational level than their male and Han counterparts. Some scholars have even drawn attention to the parallel between the construction of the very category of shaoshu minzu (national minorities) as a central element in the official nation-building project and ideology of ethnic equality and the category of funü (women) in the official ideology of gender equality. Stevan Harrell suggests that, "in both cases, there is an objectification of a category that is peripheral [or, perhaps, in the linguistic sense, simply marked] with respect to the normal category of the civiliizers, who are, in the first instance, male, and in the second, Han." Others have pointed out that the academic and professional role models presented in contemporary school texts invariably tend to be male. We may add that they are also all Han.

The few textbook stories that do portray ethnic minorities tend to confirm an image of poor, childlike, grateful people in need of help. Thus, for example, one contemporary primary school text contains a story about the poor Miao village in which the only Han Chinese family serves as a model by offering selfless help to their poor, isolated Miao neighbor. The feminization and eroticization of minorities in China (forcefully demonstrated by several scholars) also has an increasingly significant commercial side that both enforces and reproduces stereotypes of "minority women," especially in minority areas that are popular among tourists, such as the Sipsong Panna region discussed here. As I shall attempt to show, such exoticized and eroticized representations of minorities and minority women often become part of these women's early school experience and therefore play a significant role in the transformation of their gender and ethnic identities as they prepare to make their way in Chinese society.

Minority Females' Participation in School Education

Official Chinese statistics reveal that, in spite of the CCP's egalitarian ideology of equality between men and women, women in China, on the whole, lag behind men in their level of education and constitute a minority in occupations that confer political power, social status, and high income. Chinese social scientists have frequently attempted to explain this continued gender inequality in education in terms of the persistent negative influence of traditional conceptions of gender roles, justified by and partly derived from Confucian ideology. Surveys have shown, for example, that families have an important say in whether or not girls continue in school and that, in cases in which families must choose, most rural families prefer to educate sons. Educating a son is considered a better investment since he will remain in the family, while daughters eventually marry out. In addition, Stanley Rosen and other scholars have argued that the modernization policy adopted in the 1950s has had certain negative effects on women's prospects for achieving equality of opportunity in education and therefore also in other spheres of social life. For instance, in areas where households have access to employment opportunities, such as in local industries, it is often the male members of the household who take up wage labor, while the female household members are left to carry out domestic work, raise livestock, and cultivate the fields. Child labor is an important reason behind the lower level of school attendance among girls compared to boys.

Not surprisingly, educational levels are lowest among rural girls and women. Likewise, as in many other countries, the rate of female participation is lowest at the higher levels of education. In 1994, 32 percent of females over fifteen years of age were illiterate, and women made up 70 percent of all illiterates in China. In addition, one recent Chinese survey has shown that 83 percent of the more than 2.7 million children receiving no schooling in 1987 were girls and that 80 percent of the 2 million new illiterates each year are
females. At the same time, official statistics on female educational levels are rarely presented in relation to women's official ethnic status. It is indisputable, however, that minority women as a whole have the highest illiteracy rates. There are also huge discrepancies in the level of educational attainment among the fifty-six officially recognized nationalities as well as among men and women belonging to different nationalities. Nonetheless, according to official statistics, the fifty-five officially recognized national minorities tend to have fewer students and graduates at all levels of education than the majority nationality, the Han. Statistics from Yunnan show that its residents have among the lowest educational level of all provinces. Yet the provincial capital of Kunming and its surrounding areas, all of which are inhabited mostly by Han Chinese, have a much higher average level of education than the border and mountainous regions of the province, which are mostly inhabited by national minorities. Does this mean, then, that minorities have a lower educational level than the Han in Yunnan, or does it first of all confirm the profound differences between education in rural and urban areas, regardless of ethnic affiliation?

There is no easy answer to this question, and only local studies of the educational environment of men and women of different ethnic groups may reveal when, how, and why some ethnic minorities have lower attendance and completion rates than others. Many of the problems involved in popularizing education among women are in fact similar in rural Han and minority areas. In addition, however, it may also be significant that many ethnic minorities had no tradition of Chinese education, even among boys, before it was introduced in the 1950s, while, for some, Chinese education continues to be regarded as a foreign, imposed institution incompatible with their own ways of living and of perceiving the world.

A second problem encountered when evaluating Chinese statistics on minority educational levels relates to the fact that all people in China have been classified in terms of fifty-six officially recognized nationalities (mínzú). Educational statistics based on these official groupings may be highly misleading, however, since people classified as members of the same nationality may well live far apart from one another, have no interaction, speak mutually unintelligible languages, and have different religious traditions and different histories of adopting or not adopting Chinese education. Official statistics obliterate these potentially significant differences by lumping all the members of an officially recognized nationality into one group. Thus, accurate information on, for instance, an ethnic group like the Nuosu (classified as Yizu) or the Tai (Lu) (classified as Dai) can only be obtained by means of local studies of the areas in which they actually live.

Only scattered statistics are available on the educational participation of minority females in Yunnan. Educational departments within the local county governments I visited kept statistics that divided students and graduates into different nationalities and recorded the total number of girls and boys in school. But, since the two sets of figures are not interpolated, it is impossible to determine the relative participation rates of different nationalities within the same locality. The situation is further complicated by the fact that in some localities specific ethnic groups are singled out for preferential admission criteria. For these reasons the most reliable information we have on the local educational participation of national minorities comes from localities in which a single nationality predominates. In the following sections I first briefly describe the main features of female education in the two minority-populated areas of Lijiang and Sipsong Panna and then proceed to a detailed examination of the relationship between school education and gender perceptions in the two localities.

Lijiang

The majority of the population in Lijiang prefecture belong to the Naxi nationality, who constituted 58.4 percent of Lijiang's population in 1994. The Naxi have a long history of Confucian education and have often been singled out in popular and scholarly publications in China for their success in Chinese education, whether modern or Confucian. Confucian education among the Naxi was directed exclusively almost toward boys; very few Naxi girls participated. This male bias continued with the introduction of modern education. My interviews with Naxi who had attended school or had been teachers under the early years of the Communist regime in the 1950s and early 1960s revealed that Lijiang's schools continued to be dominated by boys during this period and that it was common for classes of fifty students to contain only two or three girl pupils.

