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Diversity and Distribution: Essays on Local Governance and Public Service Provision in Multiethnic China

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Diversity and Distribution: Essays on Local Governance and Public Service Provision in Multiethnic China

by

Sara Alexis Newland

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Kevin O’Brien, Chair
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Abstract

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Persistent inequality and poverty in ethnic minority areas have long been thorns in the side of the Chinese Communist Party. While coastal cities have grown at a rapid pace, life in minority areas has changed little since the onset of economic liberalization. At first blush, this is hardly surprising: ethnic minorities typically live in remote, mountainous areas, conditions that hardly lend themselves to rapid economic growth. But what makes the stagnation of minority areas particularly puzzling is the fact that it has occurred in spite of large-scale policy interventions designed to prevent it. Out of fear of the kind of ethnic unrest that occurred in Tibet in 2008 and Xinjiang in 2009, the central government has made investment in minority areas a clear priority, targeting domestic and foreign aid to these areas and granting them preferential access to subsidized loans, infrastructure development projects, and teacher training and recruitment programs, among others. And yet, these areas have remained poor—and poorly served by local governments—even as once comparably poor Han areas have grown.

This dissertation argues that local governance in multiethnic areas of China is plagued by a set of distinctive problems that lead to poor provision of public goods and services—a key component of the failure of these areas to develop. Social and institutional elements come together to produce public goods and services that benefit only those citizens who are already relatively advantaged, give officials little incentive to provide high-quality public services to the population as a whole, and make citizens reluctant to use the services that officials do provide. Several factors come together to produce these outcomes. First, the formal mechanisms for monitoring, promotion, and punishment of local officials in rural China work poorly in areas that are geographically remote or contain large minority populations. Mid-level officials in these areas are poorly supervised by officials at higher levels in the geographic-administrative hierarchy of the Party-state, and have little formal incentive to provide high-quality public goods to citizens as a result. When they do provide high-quality
services to citizens, they only have an incentive to serve those areas that are likely to be observed by higher-level officials, which places geographically central, Han areas at an advantage. Second, informal mechanisms of accountability operating through social networks, which are often effective at constraining local officials in Han areas, break down in ethnically diverse ones. The way that China’s ethnic representation policies are implemented impedes the formation of these networks in ethnically diverse areas. Furthermore, ethnic divisions in local leadership mean that even when citizens do try to use social ties to hold their coethnics in government accountable, officials are often unable to act in accordance with the wishes of their coethnics. And third, while non-state public service providers (NGOs, GONGOs, social enterprises, etc.) are often eager to work in minority areas with the specific intent of ameliorating inequalities in public service provision by the local state, they are highly dependent on the local state for access and information. Although relationships between service providers and the state can vary, nonstate providers’ dependence on the local state often means that they exacerbate rather than ameliorating existing spatial and ethnic inequalities. Local officials treat nonstate services as another resource to distribute in ways that maximize their own prospects for promotion.
To Devin and Milo
For filling my pomodoro breaks with joy
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Chapter 1

Introduction

I arrived in China to begin preliminary research for this project in July 2009, just as violent riots broke out in the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in Northwest China. Angry at the weak legal response to the deaths of two Uyghur factory workers in an industrial city near Hong Kong, Uyghurs in Ürümqi organized a 1,000-person protest that quickly turned violent as rioters destroyed businesses, fought with Han Chinese civilians, and clashed with police. Although the official death toll of 184 made the incident the most violent in recent memory, both Uyghurs and Han Chinese claimed that that official number was too low (E. Wong, 2009). In my hotel room in a dusty county seat in another minority autonomous region—this one better known for ethnic tourism than ethnic violence—I sat glued to the television as CCTV, the state-run national news channel, crafted the official narrative of the ethnic violence that had just occurred.

While CCTV was uncharacteristically open in its coverage of the violence, it eschewed discussion of the protesters’ grievances in favor of heartwarming stories of interethnic friendship. Uyghurs recounted, in broken Mandarin, their close relationships with kindly Han neighbors; Han residents thanked Uyghurs who had risked their own safety to protect them from violence. Meanwhile, Xinhua (the national wire service), the dominant Chinese media outlets, and Chinese embassies around the globe aggressively challenged the Western media’s depiction of the riots as evidence of interethnic resentment, claiming instead that the riots were an act of international terrorism fomented by Uyghur independence groups outside of China (Embassy of the PRC (USA), 2009; Xinhua, 2009). Interethnic friendship within China, the official narrative suggested, was under siege from violent ethnonationalist movements outside of China that sought to spur ethnic hatred and tear a unified country apart.

\footnote{There are conflicting accounts of how the violence unfolded; some argue that the protest was entirely peaceful until the protesters were attacked by Chinese security forces, while others claim that Uyghur protesters instigated the violence. While it is clear that there was violence on both sides, these claims are difficult to adjudicate given the severe restrictions on Internet and media freedom in Xinjiang and the particular sensitivity of any discussion of ethnic conflict in China.}
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The “July Fifth Incident” (qi wu shijian, as it was labeled in China)—like many other “mass incidents” in the 25 years since the 1989 democracy movement—was quickly and violently repressed.\(^2\) Mass arrests and executions quickly followed the riots; restrictions on Internet and cell phone use, draconian even by China’s standards, lasted for more than six months (Ansfield, 2009; Jacobs, 2009). But the violence (and similar riots in Tibet a year earlier) marked the beginning of a new era in China’s ethnic politics. Self-immolations by Tibetans across Western China, a car bomb driven into Tiananmen Square by a Uyghur family, and a coordinated knife attack by a group of Uyghurs on the central train station in the large southwestern city of Kunming have given the lie to the notion that Chinese minorities are all happy members of the “big family” (da jiating) of Chinese nationalities.\(^3\) The increasing scale and frequency of these incidents—and the fact that they are no longer geographically confined to the Chinese periphery—have made minority discontent highly visible and spurred a national debate over the limitations of China’s current ethnic governance policies (Elliott, 2015; A. Hu and L. Hu, 2011; Leibold, 2013).

This debate means that Chinese policymakers are beginning to acknowledge and openly discuss a fact that scholars have long recognized: There is substantial dissatisfaction in the non-Han periphery. While some of this discontent stems from a desire for self-determination, it is also driven by a core set of economic, social, and political grievances intimately connected to China’s system of minority governance (Bovingdon, 2002; Forsythe, 2014; Heberer, 2007; Kaltman, 2007; Zang, 2011). Minority areas remain among the poorest in China, despite a long list of programs intended to develop them. When new jobs are created in these areas, they are typically filled by Han Chinese residents (or even by Han migrants who come to these areas to seek work despite high minority unemployment there). And minorities are systematically disadvantaged in both primary schooling and higher education—and as a result are often unqualified to compete for these jobs at all (Hannum, 2002; Xiaobing Wang et al., 2013).

It is often assumed that these grievances are the product of intentional discrimination. What better way to immobilize potential separatists than to keep them poor, illiterate, and physically isolated? Certainly, discrimination by private businesses and

\(^2\)Large, urban protests like this one—and especially ones that involve ethnic minorities—are something of an exception in this regard. According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, there were over 90,000 “mass incidents” in China in 2006 (Freeman, 2010). Many of these are smaller-scale rural protests over corruption, pollution, and land grabs by local governments, and are resolved through a variety of means other than immediate repression, including concessions, selective arrests, and payoffs. For a detailed discussion of rural protest, see O’Brien and L. Li (2006).

\(^3\)This phrasing is not merely an empty slogan; a Han scholar of ethnic studies once told me that China’s ethnic minorities are like the “little brother and little sister” to the Han: “We love them best.”
the state is a significant problem, especially where the most restive ethnic groups—Tibetans and Uyghurs—are concerned (Davidson, 2015; The Economist, 2015). But the fact that minority areas have fared so poorly cannot be explained by intentional neglect and discrimination alone. In the reform era, the CCP has employed a large array of affirmative action policies (youhui zhengce) to help areas with large minority populations catch up with the rest of the country. Table 1.1 provides brief descriptions of some of these policies, but this is a very partial list. Despite the myriad programs intended to help minority areas catch up, however, these areas have fallen farther and farther behind—not only in comparison to coastal, primarily Han areas that have obvious economic and geographic advantages, but also relative to Han areas of the countryside that were once comparably poor (Sautman, 1999; Zhao, 2004). Within minority autonomous areas, the gap between minority and Han citizens is large as well.

This dissertation explores this puzzling gap between policy intentions and policy outcomes. Despite problems of corruption, mismanagement, and poor accountability, the CCP has proven remarkably good at achieving high-priority goals (as its effective enforcement of the unpopular one-child policy makes clear). So why have minority areas fallen farther and farther behind in spite of policies intended to create greater parity between the two? In this dissertation, I focus on how county governments provide public goods and services—one important factor in the stagnation of China’s minority areas, and a useful window into local governance in these areas more broadly. Public goods and services are poorly provided in minority areas relative to their majority-Han counterparts; these areas often have limited private alternatives, and the poor quality of public goods and services impedes the formation of human capital necessary for these areas to develop.

In brief, I argue that social and institutional elements come together to produce

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4Some policies target individuals rather than geographic areas—for example, individuals who are members of ethnic minority groups receive extra points on the national college entrance exam—but generally affirmative action and poverty reduction policies have targeted geographic areas that contain large poor and/or minority populations, and county officials have substantial discretion over how these resources are distributed within the county. This discretion enables the inequitable patterns of distribution that I describe in this dissertation.

5On the Han-Uyghur earnings gap in the capital city of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, see Zang (2011).


7In this dissertation, I use the terms “minority areas” and “multiethnic areas” interchangeably to refer to regions at any level of the PRC’s geographic hierarchy that contain a substantial non-Han population. Many, but not all, of these areas are officially designated as minority autonomous regions, prefectures, counties, or townships. In portions of the dissertation where I discuss the relevance of this formal political designation, I use the terms “minority autonomous region” (or prefecture, county, or township) and “non-autonomous, multiethnic region” to distinguish between the two.
public goods and services that benefit only those citizens who are already relatively advantaged, give officials little incentive to provide high-quality public services to the population as a whole, and make citizens reluctant to use the services that officials do provide. Several factors come together to produce these outcomes. First, the formal mechanisms for monitoring, promotion, and punishment of local officials in rural China work poorly in areas that are geographically remote or contain large minority populations. Mid-level officials in these areas are poorly supervised by officials at higher levels in the geographic-administrative hierarchy of the Party-state, and have little formal incentive to provide high-quality public goods to citizens as a result—or only have an incentive to serve those areas that are likely to be observed by higher-level officials, which places geographically central, Han areas at an advantage. Second, informal mechanisms of accountability operating through social networks, which are often effective in Han areas, break down in ethnically diverse ones. The way that China's ethnic representation policies are implemented impedes the formation of these networks in ethnically diverse areas. Furthermore, ethnic divisions in local leadership mean that even when citizens try to use social ties to hold their coethnics in government accountable, officials are often unable to act in accordance with the wishes of their coethnics. Finally, while non-state public service providers (NGOs, GONGOs, social enterprises, etc.) are often eager to work in minority areas with the specific intent of ameliorating inequalities in public service provision by the local state, they are highly dependent on the local state for access and information. Although relationships between service providers and the state can vary, nonstate providers' dependence on the local state often means that they exacerbate rather than ameliorating existing spatial and ethnic inequalities. Local officials treat nonstate services as another resource to distribute in ways that maximize their own prospects for promotion.

In the sections that follow, I describe the scholarly conversations that this dissertation seeks to join, and show why existing explanations fail to fully explain the dynamics I explore in this dissertation. I then describe the data and case selection strategy for the dissertation before returning to the puzzle and the argument in greater detail. I conclude with a description of the project’s major contributions.

8This dissertation primarily focuses on county level officials and their relationships up and down the administrative hierarchy—that is, their relationships with township officials they supervise, and with prefectural officials by whom they are supervised.

9Scholars of comparative politics have traditionally drawn distinctions between the government (the people in charge), the state (the institutions associated with political power), and the regime (the norms of politics that transcend the particular individuals in charge). In the case of China, these distinctions are not particularly relevant: the people in charge (the CCP) also largely designed the institutions that make up the state, although some of these institutions have historical legacies that long predate Communist rule. The distinction between the Party and the government is also not very meaningful, as nearly all high-ranking government officials are also senior Communist Party members. In this dissertation, I therefore use the terms Party-state, government, and regime interchangeably.


**Existing Literature**

**Incentivizing Good Governance in Rural China**

Over the past two decades, a large and growing literature has explored the various mechanisms—among them local elections, promotion incentives, and social ties—by which local officials may be held accountable in the absence of democracy in China (J. Chen and Huhe, 2013; Kennedy and Shi, 2011; Kung, Cai, and X. Sun, 2009b; Luo et al., 2007a; Manion, 1996, 2006, 2014; G. Smith, 2009; Teets, 2012; Tsai, 2007a; Xu and Yao, 2015; Xiaobo Zhang et al., 2004). This scholarship focuses largely on subnational comparison (primarily at the village level) within China. However, it shares much in common with a growing crossnational literature on “electoral authoritarianism” and, more broadly, on the non-coercive tools that autocrats use to maintain control (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Morse, 2012; Schatz, 2009). At the village level, existing research shows that formal and informal institutions and social ties all play a role in incentivizing local officials to serve citizens effectively. The desire for re-election leads village officials to make investments that villagers care about, reduce wasteful spending, and imitate nearby villages that provide high-quality public goods (Agostini, P. H. Brown, and Xiaobo Zhang, 2010; Kung, Cai, and X. Sun, 2009b; Martinez-Bravo et al., 2011; Xiaobo Zhang et al., 2004). As villages are often intimate places where villagers share longstanding social ties with citizens, the desire for “moral standing” may also motivate village officials to govern well, especially when officials and citizens share membership in social organizations such as clan associations (J. Chen and Huhe, 2013; Tsai, 2002, 2007a,b).