In national statistics the Naxi figure prominently as one of the few national minorities with a high percentage of students and graduates at all levels of education. This overall picture of success, however, masks significant problems and weaknesses in Naxi education. From my fieldwork in Naxi villages (and as recognized by the local Naxi government) even among such a small nationality as the Naxi (277,250 people in 1990) there are considerable discrepancies between urban and rural Naxi, with rural Naxi having by far the highest dropout rates. Moreover, while official publications on Naxi education in Lijiang rarely discuss the issue of female educational participation, Naxi education in Lijiang continues to be marked by a stark gender inequality.
that resembles that of rural Han Chinese areas. According to one source, Naxi made up 19.6 percent of all illiterates and half-literate in Yunnan in 1990, while Han accounted for 23.6 percent. In Lijiang prefecture 26 percent of the population was illiterate or half-literate in 1990, compared to only 16 percent in Kunming. When gender differences are taken into account, 64 percent of Lijiang women over twelve years of age were illiterate or half-literate, compared to 34 percent of men (1982 figures). When we consider only the Naxi population of Lijiang, 38 percent of persons over twelve years of age were illiterate or half-literate in 1982, or nearly 23 percent of Naxi men and over 52 percent of Naxi women. The statistics suggest, and fieldwork confirmed, that the Naxi on the whole have a relatively high participation rate in all levels of education; it is also clear, however, that there is a clear tendency among Naxi to favor the education of boys over girls. In one Lijiang secondary school 74.5 percent of all graduates between 1985 and 1991 were male. In another lower secondary school in which nearly all students were Naxi (191 out of 204) 62 percent of students were boys, and only 38 percent were girls. All but two of the fourteen teachers (all Naxi) in this school were men, a pattern replicated in the county as a whole, where 72 percent of all teachers are men.

Thus, the general situation of the Naxi is a high level of Chinese education with a gender bias in favor of males. The other ethnic minorities present in Lijiang, such as the Lisu, Miao, Pumi, and others, have much lower levels of Chinese education than the Naxi; their dropout rates are higher, their illiteracy rates are higher, and their schools are often in dire condition. In Yunnan as a whole, the Lisu nationality had a female illiteracy and half-literacy rate of over 85 percent in 1982 (57.6 percent among males), while among the Miao the rate was even higher, at nearly 91 percent of females and 57 percent of males.

Sipsong Panna

National statistics on the participation of members of the Dai nationality in Chinese education are not very helpful for understanding the educational level of the Tai people (an ethnic group officially considered to be part of the Dai nationality) living in the prefecture of Sipsong Panna. This is because the Tai in Sipsong Panna (284,639 people in 1990) make up only 25 percent of all people in China classified as Dai. National statistics on the Dai nationality portray a much higher level of participation in Chinese education than is the case among the Tai in Sipsong Panna.

Interestingly, whereas the Naxi have a relatively high participation rate but a clear gender bias in favor of males, the Tai in Sipsong Panna have a comparatively poor participation rate overall, including high dropout rates and relatively few students at the level of senior secondary and tertiary education, but less gender bias and therefore a comparatively high degree of female participation in Chinese education. Many Tai school dropouts are boys rather than girls, a phenomenon that is partly explained by the Tai's long-established custom of sending boys between the age of seven and fifteen to local Theravada Buddhist monasteries as novices to receive full-time religious training. This does not mean that most Tai girls remain in school, yet it presents the interesting case of an ethnic group whose proportion of girls enrolled in basic education is as high as that of boys and who also tend to have more girls continuing into higher levels of education than boys. I shall return to this later.

In the whole of Sipsong Panna prefecture over 89 percent of school-age children were enrolled in primary school in 1990. Among those enrolled, 55 percent completed five years of schooling, of which more than 88 percent actually graduated from primary school. Fully 76 percent of primary school students belonged to national minorities, compared to only 58 percent of students in lower secondary school and 31.7 percent in higher secondary school. In 1995 there were a total of 4,356 registered Buddhist novices (all boys, most of them Tai) in Sipsong Panna. Among the school-age novices over 67 percent were also enrolled in school. These figures are only partly revealing, however, for we do not know the total number of school-age Tai boys nor the percentage of school-age Tai boys and girls attending school. My interviews in village schools showed that many boys, and especially novices, were enrolled in school without actually attending on a regular basis, and many dropped out after a few years.

Concerning illiteracy rates, the official figure for the Sipsong Panna population as a whole in 1990 was 25.75 percent illiterate or half-literate. One researcher reported that about half of the illiterates in Sipsong Panna in 1990 were Tai (who made up about one-third of the total population) and that 68 percent of all illiterates in the prefecture were women. During interviews I conducted in Sipsong Panna villages many women told me that they had been recorded by the census takers as being literate simply for having participated in a few months of literacy training (mostly in Tai and Chinese) at some time in their lives, even though they were not able to read and write today.

In the early 1980s, when the official policy toward religious expression became more relaxed, the Tai began to rebuild their Buddhist temples. Consequently, some local officials expressed concern that some schools practically became "girls' schools" as many Tai boys left to become Buddhist novices. A number of new measures were then introduced, with varying degrees of success, to convince parents to send their sons to the Chinese schools.
so-called girls’ schools no longer exist, but teachers in most village primary schools still complain about male novices who enroll but rarely turn up, do not do their homework, or drop out after a few years. A few statistics from the southern county of Mengla in Sipsong Panna show that the proportion of girls in school is indeed higher than in most other rural areas of Yunnan. The figures include all primary and regular secondary students in Mengla and are therefore not limited to Tai students. Since my fieldwork and local school statistics both show that other local ethnic groups such as the Akha tend to favor boys over girls in schooling, it is conceivable that the actual proportion of Tai girls to Tai boys is even higher than the following figures suggest (see tables 1 and 2).^{14}

Educational patterns among the other minority ethnic groups in Sipsong Panna resemble to a large extent that of the rural areas of Lijiang: poverty is often a major reason for very low school attendance rates, and there is a tendency, among the Akha for instance, to favor education of sons when there is no possibility of providing for the education of all children. The Blang (and the few Kamu) are the only Theravada Buddhists in the area apart from the Tai, but most of them live under very poor conditions, and boys and girls alike have low levels of education. I visited several Blang villages that had temples with novices (who often could not read or write and had no monks to train them) and where the authorities had recently closed down the local primary school for lack of students. In addition to the problem of convincing students to remain in school in these poor areas, it is also difficult for local education

departments to find teachers who are willing to stay in these villages. They are poorly paid, face a harsh existence, and do not speak the local language; consequently, many of them look for a transfer as quickly as possible.