Although existing research treats village officials as deeply embedded in a social world, township and county officials are typically depicted as atomized rational actors who seek only to maximize their personal utility. Beginning with Oi (1992)’s research on “local state corporatism,” work on the early reform period emphasized township officials’ responsiveness to economic incentives as a key driver of China’s rapid economic growth. Since the decline of the Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) that enabled rapid rural growth in the 1980s, however, scholars have instead emphasized officials’ responsiveness to promotion incentives. Some argue that the Cadre Responsibility System—under which officials may be rewarded with promotion for successfully fulfilling higher-level mandates—has strengthened the central government’s control over local officials and led to relatively effective implementation of the policies that the central government prioritizes (Ahlers and Schubert, 2015; Edin, 2003, 2003a; Heberer and Schubert, 2012). But detractors generally outnumber these optimists, arguing that local officials have become masters at gaming the system. For the sake of fulfilling targets set by the central government (and improving
their own chances of promotion), these scholars argue, local officials build wasteful infrastructure projects at the expense of meaningful investment and dutifully meet “hard targets” while failing to implement popular and potentially beneficial policies.\(^{10}\)

This body of work is a useful starting point for thinking about local governance and the provision of public goods and services in China’s minority areas. However, it fails to fully explain several of the dynamics I identify in this dissertation. First, the incentive-based approach that dominates research on mid-level officials cannot help us to understand variation in the effort and effectiveness of officials across different types of counties, since the Cadre Responsibility System is a national policy.\(^{11}\) Second, this approach cannot explain the behavior of the many county officials I met during my research who expressed no desire for promotion. Promotion to a prefectural position typically involves substantial social disruption (moving away from one’s lifelong county home to a prefectural capital many hours away), and for many officials, the benefits of increased status did not outweigh this cost.\(^{12}\) Some of these officials were committed public servants, while others sought to do as little as possible; officials with little desire for promotion fell into both categories. Career incentives may explain why some officials do their jobs effectively, but offer an incomplete explanation at best.

In this dissertation, I build on the existing literature on governance in rural China in two ways. First, I seek to enrich our understanding of township and county officials’ motivations and desires. Just as existing research on Chinese villages has shown village officials to respond to both career incentives and social ties, I argue that county officials exist in a web of social relationships—with other officials and with the citizens they serve—that has profound implications for their performance. While career incentives certainly play a role in some officials’ decisions—and I discuss the importance of the promotion system at length in chapter 3—it is misguided to think that these are the only factors that guide the behavior of mid-level officials. Instead, I suggest that these personal incentives are one factor among many. What Tsai (2007a) calls a desire for “moral standing” may be as relevant to township and county officials as it is to village officials. Indeed, county officials’ personal relationships with citizens, former coworkers, and fellow officials may determine how well they “serve the people,” and which people they serve, by giving them better information

\(^{10}\)For these and other arguments about the negative consequences of the cadre responsibility system, see Duan and Zhan (2011), Minzner (2009), O’Brien and L. Li (1999), G. Smith (2009), and Xueguang Zhou (2010).

\(^{11}\)Existing research on the CRS instead emphasizes variation by policy type. In other words, policies that are considered “hard targets” by the central government (among them the one-child policy and “stability maintenance” (weiwen) policies) are generally implemented more effectively than “soft targets.” Also see Göbel (2011) for a similar critique of existing research on “hard targets.”

\(^{12}\)Interview with county people’s congress office employee, Yunnan, 2011.
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about—and a stronger sense of obligation to—some citizens than others. Mid-level rural officials, I argue, are closer to Lipsky (1980)’s “street-level bureaucrats” than to the atomized utility-maximizers the existing literature sometimes makes them out to be; their personal biases, social relationships, and self-identity inform their performance to as great a degree as formal rules and career incentives do. And given their substantial discretion over resource distribution, these personal biases play a powerful rule in determining who wins and who loses when the state provides public goods and services.

Formal career incentives do play some role in constraining mid-level officials, however. A second contribution that this dissertation makes to the study of rural governance is to build on existing research by explaining why professional incentives are more effective at constraining local officials in some places than in others. Although the Cadre Responsibility System is quite consistently applied on paper, I show that in practice, political geography creates substantial variation in the effectiveness of this system. Whether county officials are likely to be observed by their superiors, and either punished for malfeasance or rewarded for effective performance as a result, depends in part on the distance—both physical and cultural—from the county to its supervising prefectural capital. Minority areas are doubly disadvantaged by this system; they are typically far from more central political capitals, and higher-level officials perceive them to be dirty, dangerous, and uncivilized—and are reluctant to visit as a result.

Ethnic Diversity and Public Goods Provision

A second set of potential explanations for the poor quality of public goods and services in multiethnic areas of China comes from the cross-national literature on ethnic diversity and public goods provision. Ethnic diversity creates thorny problems for politics: It makes democracy difficult to sustain, impedes cooperation between citizens, causes governments to underprovide public goods, and may increase the likelihood of conflict.13 These bad outcomes have several causes. They may result from “ethnic outbidding”—the notion that political parties appeal to ethnic voters with more and more extreme positions that make multiethnic democracies difficult to sustain. A “taste for discrimination” may lead voters to prefer that officials underspend on public goods so that they can pay privately for goods that benefit their own ethnic group instead. Interethnic violence may impede economic development. And “free-riding” may be harder to detect and punish in multiethnic societies than homogenous ones.

13The sources that make these and related claims include Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly (1999), Easterly and Levine (1997), Habyarimana et al. (2007), Horowitz (1985), Miguel and Gugerty (2005), Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005), and Rabushka and Shepsle (1972). Other sources suggest that ethnically diverse areas are not more conflict prone than others, or that economic rather than ethnic divisions drive these results (Baldwin and Huber, 2010; Collier and Hoeffler, 2002; Fearon and Laitin, 2003).
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While these problems can be overcome by social and political institutions that transcend ethnic boundaries (Chandra, 2005; Dunning and Harrison, 2010; Glennerster, Miguel, and Rothenberg, 2013; Miguel, 2004), they nonetheless provide grounds for pessimism about economic development and political stability in many multiethnic societies.

Whether any of these findings apply to China is an open question. Although much has been written about ethnicity in China, the existing literature is dominated by legal studies scholarship on China’s autonomy laws on paper, ethnographic work on the cultural practices of different minority groups, and historical work on the creation of China’s minority autonomous regions and ethnic classification scheme. To date, no research has examined whether ethnic diversity affects politics in China as it does in the elsewhere in the world, although religious and clan divisions have been shown to negatively affect village-level public investment and the quality of local elections (Kennedy, 2002; Manion, 2006; Padro i Miquel, Qian, and Yao, 2012; Tsai, 2002; Xu and Yao, 2015). Thus one goal of this project is to bring the Chinese case into a conversation that has largely focused on South Asia and Africa.

Consistent with the findings presented here, the existing literature would predict a negative association between ethnic diversity and provision of public goods and services in China. However, there are reasons to suspect that the mechanisms that are the focus of the cross-national literature on ethnicity and public goods provision are not relevant to China. First, the bulk of this literature focuses on democracies (albeit often imperfect ones), and assumes that officials’ (under)provision of public goods reflects voters’ preferences. While voter preferences may be relevant in Chinese villages—the only level of the Chinese state at which citizens vote in meaningful elections—citizens have little say in policy design or implementation at the county level, now primarily responsible for providing rural public goods and services. The notion that citizens’ policy preferences determine officials’ choices is difficult to square with the Chinese Communist Party’s self-conception as an elite “vanguard party” that rules in the best interests of, but without much input from, an enormous and relatively uneducated population.

The notion that violent conflict hinders economic development in ethnically diverse places also cannot explain my findings. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where the violent riots that I described at the beginning of this chapter took place, is the only part of China where violent opposition to CCP rule is widespread (and even there, violence is limited to isolated incidents rather than a protracted, large-scale conflict). Yunnan Province—the focus of much of this dissertation—is home to 25

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15 Tibet was also the site of violent conflict between Han and Tibetan citizens in 2008, but violent
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ethnic groups, but has experienced virtually no overt interethnic conflict in recent memory. The fact that ethnic diversity is nonetheless associated with poor-quality public goods and services there casts doubt on the relevance of the conflict hypothesis.

Finally, the genesis of China’s ethnic divisions calls into question the relevance of explanations for underprovision of public goods that focus on interethnic social dynamics. The notion that different ethnic groups have different preferences is a core assumption of much of the literature on ethnic politics.\(^\text{16}\) China is a “hard case” for the study of ethnic politics because social identities correspond only loosely to China’s ethnic categories, and because many of these categories are a relatively recent creation of the Chinese state. When the CCP conducted an ethnic census shortly after coming to power, citizens provided literally hundreds of different responses to an open-ended question about their ethnicity. One ethnic group had only two members: a woman and her husband. The 1956 ethnic classification project (\textit{minzu shibie}) attempted to create a more manageable closed list of officially recognized ethnic categories, but did so in a short time period and with limited information about local minority populations. This resulted in a rather haphazard categorization schema that lumped together groups of people with little in common under the label of a single ethnicity.\(^\text{17}\) In one of my fieldwork sites, for instance, two nearby Yi minority villages used different dialects and dressed in different styles; there was little connection between them other than the Yi label the state assigned them. In this context, there is little reason to assume that a citizen’s preferences should map on to the ethnic category stamped in her passport, or that citizens should possess either a “taste for discrimination” against ethnic outgroup members or an in-group bias favoring their coethnics.

\section*{Puzzle and Dissertation Overview}

Existing explanations thus cannot fully resolve the central puzzle of this dissertation. Given the CCP’s recent emphasis on improving public services in order to convince the public that the Party “serves the people,” and the urgency of satisfying minority opposition to CCP rule there has since been characterized by symbolic, self-directed acts of violence (primarily public self-immolations) rather than interethnic violence, and thus seems unlikely to disrupt the local economy.

Recent literature has increasingly challenged the “primordialist” view of ethnicity and argued instead that ethnic identities, and preferences, are malleable. On the primordialism/constructivism debate, see Fearon and Laitin (2000). For an iconic example of the primordialist approach, see Horowitz (1985). Recent work exemplifying the constructivist approach includes Chandra (2012).

\(^{17}\)Early research on the topic assumed that some of these categories bore little relationship to the underlying characteristics of the country’s ethnic groups, and were created to conform with Stalin’s approach to racial classification. More recent work has shown, however, that the classification was at least somewhat principled, and drew on an ethnolinguistic schema developed by British military officer Henry Davies during his travels in what is now southwestern China in the late 19th Century (Dreyer, 1976; Mullaney, 2011).
Table 1.1: Affirmative Action Programs for Minority Areas (Partial List)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang Class</td>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Places students from Xinjiang in elite coastal schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gaokao</em> (college entrance exam)</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td></td>
<td>Extra points on the <em>Gaokao</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business incentives</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Tax refunds for new enterprises in minority and poor areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat’l Compulsory Ed. Project</td>
<td>Poor areas</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>School funding &amp; student subsidies. Emphasizes remote and min. areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Twinning” program</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pairs coastal w/poor &amp; min. areas to provide support for education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop the West (<em>xibu da kaifa</em>)</td>
<td>Western China</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Large-scale infrastructure investment in western China (where minorities are concentrated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Institutes and Universities</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Tertiary institutions with preferential admissions for ethnic minorities, largely devoted to the study of minority languages, culture, autonomy law, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang Six Principles</td>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>1990s(?)</td>
<td>60 percent quote for Uyghurs in hiring, army positions, and university admissions in Xinjiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty County Designation</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Minority autonomous counties can be designated as “poverty counties” (and eligible for preferential policies as a result) with a higher per capita income than non-autonomous counties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidized Bank Loans</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Funds disproportionately target minority counties (part of “8-7” national poverty alleviation plan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food-for-Work program</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Rural residents are paid to work on local public infrastructure projects; funding disproportionately given to minority areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development capital</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Disproportionately targeted to minority counties (part of “8-7” nat’l poverty alleviation plan)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
populations that resent CCP rule, why does public service provision remain so poor in ethnically diverse areas of China? The persistent and growing gap between Han and largely minority areas of the country is especially puzzling in light of the myriad programs intended to help minority areas catch up (see Table 1.1 for an incomplete list). Ethnically diverse Yunnan Province, “the darling of the international community” for its poverty and wide array of ethnic groups, has also received a disproportionate share of resources from foreign NGOs.\textsuperscript{18} Although ethnically diverse areas of China are typically quite poor, poverty alone thus does not explain the low quality of public services there—especially because so many resource transfers to these areas are explicitly intended to improve public services. How, then, can we make sense of the fact that these areas remain poorly served, and why are some areas better able than others to overcome this general pattern?