### Daughters in School? Parental Attitudes

Campaigns for improving school attendance and graduation rates have mostly been directed toward parents. In the 1950s, when the Communist Party began its attempts to popularize Chinese state education in Sipsong Panna, work teams held large meetings for parents, trying to convince them to send their children to school; they organized literacy classes for grown-ups, and teachers went to the private homes of parents and argued for sending children to school. Later on, in the 1980s, parents in some Tai townships had to pay a deposit when a child started school and would lose it if the child dropped out. To a lesser degree, campaigns were directed toward monks, who were encouraged to let their novices go to school. Today Tai parents are widely criticized by local teachers and administrators for not paying sufficient attention to their children’s education, that is, Chinese state-run school education. They are frequently reproached for being indifferent to whether or not their sons drop out and become novices and for readily agreeing when young Tai girls want to leave school and marry early. In the critical words of one educational cadre:

The Aini [Akha] are best at studying, the Tai are the worst. They refuse to change their habits and they marry early. Even when they do not marry early, they do not want to study. The Tai are not interested in studying and it is the same with the Blang. Most of those who continue are Aini. They are better in enduring hard times, and their marriage customs are like those of us Han Chinese, that is, they do not marry so early. They have more contacts with us Han Chinese. Every year two hundred new students start here, but the majority of them have to be Tai according to our rules. That is because the Tai make up the principal ethnic group here. But anyway, there is always a majority of Aini students here because so many Tai drop out. When other minorities drop out of school it is because their family is poor and cannot afford to keep them in school. The Tai stop because of their customs. Their boys first learn Tai script in the temples and then when they go to school their Chinese is very bad, they do not understand teachers and they quickly drop out. We actually do not want all those Tai students here, but we have to take them.\(^{16}\)

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**TABLE 1. Female Students in All Primary Schools in Mengla County, 1988**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>1,472</td>
<td>1,447</td>
<td>2,539</td>
<td>2,340</td>
<td>2,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Students</td>
<td>1,496</td>
<td>1,508</td>
<td>1,245</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>1,092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Female Population</td>
<td>44.68</td>
<td>47.92</td>
<td>48.97</td>
<td>45.34</td>
<td>47.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2. Female Students in Lower and Higher Secondary Schools in Mengla County, 1988**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade of Lower and Higher Secondary Schools</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>1,050</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Female Students</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Female Students</td>
<td>47.90</td>
<td>44.08</td>
<td>46.12</td>
<td>51.72</td>
<td>51.98</td>
<td>50.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unlike the Tai boys, Tai girls do not become novices and therefore participation in state schooling is their only opportunity for formal education. While most rural Tai parents I interviewed were concerned that at least one son should become a novice for some time, they were rather indifferent about whether or not their children would attend the local Chinese school. If the children themselves wanted to attend they would agree to it, and, if not, parents often took the view that they had no way of forcing their children to attend school. Interestingly, however, those parents who only had daughters tended to be more positive toward school education than parents with sons. This was especially true of parents who did not require their daughters’ help in the household; such parents frequently expressed a desire for their daughters to attend school at least for the first six years, yet they rarely expressed specific expectations of them with regard to their academic performance or their chances of continuing in the education system. Participation in the state-run school system appeared to hold no symbolic value to the Tai beyond the practical value attached to basic literacy skills.

The government’s difficulty in persuading Tai boys to remain in school has often been explained in terms of parents’ preference for Buddhist-novice education, which conflicts with the state school system. It has been much more difficult, however, for researchers and teachers to identify a “logical” explanation for why many Tai girls leave school before the state’s ideal minimum of nine years. Indeed, Chinese researchers disagree over whether state education among Tai girls has been a success: is it laudable that as many Tai girls as boys attend basic schooling, or is it lamentable that Tai females, like Tai males, have a higher-than-average dropout rate and that relatively few continue on to higher education? Some researchers have stressed that it is easier for the Chinese authorities to convince the Tai to send their daughters to school because the Tai, unlike the Han and the Naxi, have no tradition of preferring sons over daughters. The main reasons often identified for the absence of a strong male bias among the Tai are that Tai marriages are not arranged and are matrilocal; that is, husbands reside with the wife’s family after marriage before forming their own household after a few years. Others have argued, however, that an important reason for the low level of female education among Tai and Tibetans alike is that Buddhism only supports the education of boys and that parents are therefore not inclined to send girls to school.

Both of these explanations focus on internal cultural characteristics that are supposed to explain a specific ethnic group’s low participation in state education. According to such explanations, failed attempts to spread and popularize state education among a given ethnic minority are first of all due to the minority’s inherited cultural traits, which are incompatible with the modern Chinese society and therefore need to be changed. In fact, this view of the cultural deficiencies of the Tai (and many other ethnic minorities) finds expression not only among many researchers and cadres at higher administrative levels but also at the local level among teachers and leaders who criticize parents for transmitting and encouraging values that are regarded as obstructing the goals of the state education system. Thus, Tai parents are criticized for, among other things, letting their sons become novices and monks, for supporting their daughters’ early marriages, and for being indifferent to the school education of both sons and daughters. This view (in addition to mere economic calculation) also lies behind the recent heavy promotion of boarding school education among national minorities, since boarding school is regarded as a convenient and effective means of breaking the cultural influence of parents and other villagers upon children while at the same time ensuring that the children engage in schoolwork rather than domestic work.