Resolving this puzzle requires attention to three related questions. First, who governs minority areas? One obvious difference between minority autonomous areas and non-autonomous areas lies in the different governance structures and guarantees of ethnic representation in the two types of regions, but how well do the guarantees of descriptive representation on paper translate into practice? Perhaps these differences in who governs (descriptive representation) translate into disparities in how citizens’ interests, of which demand for high-quality public services are one example, are represented (substantive representation). To date, however, existing research on ethnicity in China has focused either on the cultural attributes of different ethnic groups or on ethnic autonomy laws on paper, with limited attention to how these laws are implemented in practice at the county level.\textsuperscript{19} It is thus difficult to know how minority areas are actually governed and whether these patterns of governance might plausibly explain underprovision of public services. Chapter 2, described in greater detail below, seeks to fill this gap by providing the first empirical description of patterns of county-level ethnic governance, and demonstrating how these patterns impede representation of citizens’ interests.

Understanding who governs multiethnic areas of China is only one part of the story of how governance in these areas works, however. Chapter 3 therefore builds on the previous chapter by assessing how local governments in multiethnic areas provide public goods and services to citizens. What do local governments in minority areas actually do, why are they generally such ineffective providers of public services, and why do some local governments provide public goods to citizens more effectively than others? This chapter relies on qualitative evidence to develop two interlinking arguments about the importance of bottom-up accountability to citizens and top-down

\textsuperscript{18}Interview with academic expert on civil society, Hong Kong, 2011.

\textsuperscript{19}Some work has explored ethnic representation at the “minority autonomous region” level (analogous to a province) in Tibet and Xinjiang, but this tells us little about local governance. Moreover, the volatility of ethnic politics in these two areas makes it unlikely that patterns there can be generalized to other minority areas of China.
accountability to officials for ensuring that officials provide public services to citizens (described in greater detail below). It then tests these arguments on a broader range of cases (the 129 counties in Yunnan Province).

Non-state actors may sometimes fill in the gaps in service provision left by an ineffectual state. To what degree has this occurred in multiethnic China in response to the poor-quality public services that Chapter 3 documents? Chapter 4 asks about the societal response to the generally poor public services in minority areas. In the face of consistently poor public service provision by local governments, how do social groups respond? In recent years, NGOs and private, for-profit service providers have played an increasingly important role as service providers across China (Teets, 2012). If these groups effectively counter inequities in service provision by the local state, perhaps the patterns in local government services that chapters 2-4 describe do not explain persistent disparities in public service outcomes. However, I find that the opposite is true: unable to resist state influence for reasons that I describe below, non-state service providers often have no choice but to reinforce the spatial and ethnic inequalities that characterize provision of public services by the local state.

Data and Methods

I use a mixed-methods approach to answer these questions. Preliminary fieldwork consisting of expert interviews and short visits to a variety of ethnically diverse areas in Hebei Province (capital region) Guangdong Province (coastal region), and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (southwest) was used to develop initial hy-
hypotheses. I then conducted more in-depth fieldwork in Yunnan and Sichuan provinces—
neighboring provinces in the southwest—to enable more detailed exploration of these
hypotheses. Finally, I used county and prefectural government documents housed
in provincial libraries and the National Library of China to construct two datasets
(described in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3) covering the 129 counties in Yunnan
Province in order to test whether my qualitative findings can be generalized to a
broader range of cases. In all, I conducted ten months of fieldwork, consisting of 65
in-depth interviews with officials, public service provider, experts, NGO and founda-
tion staff, and citizens; site visits to hospitals, schools, and NGO-run public service
programs; and hundreds of hours in libraries collecting archival information for the
two datasets described in Chapters 2 and 3.

Scholars of comparative politics increasingly use subnational comparison to iden-
tify and explain patterns of variation while avoiding some of the well-known problems
plaguing cross-national research (E. L. Gibson, 2011; Hurst, 2004; Moncada and Sny-
der, 2012; Singh, 2008; Snyder, 2001; Ziblatt, 2008). For the reasons these scholars
cite—among them the advantage of comparing units that are more similar than coun-
tries typically are, and the possibility of holding constant domestic factors that act as
confounders in cross-national research—the 129 counties in Yunnan province provide
a useful set of cases for testing hypotheses about local governance in ethnically diverse
areas.

Yunnan displays substantial diversity along a number of dimensions. First, a
varied set of 25 ethnic groups live in the province; some are nationally important
while others are concentrated almost entirely in a small area of Yunnan. Some, like
the Tibetans, frequently express discontent with Chinese rule, whereas others, like
the Hui, are quite assimilated. There are also significant cultural, religious, and
linguistic differences across these groups. Second, Yunnan displays a diversity of
political institutions: it contains several county-level cities as well as typical (non-
autonomous) counties and both county- and prefecture-level minority autonomous
areas. Importantly, while there is often a close correlation between having a large
minority population and being designated a minority autonomous county, in Yunnan
this correlation is somewhat weaker, and there are a number of counties with large
minority populations that have not been given any special designation. This makes it
possible to separate (at least to some degree) the effect of having an ethnically diverse

\footnote{It is important to note that my choice of fieldwork sites was constrained by the extreme sensi-
tivity of ethnic politics in China. Conducting research in the most restive minority areas (primarily
Uyghur and Tibetan areas) would not have been safe for either me or my interview subjects. The
quantitative datasets used in Chapters 2 and 3 cover several Tibetan autonomous counties, but
these are too few in number to serve as the basis for general claims about ethnic politics in Tibetan
areas, and are somewhat atypical due to their heavy reliance on ethnic tourism. This means that,
although I believe this argument to hold across many minority areas in China, my findings cannot
be generalized to the areas with violent ethnic conflict.}
Figure 1.2: County-level Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization (ELF) in Yunnan Province (2006). Darker colors indicate greater ethnic diversity. ELF in Yunnan ranges from .01 to .81. Source: Author calculations from data in the 2007 *Yunnan Statistical Yearbook*.

population from the effect of a particular set of political institutions. Finally, Yunnan is a “hard case” for the hypotheses being tested here. Although ethnic diversity is a core part of Yunnan’s identity, there has been little overt conflict between ethnic groups.\(^2\) If ethnic diversity affects public service provision even in a place where the salience of ethnic difference is low, then it seems reasonable to assume that ethnic diversity will also affect public service provision in places where these distinctions cause greater conflict.