Tai students’ own perceptions of what their parents expected from them in school were largely consistent with what parents themselves expressed in interviews. Few felt strong expectations from their parents with regard to school performance. When parents were asked to mention specific things they desired for their children’s future, only those with substantial Chinese education themselves (i.e., beyond lower secondary school) cited Chinese education or a job that was necessarily related to school education. By contrast, Akha parents’ expectations of children who had managed to continue beyond primary and, especially, lower secondary school were higher than those of Tai parents. Discussions among Tai and Akha students of this phenomenon often revolved around the fact that Akha students, unlike Tai students, felt heavy family pressure to perform well in school in order to secure a job “outside the village.” The most common perception of parental expectations among both Tai and Akha students was that parents wanted their child to become a “medical worker so that he or she could help the parents when they grew old.” Akha students additionally said that, if nothing else, their parents wanted them “to escape the hard labor in the village” by finding outside work.

The Akha, Blang, Akhe, Phusa, Lahu, and other minorities living higher up in the mountains of Sipsong Panna generally have lower levels of education than those living at lower elevations, and in many villages only around 10 percent of school-age children manage to complete primary school. Several upland villages I visited had never produced a single primary school graduate. Yet rural Akha who continue to lower secondary school are often celebrated in their villages. Success, of course, is a relative term, and the highest expectation of most parents was for a child to gain admission to a specialized secondary school, which, unlike regular higher secondary education, guaranteed a job
after graduation. Akha students in lower primary schools and in the Teachers’ Training School, whom I interviewed, all expressed concern that their families had to suffer economically because they were in school and that, therefore, it was important they made up for this sacrifice by succeeding in the quest for a job outside the village. In addition, many female Akha students also mentioned that, due to poverty, most families in their villages preferred to focus on a son’s education. Girls married early, moved to their husband’s family, performed domestic work, and were not expected to leave the village. Female Akha students often faced the dilemma of being celebrated in the village and at the same time shunned by other village girls, who regarded them as alien after spending years at distant boarding schools. 

The most sudden and radical changes in female educational participation occurred during the Cultural Revolution, when commune took over the responsibility for organizing all school education and parents had nothing to gain economically from keeping their children at home to work in the fields. Children were expected to attend school, and they often did, mainly learning to read selected texts by Chairman Mao and working part-time in the fields. Today, however, there is a very clear difference between Naxi parents in the city of Lijiang who allow all their children to participate in compulsory education and those in the rural areas who still tend to favor sons when poverty forces them to choose between educating a son or daughter. Indeed, parents from different ethnic groups (Naxi, Nuoso, Miao, Tuoluo’en, Lisu, and Premi) in the poorest rural areas of Lijiang often shared a similar attitude toward their children’s education: schooling is an onerous financial investment that also deprives the family of precious labor power. Fewer rural parents than urban ones believed—though many expressed the hope—that school education would lead to economic prosperity and a job outside the village.

Most parents said that they wished to invest in the education of at least one son and that it would be better to educate a son rather than a daughter because at least he would remain in the family. Very often, however, parents did not argue rationally for or against this view but simply took it for granted that sending a son rather than a daughter to school was the normal and acceptable way to behave. Many teachers in rural districts of Lijiang also complained that it was difficult to convince parents to let their daughters remain in school. My interviews suggested that many rural Naxi parents would be happy to see their daughters as well as their sons receive an education but that, when economic conditions forced them to choose one over the other, they would, without further rational consideration, express a male preference for the reasons mentioned earlier and because this was how their own parents and grandparents would have chosen.

Historically, Confucian education was regarded by the Lijiang Naxi as a main route for sons to acquire enhanced social status for themselves and their families. Today many parents in rural Lijiang allow their daughters to receive a primary education but tend only to support sons continuing on to secondary education. As is the case in Sipsong Panna, participation in Chinese school education does not guarantee the rural Naxi in Lijiang an improved economic position or a nonagricultural job, but, unlike in Sipsong Panna, Chinese school education does confer social status and is considered a main road to knowledge and wisdom. Although most parents in the city of Lijiang want their daughters to complete nine years of compulsory education, male preference was reflected in the fact that several interviewees warned their daughters of the difficulties of finding a marriage partner if they were to obtain a higher education (or a better job). Such warnings appear to have an impact on young Naxi female students and graduates, who often expressed the view that the social price of succeeding in the education system was too high to make the effort worthwhile. Even so, I found that cultural explanations of the Naxi tendency to favor boys over girls in education were often less important than the economic constraints faced by families. It was my firm impression that more rural Naxi families in Lijiang would happily allow their daughters to attend school for longer if only they found they could afford it.

At the same time, many female minority students have found that in recent years it has become easier for them to obtain certain kinds of jobs precisely because they belong to an ethnic minority, are female, and have attended school for a few years. The tourist industry in Sipsong Panna, which is dominated by Han Chinese entrepreneurs, is presently booming, and there is a high demand for minority women who can speak enough Chinese to serve the increasing number of (predominantly male) tourists who visit the region from other parts of China. In Lijiang, for example, parents are often encouraged by the local government to send their daughters to school for longer periods of time precisely in order to meet this burgeoning demand for educated minority women in the tourism industry. Indeed, as we shall see, the state school system is complicitous in more ways than one in the current ongoing attempt to reproduce officially sanctioned representations of minority culture for popular consumption by mainly Han audiences.

How Schools Represent Minority Women

In minority areas the school, and the educational arena in general, often comes to play its own special role in representing minorities and minority
women especially—one that reflects a mixture of official state representations transmitted via schoolbooks, popular Han Chinese exoticized representations, and representations produced and communicated by local minority elite members themselves. A recent example of representations of minority women is found in a new series of educational publications about women in Yunnan. Each nationality has its own booklet composed of a mixture of color pictures and brief texts about women. The front covers of the booklets all show pictures of women wearing traditional costumes, except for the booklet on the Han Chinese, titled "In Pursuit of Beauty," which shows three young, beautiful Han Chinese women wearing highly fashionable Western clothes.