**Preview of the Argument**

Taken together, the chapters in this dissertation suggest that minority areas are poorly served for a combination of institutional and social reasons. In brief, I argue that both the formal top-down and informal bottom-up mechanisms that hold officials somewhat accountable elsewhere in rural China break down in remote and ethnically diverse areas, leading to poor-quality public goods and services. Many of

\(^2\)Ethnic separatist demands have been much less strident in the Tibetan areas of Yunnan than in Tibetan areas in Qinghai and Sichuan and Tibet itself. A terrorist attack likely related to ethnic separatism occurred at the main train station in the provincial capital of Kunming in 2014, but the perpetrators were members of an ethnic group that does not reside in Yunnan, and the attack was likely intended to draw national attention rather than to comment on Yunnan’s interethnic dynamics in particular.
the regions with a political designation as a “minority autonomous area” are doubly disadvantaged by having both of these qualities.

This argument rests on three main claims. First, I argue that the CCP’s primary mechanism for holding officials accountable—a system in which an officials’ superiors monitor his performance and may reward good performance with promotion—operates poorly in areas that higher-level officials perceive as remote, either physically or culturally. Higher-level officials are reluctant to visit areas that are physically distant from the political capitals in which they work, and are also often reluctant to visit minority areas which they perceive as culturally distant, unsanitary, and dangerous. As a result, local officials in these areas go largely unsupervised. They have little professional incentive to provide high-quality public goods and services, as their hard work is unlikely to be observed (and hence unlikely to lead to promotion). Instead, they do nothing at all or invest in wasteful infrastructure projects rather than in services that benefit citizens more directly.

Second, social networks between officials and citizens, which have been shown to hold officials accountable to citizens in other parts of China (J. Chen and Huhe, 2013; Tsai, 2007a,b), are ineffective at creating political accountability in multiethnic areas. Social life in these areas is largely organized along ethnic lines; the ethnic structure of the local state means that citizens have few points of access. As a result, local officials often lack information about the needs of the population, and lack a sense of obligation to that population. This is especially true of non-autonomous counties, where officials are virtually all Han Chinese, but is also the case in minority autonomous areas, where the local state is typically more diverse than the population it governs. And even when citizens can use ethnic social networks to gain access to top-level county officials, the ethnically fragmented nature of county leadership means that these officials are often hamstrung in their ability to implement programs that benefit their coethnics.

Finally, even though NGOs and other non-state service providers often seek to ameliorate the inequalities created by these problems, the same spatial and ethnic inequalities often plague their work as well. Non-state service providers depend on local governments for access and information, and citizens may be fearul of cooperating with a non-state actor unless the government gives that agency an explicit endorsement. Even though local governments are often unpopular in minority areas, citizens are still reluctant to engage with non-state actors without explicit permission, as they fear running afoul of the local government. As a result, even though relationships between the local governments and nonstate service providers can take a variety of different forms, non-state service providers nearly always serve at the pleasure of the local government. Their resources and expertise mean that they can sometimes push back against local government demands, but in general they face a choice between serving where the government allows them to and leaving an area completely. This
means that non-state services often wind up following the same geographic logic as the services the state provides. Hoping to get credit for an innovative approach to public service provision, county officials often insist that non-state service providers operate in the townships and villages most likely to be observed by visiting, higher-level officials. As a result, even non-state service providers with an explicit commitment to ameliorating inequality and serving the neediest citizens often wind up providing services to the areas that already benefit from sustained local government attention.

Contributions

The questions that this dissertation explores—about who governs the ethnic periphery, the quality of services these officials provide to citizens there, and how social groups respond to government efforts (or lack thereof)—speak to two central problems facing the CCP regime, problems that are central concerns of the field of comparative politics as well. The first concerns representation in multiethnic societies. How can a government claim to represent all citizens when the needs and preferences of those citizens may differ substantially on the basis of their ascriptive identities? What does national identity mean in a place where citizens lack a unifying language, religion, or culture? These questions have been explored in great detail in the context of democratic politics (Kymlicka, 1995; Okin, 1999). But they are relevant to many autocracies as well (with the caveat that “representation” is typically imperfect at best, and often more concerned with regime stability than with giving citizens a real voice).

A second key challenge facing the CCP regime (and one quite familiar to students of comparative political economy outside of China) is how to enable continuing economic development and check rising inequality in the context of high corruption and weak formal institutions of accountability. For much of the reform era, China

22There has been a long-running debate over the relevance of broader comparative literatures to the Chinese case. Some argue that China’s history and culture are so unique that they render cross-national comparison impossible or unhelpful, while others suggest that Chinese area studies can and should contribute to broader scholarly debates. On this intellectual history of this debate, see Harding (1984), Perry (1994), and Shambaugh (1993). This debate is ongoing, if less explicitly so. Prominent work that emphasizes China’s distinctiveness includes Kang (2003). Recent examples of work that emphasize China’s comparability to other authoritarian regimes include Lorentzen (2014) and Manion (2014). This dissertation starts from the assumption that the study of local politics in China can be usefully informed by comparative literatures on the topic, for several reasons. First, many of the impediments to high-quality local governance in China trouble other developing countries as well (and, as in China, these challenges are often exacerbated by weak institutions of political representation). Second, because the empirical literature on ethnic politics in China is so sparse, comparative literatures on this topic can be useful for generating hypotheses to test on the Chinese case.

23For an interesting discussion of these questions in the context of the former Soviet Union, see Martin (2001).
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

was remarkably successful in this regard; “reform and opening up” (gaige kaifang) lifted over 600 million people out of poverty, making it the most successful poverty alleviation program in modern history.\(^{24}\) After almost forty years of reform, however, the “low-hanging fruit” have mostly all been picked, as reform has eliminated most of the inefficiencies created by the planned economy. Further sustained growth will require fundamental changes to the Chinese economy and to society. Greater investment in human capital is necessary to enable a shift to higher-value-added jobs, for instance, and improved social protections are necessary to encourage the middle class to spend rather than save—a necessary prerequisite if China is to give up its role as the “world’s factory” and instead rely more heavily on domestic demand from the growing middle class. And China’s substantial corruption problems must be tackled if they are not to waste government resources and deter private investment, both foreign and domestic. These challenges are partly economic, but they are also about state-building. China is in the middle of a second transition: having largely completed the transition from communism to capitalism (albeit an illiberal form of state capitalism), the CCP must now facilitate China’s movement from developing to middle-income country status. This means abandoning the growth-at-all-costs attitude that has long held sway, improving social protections for the most vulnerable citizens, and attending to the higher-order demands of the sizeable middle class.