In recent years Sipsong Panna has become an attractive tourist spot for Han Chinese from all over China, and it has also become an important center for foreign trade since the opening of the borders with neighboring Southeast Asian states. In the imagination of many Han Chinese, the Tai people, and especially Tai women, have long been wrapped in an aura of mysticism, beauty, gentleness, and liberal sexual behavior, as is evident from numerous Chinese popular and pseudoscientific publications, TV series, and postcards. In the publication series mentioned earlier the booklet about the Tai shows a boat full of Tai women rowing while in traditional Tai dress and is entitled "Women Bathed in Holy Water." Tourists come to Sipsong Panna to look at Tai women, to be served by Tai women, and to feel the "gentle atmosphere" of the Tai people. This gives rise to the curious situation in which other minority women and even Han women dress up as Tai when it is convenient for business. In addition, selected Tai villages have been transformed into living ethnographic museums, where tourists can pay to see a "real" Tai house from the inside while being served tea by a beautiful Tai girl.

The exotic representation and perception of the Tai and, especially, Tai women has become a good business in Sipsong Panna. Today local schools are also engaged in the business of representing Tai women for the benefit of the tourist trade. State support for education is insufficient to ensure that schools in many minority areas have the same equipment, physical standard, and quality of teachers as schools in the more prosperous regions of China. Schools, however, have the potential to generate their own earnings and are encouraged by government to do so. The most common means of raising school income across China is to grow and sell agricultural products from fields attached to the schools. Another means, increasingly common in minority and tourist areas, is to try to attract investment and/or aid from central units in China or from foreign sources. Some minority boarding schools appear to have been successful in the latter. In return, the schools provide contingents of colorfully dressed minority students to sing and perform at parties and other social occasions attended by important guests.

Students are sometimes requested by local school authorities to participate in such events, and, whereas several students in tertiary education complained that they were not paid for their performances (nor for simply wearing their "ethnic costumes" on certain occasions), most secondary school students appeared to take it for granted that they were required to perform on occasion for elite audiences made up mostly of middle-aged Han Chinese men in important social positions. It is true that at their own private parties the students of different ethnic groups often enjoyed performing and dancing for one another. Yet, by staging on command a public performance of minority students who "like to sing and dance," the schools actively participate in the commodification of minority women and serve to confirm and reinforce an exoticized image of minority peoples.

I observed strong discrepancies in the attitudes to these kind of performances among Tai and Akha students. Whereas Tai students normally wore clothes that resembled the traditional Tai-style dress both in and outside school, Akha girls would never think of putting on a traditional village costume and felt very embarrassed when they were required to do so by the school. For both Akha and Tai students alike, the Tai costume was associated with brightness, color, beauty, femininity, dancing, easygoing life, and gentleness, while traditional Akha dress was associated with darkness, a harsh life, poverty, and backwardness. Often Akha girls would tell me that they were jealous of the Tai dress and wished they could also wear it but that their skin color betrayed them as Akha. Many Akha students tended to dislike darker skin, which is associated with the non-Tai ethnic groups from the mountains, and they often brought this up when asked what they considered were the differences between Akha and Tai. They felt that their "backwardness" became too obvious when exposed to an influential audience representing modernity and money and when performing side by side with what they considered to be the more refined dancing, singing, and costumes of Tai girls.

In 1992 one boarding school for minority nationalities set up a special "tourism course." The course was open to students who had not passed the examination for higher secondary school and consisted of one year of training in preparation for work in the local tourist industry, mainly as tourist guides and as service personnel in hotels. The course included classes on "travel psychology" (luyou xinlixue), "behavioral norms" (xingwei guifan), "etiquette" (liyi), and "minority dance" (minzu wudao). This represents another example of how schools make use of the local tourist industry in order to generate school...
income, while at the same time they participate in the construction and confirmation of stereotypical representations of minorities, especially minority women. These representations invariably establish a contrast, implicit or explicit, between "traditional" minority people and the "modern" Han.

Female Students' Conception of Gender Roles

I have elsewhere argued that during their school education, and especially through the boarding school experience, many ethnic minority students are forced to reconsider the significance and relevance of the cultural values and beliefs with which they have grown up and that this sometimes results in shame and disregard for what has come to be considered as "backward" customs. Both male and female students appear to have been equally affected by the cultural repression they experience in school. At the same time, however, it was also clear that changing notions of the value of one's cultural and religious customs and beliefs were closely connected to changing concepts of gender roles and relations and that individual responses to state education were far from being gender neutral. For instance, the salience of learning (in school) that divination was a backward and "superstitious" habit was experienced differently by Akha girls and boys. Similarly, the consequences of reverting to the old Tai script rather than using the new Tai script while in school were different for Tai girls and boys. And the Naxi's often-praised ability to learn from other nationalities and to succeed in Chinese education had different implications for Naxi female and male students. Thus, to understand ethnic responses to the state project of promoting a unified, standardized state education system, we need also to look specifically at the different political implications of this project for men and women.

One example of a political act that has so far only been understood from an ethnic perspective, without paying attention to its gender-specific relevance, is the recent return to the old Tai script in Sipsong Panna. When the Communist Party in the early 1950s decided to create new Roman scripts for a select number of ethnic groups, it also decided to revise, simplify, and standardize some of the scripts that already existed. The Tai script used in Sipsong Panna was one such script selected for simplification by a joint effort of Tai and Chinese scholars. The new simplified script was supposed to ensure standardization and make it easier for Tai to learn to read and write. It was also expected to facilitate a gradual transition to Chinese and to break the traditionally close relationship between the Tai script and Theravada Buddhism. The new, simplified script was decreed to be the only Tai script used in schools, local newspapers, and other local publications, a situation that lasted from the late 1950s to the Cultural Revolution and again from 1978 until the late 1980s. During these periods only boys who were appointed as Buddhist novices in the temples were allowed to study the traditional Tai script. Tai girls who attended school during these periods learned only the new script, as did Tai women who participated in adult literacy classes.

In 1986 the local Sipsong Panna government, which was dominated by Tai, decided that the new script was to be replaced by the traditional one. They defended this change on grounds that the traditional script was still taught in the region's monasteries and that it constituted an indissoluble part of the Tai cultural heritage as well as being the medium for traditional Tai texts. Some problems were mentioned in this regard; for instance, that reporters at the local television station and newspaper were accustomed to the new script and would find it difficult to learn the old one. One group that was most directly affected by the decision yet was not even mentioned, however, were women who had learned the new script in school and who had no knowledge of the traditional script. Several female interviewees who had learned the new script told me that, with this new policy, their knowledge of written Tai was rendered largely useless.

Nonetheless, the ethnic, historical, and symbolic significance of the old Tai script was so strong that most female students and graduates welcomed the change. Many recalled having been told stories by their grandparents about how the Tai script had come into being and why it was important to the Tai and distinguished them from the other ethnic groups in the area. Although Tai women were not part of the formal learning culture in the villages, they nonetheless played an important role in transmitting the symbolic value of the Tai language to their children. Many argued strenuously in favor of the cultural advantages of returning to the traditional script, despite the fact that they themselves were practically disadvantaged by the move.

Then, in 1996, the local government decided to revert back to the new script. The result, at the time of this writing, has been that the teaching of the Tai script has been called off for nearly a year in most schools while textbooks are being revised. At the same time, the few schools experimenting with expanded bilingual Tai-Chinese education, using the old Tai script, have had to cancel their programs. Although it is difficult to know what the consequences of this latest decision will be, it will certainly add to the confusing relationship between the two scripts and to the division between monastery and school.

Concerning the question of the status of the Tai spoken and written language in schools, Tai female students were on the whole less engaged in the
issue than males. In contrast with Tai males, they never had to choose between school or monastery, secular or Buddhist education, Chinese or Tai language. Had it not been for the school, they would probably not have learned to read and write much anyway, they told me. Perhaps that was also why they tended to be less outspoken than male students against the suppression of religion in education and the lack of Tai language instruction beyond the primary level. If a female Tai wanted to leave the village, learn to read and write, or find a job outside of agriculture or local trade, the school system was one of the means available for achieving these aims. Therefore, those women with ambitions to continue in the school system (and they were relatively few among those I interviewed) attempted to adapt as best they could to existing realities, while those with little ambition to continue their education tended to keep a low profile and often dropped out after scoring poorly on an exam.

Another realm of school education in which gender differences acquire significance has to do with instilled notions of cultural backwardness and modernity. In school students learn that "superstitious activities" are "leftovers" from more "primitive stages of human society," while religion, on the other hand, only develops in more advanced forms of society. According to this official view, both will ultimately melt away in the socialist society, where there is no need to "escape from the real life." This understanding has clear implications for students' concepts of their own religious upbringing. It also has special implications for female students when sex, in addition to their ethnic identity, both come to represent backwardness, superstition, and primitive behavior. Emily Chao has shown that in the Naxi elite's creation of "dongba culture" (dongba wenhua) as a signifier of Naxi identity and representation, the ritual priest, or dongba, has been granted an identity as male, learned, and literary, in contrast to his historical contemporary, the sanba, who is represented as female, backward, and illiterate.

Unlike the dongba, the sanba have rarely been objects of scholarly research, nor have they achieved prominent symbolic value in the modern process of Naxi identification and of establishing the Naxi as an ethnic group in China. To the degree that Naxi students learn anything about Lijiang history and the history of the Naxi and other ethnic groups in the area, it is most likely to be related to the male dongba culture, which has been officially promoted as proof that the Naxi had early on developed their own script (and were therefore more culturally advanced than other nonliterate ethnic groups). In this way dongba activities and all that is connected to them changed during the course of one decade in the 1980s from being considered elements of superstition to evidence of advanced culture. Evening and day courses were set up for men and women who wished to study dongba culture.

The emphasis on dongba culture may have had a profound impact on Naxi students' and intellectuals' sense of ethnic pride and self-confidence, but for Naxi female students this privileging of the dongba as "the Naxi's own traditional intellectuals" also serves to confirm that literacy, development, and education are first of all identified with males. The perception is reinforced by the fact that the well-educated personages in Naxi history as well as today tend to be exclusively male. In Chinese publications Naxi are frequently characterized as an ethnic group that "loves learning." Naxi female students, whom I interviewed, often repeated this characterization—even though their own mothers were mostly illiterate and their own first priority with regard to a future husband was that he should have more education than themselves. Many also raised the complaint (often heard from Han Chinese women as well) that it was nearly impossible for a woman to marry after the age of thirty if she possessed a higher education or had a well-paid job in a private company.

Thus, while the more or less direct alteration of the content of education in Lijiang brought about by Naxi intellectuals and individual Naxi teachers in recent years has probably strengthened the ethnic identity of many Naxi students and helped to eradicate their feelings of belonging to a backward minority, this change has left unchallenged—and perhaps even reinforced—traditional concepts of Naxi men as bearers of civilization, education, and development and of Naxi women as representatives of tradition and family life. New tales about Naxi heroes and famous Naxi people, and of the dongba heritage and dongba culture, may in the future become an increasingly significant, though often unofficial, part of school education. But the role models and bearers of this celebrated Naxi literary tradition are so far still predominantly men.

Discussions I held among Tai and Akha students about so-called superstitious practices in Akha villages highlighted how the female gender was often connected in students' minds to notions of superstition and backwardness. Through discussions among students about Akha female shamanism, it became clear that most students accepted a view that the superstition practiced in Akha villages confirmed a kind of backwardness that was first of all female in nature. In addition, most illiterate Akha were female. One discussion among Tai and Akha students in which the Akha students reluctantly talked about the female shamans in their village ended on the following note.

Tai student: "This dancing [by the Akha female shaman] is really terrifying."

Akha student: "I know. My father already does not believe in it anymore."
My mother always wants to call the nipha when we are sick, but my father says it is superstition.

*Akha student:* "Yes, my father says the same. Women are much more superstitious than men. Men are more open (kaifang) ... I don't know why."