Meeting these needs requires the CCP to create a social welfare system essentially out of whole cloth. China in the Maoist era had reasonably strong social protections: urban “work units” provided cradle-to-grave protections for workers, and rural communes provided basic health and education services, although these were of far lower quality than the services that city dwellers received. With decollectivization in the countryside, the minimal rural social safety net fell apart; in the cities, the pressure on state-owned enterprises to conform to market logic left many insolvent and unable to cover the costs of services to current and former workers.\(^{25}\) In the 1980s and 1990s, a social safety net was virtually nonexistent, especially in rural areas. But when the Hu-Wen administration assumed power in 2003, developing the countryside and ameliorating economic inequality became top national priorities, and new social protections rapidly developed. Between 2003 and 2008, China created the largest rural public health insurance program in the world; a welfare program for the country’s poorest residents; a public health insurance program for informal workers, including migrant workers; an urban public health insurance program for children, the elderly, and the unemployed; and a system of fee exemptions and subsidies for poor students.

\(^{24}\)There is some debate over these exact numbers, stemming in part from inconsistency between the global poverty line and the way the Chinese government measures poverty (Tatlow, 2014). Even relatively conservative estimates suggest that economic reforms lifted over 500 million people out of poverty, however.

\(^{25}\)Many sources discuss these shifts in far greater detail than I can here. Two examples are Steinfeld (2010) and Naughton (2007).
These two challenges—how to ensure some degree of ethnic representation within a largely Han nation-state governed by an authoritarian regime, and how to rebuild a defunct social welfare system that reaches the neediest residents of a rapidly growing and highly unequal country—come together in the border areas where China’s ethnic minority populations are clustered. Overwhelmingly poor, these areas have received few benefits from the economic reforms that pulled much of the Han population out of poverty. In some areas, like South Mountain County, economic liberalization has created the problems of modernity with few of the advantages: rates of drug abuse and HIV infection are high, but the Southeast Asian trade networks that have brought these problems to the isolated area have yielded few economic gains for most citizens. More generally, minority areas have fallen farther and farther behind once comparably impoverished Han areas. While minority areas are poor, local resources are not the only ones available to governments in these areas, and poverty alone does not explain the poor public services these areas receive. In short, local governments in minority areas are doing less with more.

Studying how well local governments provide public services to citizens in minority areas can thus enrich our understanding of Chinese politics in two important

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26I discuss this county throughout the dissertation; as is common practice in research on sensitive topics in China, I refer to the county by a fictional name throughout. See Chapter 3 for a more detailed description of South Mountain County.
ways. First, how effectively local state services reach ethnic minority populations, and whether these services actually improve the quality of life of the citizens they reach, is an important signal of the ability of the new social welfare institutions to serve China’s neediest citizens and keep the population satisfied. If these services only benefit those who are already relatively well off, then they are likely to exacerbate existing inequalities and do little to address one of the most pressing sources of discontent with CCP rule. For a regime whose power is based on a little coercion and a lot of consent, the ability to make all citizens feel that they are well-served by CCP leadership is essential.

Second, the effectiveness of public service provision in minority areas tells us something about the benefits and shortcomings of the political institutions intended to ensure representation of China’s ethnic minority groups. These institutions were created as a concession to ethnic minority groups who might otherwise have put up prolonged resistance to CCP rule. They rested on the assumption that local representation by coethnics would ensure culturally appropriate implementation of national programs. How well public services are provided in minority areas gives us insight into whether these political institutions serve their intended purposes—and if they do not, where and why the breakdown is occurring. As minority areas have been some of China’s most restive regions of late, the CCP’s (in)ability to effectively serve citizens in these areas has significant implications for the ease of maintaining China’s identity as a “unified, multiethnic country.”

It may also tell us something about the role of the quasi-representative institutions for ethnic minorities living in authoritarian regimes elsewhere. The CCP is not alone in facing the difficult task of holding together a diverse set of ethnic groups within the framework of a unified nation-state, and the CCP’s institutional solutions to this problem appear in various forms across the globe. Countries as different as Russia, Somalia, and Bangladesh all contain some version of quasi-autonomous regions for ethnic minority groups, for instance, and citizens living in authoritarian regimes that lack autonomous regions have sometimes advocated for their creation, as was the case of several Vietnamese minority groups. Other autocracies (among them Ethiopia, Singapore, and Kazakhstan) reserve seats for ethnic minorities in the national legislature, require that political parties field minority candidates, or require ethnic minority representation in the bureaucracy. The cross-national variation in these quasi-representative institutions is worthy of greater study. The analysis presented in this dissertation suggests the importance of analyzing the patterns of ethnic representation that these institutional arrangements produce, and the relationship between the ethnic makeup of local officialdom and of the population as a whole. While the community-level dynamics in ethnically diverse societies may create chal-

\footnote{This is most obviously true of Tibet and Xinjiang, but is also true of areas that have traditionally been relatively accepting of CCP rule. On protests in Inner Mongolia, for example, see Jacobs (2011).}
lenges for local governance around the globe, my research suggests that interethnic
dynamics in local leadership play an important and understudied role in creating
these problems.

The rest of the dissertation proceeds as follows. Drawing on both qualitative re-
search and an original dataset of thousands of county officials across Yunnan Province,
Chapter 2 describes patterns of ethnic representation in multietnic areas of China,
and discusses why these patterns inhibit ethnic minority officials from effectively rep-
resenting their coethnics. Chapter 3 extends this discussion by examining one specific
instance of representation: how well local governments provide vital public services
to citizens. It argues for a two-pronged explanation for poor public service provision
in remote and ethnically diverse areas: local officials are poorly supervised by higher-
level officials in geographically remote and (seemingly) culturally distant areas, and
they are poorly supervised by citizens via informal social networks when ethnic diver-
sity disrupts connections between officials and citizens. Chapter 4 explores how social
groups respond in the face of these generally low-quality state services. It describes
the variety of forms that relationships between the local state and non-state service
providers can take in minority areas, and explains how these various relationships
often lead non-state service providers to recreate the same spatial and ethnic inequalitys
that characterize state provision of public services. The conclusion, Chapter 5,
describes the dissertation’s main findings and explores its implications for the study
of Chinese local officials, the study of rural public service provision, and the study of
ethnic politics cross-nationally.
Chapter 2
Who Represents Multiethnic China?

2.1 Introduction

The relationship between descriptive and substantive representation has received significant attention from students of both developed and developing democracies (Barreto, Segura, and Woods, 2004; Gay, 2001; Jensenius, 2015; Mansbridge, 1999; Min and Uppal, 2012). Less is known about the relationship between the two in non-democracies, however. At first blush, this may not seem surprising—after all, if autocracies pursue policies with little regard for the policy preferences of their citizens, why would we expect to see any relationship between the ethnicity of officials (and the citizens they govern) and the policies they pursue? However, a growing literature exploring variation in type and quality of representation within authoritarian regimes casts doubt on this assumption (Caughey, 2012; Manion, 1996; Morse, 2012; Tsai, 2007a). This body of work suggests that imperfect elections, civic organizations, and social ties may hold officials accountable to citizens, even when the chance of those officials being voted out of office or otherwise losing their positions is small. But given that the experiences of ethnic outsiders in authoritarian counties typically range from political marginalization at best to genocide at worst, do these mechanisms of authoritarian accountability successfully create links between officials and ethnic minority citizens? Or must minorities simply accept that their interests are unlikely to be taken into account?