One of the most striking observations during interviews with female secondary students belonging to different ethnic groups in Sipsong Panna was how attitudes toward religion, novices, and expectations of future life changed with the age of the students. Obviously, a twelve-year-old Tai girl in her first year of lower secondary school would reflect differently on her own life and have a less analytical attitude toward her own cultural background than a twenty-year-old student in her last year of specialized secondary school. Yet, apart from this obvious maturation, there also seemed to be a growing resentment and stigmatization of what Tai students themselves regarded as the most significant features of their previous village life: Buddhist religious beliefs and practices, belief in spirits, the custom of sending boys to monasteries, speaking the Tai language, and engaging in agricultural work. I believe this change was connected to the school's undisguised promotion of a notion of development and modernization that was inextricably bound up with atheism, the learning of Chinese, and the study of "modern" subjects, which takes place only in state-run schools. Tai girls in lower secondary schools tended to be very outspoken and assertive in their statements concerning boys and men becoming novices or monks. Most argued that men behaved better if they had been novices and that they were also more learned; often there was simply no doubt in their minds that it took a period of novice-hood to make a man. As a result, many did not find it necessary or relevant to argue why their future husband should possess some Buddhist training. By contrast, female students at the uppermost level of senior secondary school and those in tertiary education were often more critical of the male novice experience. Their main argument often paralleled that of the school—namely, that becoming a novice prevented one from receiving a good school education. And, since the girls were educated in Chinese schools themselves, they also wanted husbands or boyfriend with similar training.

During their time in boarding school Tai minority girls were prevented from participating in the religious activities of their villages. They were also taught that religion obstructs modernization, and at the same time they gained a growing awareness that only through participation in Chinese school education could they expect to attain desirable positions in government, administration, and teaching. And, not least, through the deliberate omission of Tai language, history, and culture in the curriculum, they internalized the school's message that these aspects of their heritage and identity were "useless" and incompatible with "development" and "modernization"—concepts that I never found formally discussed in schools but which were taken for granted as positive and commonly celebrated goals of the development of society. Most of these students appeared to have an abstract perception of the "Han Chinese" as the most "advanced" nationality, a notion that was transmitted to them directly through the school system. A common argument put forward by older Tai students against boys becoming Buddhist novices was that: "the Han are more developed than us so it would be a waste of time for a boy to go to a monastery—it would be better for him to learn Han Chinese from the Han in a Han school (*Hanzu xuexia*)." This argument was expressed by Tai female and male students alike, but I found that Tai female students in general were less critical of the messages transmitted by the school and more critical of the religious practices of their families.

One reason why school education may have a stronger and different impact on Tai girls and young women than on Tai males is that the school represents one of the only means available to Tai girls of becoming literate, of receiving an education, of finding a job, and of perhaps moving upward in society. They find possibilities in the state education system that they would not find elsewhere. In any case they do not have the choice of becoming novices, and many would not have learned to read and write Tai in the first place; as a result, Tai female students may find it easier than Tai males to accept the boarding school's pressure for assimilation and its demand that they reject a large degree of the cultural patterns and customs they were brought up with. Thus, the attitudes and responses of Tai female students at higher levels of education and among graduates toward the form and content of state education are frequently marked by a conflicting relationship between the loss of ethnic self-confidence as Tai and the gaining of self-confidence as female students who are praised in the school system for succeeding against the odds of being both Tai and woman.

It may be the case that, as an increasing number of Tai girls receive Chinese education and because they are more likely than boys to continue in the education system, the position of women in Tai society will gradually improve as these women gain influential positions in the various state organs and institutions that demand modern education and knowledge of the Chinese language. One Chinese researcher has argued that the change has already affected Tai women's position in the local Tai community because there are an increasing number of Tai women working in the administration and because they have become important in local trade."
Conclusion

Studies on the Chinese education system have so far largely ignored education among the non-Han peoples, who live mainly in the vast border regions of the People's Republic. To the limited degree that scholars outside of China have concerned themselves with the policies and practice of Chinese education among non-Han minorities, they have mostly done so as part of more general studies of ethnic minorities in the People's Republic or of national policy toward minorities. There are, however, a number of issues that call for a more integrated approach to the study of education in China as a whole and the study of education among ethnic minorities. One of those issues concerns the different ways in which boys and girls, men and women, conceive of, are influenced by, and respond to the content and form of standardized Chinese education as promoted by the state school system. For ethnic minority students of both sexes, the encounter with the state education system is often a powerful experience that to differing extents impacts upon students' ethnic self-perceptions; their perceptions of the Han; and their perceptions of the Chinese state, government, and nation. In short, the school often plays a crucial role in the ongoing process of ethnic identification.

The Chinese state has encountered numerous difficulties in its attempts to establish and popularize Chinese education among the different ethnic minorities, and many of these minorities have in turn responded to this project with passive or active resistance or simply indifference. Others, of course, have either had long experience in adopting and adapting various forms of Chinese education or have found social, political, or economic advantages in participating in, and eventually modifying, the form and content of local schools. In either case the deep significance of the concept, ideology, and policy of minority education (minzu jiaoyu) has ensured that Chinese and foreign researchers and government workers alike have first of all studied and treated "minorities" as such, rather than paying attention to the profound discrepancies between minority men and women in terms of their relation to education, concepts of education, and responses to the state education system.

This essay has attempted to show not only that, for important historical, cultural, economic, and political reasons, different ethnic groups have responded differently to the form and content of Chinese state education but also that the state education system is experienced differently by women and men within the same ethnic group. Processes of ethnic and gender identification are closely related—perhaps even interdependent. In the course of confrontation with an education system based on the Chinese language and su-
fused with notions of modernization, atheism, and nationalism that serve to transmit an eroticized, exoticized, and feminized image of non-Han peoples, the salience of the complex interconnectedness of ethnic and gender identities stands out.

One of the messages transmitted via the education system that clearly had an impact on female minority students' perception of women and of their own ethnic group concerns the backwash of superstitious activity, which the school often presents as being directly connected to the popularity of female shamans and sorcerers as well as to traditional minority female costumes, illiteracy, and early marriage. In the case of the Akha, for example, all students were aware that their ethnic group was associated with backwardness, but, in addition, female Akha students were very conscious of the fact that this backwardness was mainly associated with things and practices connected to females. Naxi female students also faced the fact that education was until recently (and still is in some areas) mainly a male project and that a family's status was connected to the successful participation of its male members in Chinese education. Unlike the Akha, however, the Naxi belong to an ethnic group that is celebrated in China for its openness toward what is often described as "more developed nationalities" (notably the Han) and which has managed to establish itself as a well-known and influential national minority in China. The fact that most contemporary Naxi intellectuals are men, that those in former times who succeeded in Confucian education were men, and that even the Naxi's "own intellectuals," the dongba, were men apparently did not diminish Naxi female students' pride in their ethnic affiliation.

Regarding traditional, and to a certain extent contemporary, attitudes toward boys' and girls' education, the Naxi have much in common with the rural Han. A comparative approach incorporating Han women and men's perceptions of and responses to the messages of national unity, modernization, and concepts of development (fazhan) and backwardness (luohou), as transmitted in the national school system, would do much to increase our knowledge of how, why, and under what circumstances ethnic and gender identities, respectively, gain salience and what role school education plays in this process. The comparisons that have been made in this essay concerning the impact of state education on gender perceptions among different ethnic minorities suggest that, although ethnic identity clearly has different meanings and implications for female and male students, there are situations in which feelings of common ethnic identity acquire greater salience than gender-specific differences. Those situations are likely to occur when members of an ethnic minority are forced to reconsider the cultural values they have grown up with, such as often happens when minority students encounter a school system based on different values,
language, history, and attitudes toward spiritual life than those learned within the family and village. When such confrontations are strongly felt, as in the case of the Tai students, whose cultural values, religion, and history are very distant from those of the central parts of China, a sense of common ethnic identity and the collective memory of one's past seem to become more important to the actors than gender-based differences.

NOTES

1. I am grateful for the valuable comments on earlier drafts of this essay raised by several participants at the Toronto conference on Education and Society in Twentieth-Century China (September 1997), especially Feng Xu. I also wish to thank Koen Wel lens for his comments and the Danish Council for Development Research for financial support for the research and fieldwork upon which this essay is based.

2. As shown by Ping-Chun Hsiung in this volume, there is also a general inconsistency between the Chinese government's ideological and financial support for education.


4. Ibid., 12.

5. See, for example, Nan Ning, "Xingbie qishi" (Sexual discrimination: leaving a sigh about education), in Zhongguo funi (Chinese women) 2 (February 1989): 4–5.


10. Ibid.; Hooper, "China's Modernization: Are Young Women Going to Lose Out?"; and "Gender and Education.


15. The validity of the Chinese classification of nationalities has been widely discussed in China during the last decade. Recent Chinese scholarship confirms that the classification was a construction that was only ideologically, not practically, based on Stalin's criteria for an ethnic group. Obviously, many Chinese researchers are aware of this, but political circumstances sometimes make it impossible for them to acknowledge it in their writings. Scholars both in and outside China are currently debating whether a reconsideration would be useful.

16. This is also true with respect to the Muslim Hui, who are normally regarded as one of the nationalities with a high level of education. At all levels from senior secondary school, Muslim Hui produce more graduates per one thousand population than do the Han. Gladney's fieldwork among the Muslim Hui showed, however, that in some localities most Hui attended public school and studied the Koran in private, while in other areas school attendance was low and on the decrease. Thus, in one Han Chinese county the enrollment rate in 1982 was 93.9 percent, and 79 percent among girls; while in the adjacent all-Muslim county the enrollment rate was only 23.9 percent, with barely 9 percent of girls enrolled and only 2.9 percent of girls enrolled actually graduating. See Dru C. Gladney, Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 125.


19. Based on the author's interviews with headmaster and administration.
20. Yunnan Province Education Commission, ed., Yunnan jiaoyu sishi nian, 1949–
1989 (Forty years of education in Yunnan) (Kunming: Yunnan daxue chubanshe, n.d.),
120.
21. Sipsong Panna Education Department, Xishuangbanna Zhou minzu jiaoyu qing-
1. See also Mette H. Hansen, “Teaching Backwardness or Equality? Chinese State
Education among the Tai in Sipsong Panna,” in Gerard Postiglione and Regie Stites,
22. Yang Chonglong, Yunnan jiaoyu wenti yanjiu (Research on Yunnan’s educa-
tional problems), 302; and Yang Shide, “Xishuangbanna Zhou jichu jiaoyu yu minzu
suzhi de tantao” (An inquiry into the basic education and the quality of the nationali-
ties in Sipsong Panna), in Yan Sanlong et al., eds., Xishuangbanna minzu jiaoyu (Minori-
23. For further detail, see Hansen, “Teaching Backwardness or Equality.”
24. Wang Xihong et al., eds., Zhongguo bianjing minzu jiaoyu (Education of China’s
minorities living in border areas) (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe,
1990), 271.
25. In such cases the township governments would normally attempt to restart the
school again after a few years.
26. Interview with a leading administrative cadre at a nationalities school in Sipsong
Panna.
27. Wang Xihong et al., eds., Zhongguo bianjing minzu jiaoyu, 271.
28. Sun Ruqinong et al., eds., Zhongguo shaoshu minzu jiaoyuxue gailun (An intro-
duction to the education of China’s national minorities) (Beijing: Zhongguo laodong
chubanshe, 1990), 267.
29. While many of their villages were not remote in terms of actual physical dis-
tance, they were only accessible on foot, which involved walking for a whole day, while
even the cost of the bus ticket to the nearest village on the roadside was a financial
burden to many families. As a consequence, many students in boarding schools (al-
most all non-Han) only visited their families during summer holiday and sometimes
during the local Water Splashing Festival.
30. This might possibly, and gradually, be influenced by the state policy of popula-
tion control, which has only been strictly enforced in the area since 1991. According
to this policy, parents living in the city of Lijiang may have only one child, whereas rural
families may have two children regardless of nationality.
31. Zhang Ning and Liu Wenxiao, In Pursuit of Beauty: The Han (Kunming: Yunnan
jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995).
32. Zheng Xiaoquin and Yu Tao, Women Bathed in Holy Water: The Dais (Kunming:
Yunnan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995).
35. See also White, "Fame and Sacrifice."
36. Interview with a twenty-one-year-old Tai student.
37. Zheng Xiaoyun, "Dangdai Xishuangbanna Daizu shehui wenhua bianyi yanjiu"
(Research on current changes in the culture and society of the Dai Nationality in
38. In addition to the articles and books already mentioned, other publications have
also focused on the ways in which minority education is practiced in local areas. See,
for instance, Wurlig Borchiged, "The Impact of Urban Ethnic Education on Modern
Frontiers, 278–301; and Chae-jin Lee, China’s Korean Minority: The Politics of Ethnic