This chapter sheds light on the dimensions of representation in multiethnic areas of China. Throughout its rule, the CCP has sought to provide both descriptive and substantive representation to ethnic minority groups, albeit in ways that bear little resemblance to the methods commonly used to ensure substantive representation in liberal democracies. At the same time, I argue, the policies intended to ensure descriptive representation for ethnic minorities have been implemented in ways that
ultimately achieve neither of these goals. First, although constitutional guarantees of ethnic representation are largely (if not completely) respected, most ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in local officialdom relative to their share of the population—and are even more underrepresented in minority autonomous counties than in Han-dominated areas. Second, the autonomy of local officials from the titular minority group is limited by patterns of Party secretary officeholding. Although fewer Party secretaries are Han Chinese than existing literature might lead us to expect, it is exceedingly rare for both the Party secretary and the county governor to be members of the same ethnic group. Finally, I argue that these ethnic divisions in the local state have important implications for substantive representation, as they make it difficult for minority officials to effectively advocate for programs that would benefit their coethnics.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I first describe existing literature on descriptive and substantive representation, local governance in rural China, and Chinese ethnic politics. I then briefly survey the PRC’s approach to descriptive and substantive representation and describe the legal guarantees enshrined in the Autonomy Law. After describing my data and methods, I devote the bulk of the chapter to providing a nuanced description of what these policies look like in practice. Using an original dataset of county officials across Yunnan Province, I provide fine-grained evidence that while ethnic representation in China looks quite different from what common assumptions about it would lead us to believe, patterns in ethnic representation suggest that descriptive representation in minority areas is limited. Finally, I describe some of implications of these patterns for substantive representation of Chinese minorities.

2.2 Existing Literature

Descriptive and Substantive Representation

Scholars of democratic politics have long drawn a distinction between descriptive and substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967). Descriptive representation refers to the degree to which officials resemble their constituency, most often in terms of race, gender, and ethnicity. Substantive representation, by contrast, describes officials’ pursuit of policies that reflect the preferences or interests of those constituents. Much of the existing empirical work on representation is concerned with the degree to which the former can induce the latter—or, more broadly, with the types of behavioral changes (among both officials and citizens) that result from descriptive representation (Gay, 2001; Hero and Tolbert, 1995; Pantoja and Segura, 2003; Thomas, 1994).

There are several mechanisms that might plausibly connect descriptive to substantive representation. The first might be called shared interests: the notion that the group in question has distinct needs or policy preferences that will be reflected
in the voting record of an official from that group. The notion of shared interests underpins much of the literature on gender and representation. Although findings on the outcomes of representation by women are mixed, some scholars argue that women have different preferences regarding public spending and social policy than men, and that without women in office these preferences do not make it onto the agenda (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Wängnerud, 2009). It is also central to the logic underpinning policies designed to ensure descriptive representation in China, as I discuss later in this chapter.

A second explanation for the connection between descriptive and substantive representation focuses on what I term *identity-driven obligations*, the notion that officials may feel a greater sense of obligation to citizens with whom they share an ascriptive identity. This mechanism is less relevant for robust democracies, where unresponsive officials can be voted out of office, than it is for places where democratic mechanisms are flawed or nonexistent. As Lily Tsai has documented in Han areas of rural China, however, identity-driven obligations are an important driver of substantive representation in the Chinese countryside. Tsai finds that in villages where organizational membership creates bonds of social obligation between officials and citizens, local officials provide better public goods than they do in villages where the relevant social organizations exclude local officials (Tsai, 2007a,b). In ethnically diverse areas of China, ethnic identities are one salient cleavage along which social and economic life is organized. This chapter argues, however, that the ethnic structure of the local state makes it difficult for citizens to use ethnically bounded social networks to hold their coethnics in government accountable.

**Governance in Multiethnic and Rural China**

Existing literature on politics in ethnic minority areas of China falls into two broad categories: primarily anthropological work on ethnic identity and descriptive work on the legal basis for ethnic politics in China. The first, largely ethnographic body of work on ethnic minorities in China generally (although not exclusively) examines ethnic groups in isolation, and focuses on elements of these groups’ cultures rather than on the political institutions that shape their interactions with the state. When these studies do attend to politics, they typically focus on the role of the state in shaping ethnic identity or on ethnic identity as a form of resistance to the local state (Benson and Svanberg, 1998; Bovingdon, 2002; Gladney, 1996; Harrell, 2001; Kaup, 2000; McCarthy, 2009; Mullaney, 2004, 2011; Schein, 2000; Z. Wang, 1997). These studies provide useful information for understanding the diverse cultural contexts

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1Lipsky (1980)’s work on “street-level bureaucrats” demonstrates one important form that *identity-driven obligations* may take even in a democracy, when bureaucrats have some discretion in policy implementation and make decisions that are influenced by the multiple identities of the citizens they serve (and by their own). More recent work in this vein includes Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003).
in which China’s ethnic policies operate. But given their specificity—even studies that focus on more than one ethnic group generally examine only a small number of locations—these studies make it difficult to assess the generalizability of the authors’ findings to other groups in other contexts. And as both the explanations and the outcomes of interest in these studies typically focus on ethnicity, this body of work has little to say to debates in political science and economics over the relationship of diversity to substantive outcomes of interest such as communal violence and public goods provision.

The second major strand of literature on ethnic politics in China focuses on elements of the legal framework for governing ethnic minority regions (Dreyer, 1976; Potter, 2011; Sautman, 1999, 2012; Xia, 2009). These include the constitutional provisions for ethnic representation, the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy, and the autonomous regulations (zizhi tiaoli) and singular regulations (danxing tiaoli) drafted by the People’s Congresses of minority autonomous areas. These forms of legislation, as well as the process by which they were enacted and the changes to them that central policymakers are currently considering, are useful windows into local governance in ethnic minority areas of China. However, they do not tell the whole story—nor do they necessarily bear any resemblance to reality (a point that a quick look at the long list of civil rights “guaranteed” by the Chinese constitution should drive home). What is often missing from these works is a detailed discussion of how these policies are implemented, and whether they make any difference in the lives of the people who live in the areas subject to them.

A relatively new literature on local governance in predominantly Han areas of rural China has done a better job in this regard, and has yielded much of what we know about the local state and representation in China. It is clear from this literature, as well as from the groundswell of discontent across rural China, that corruption and mismanagement are rampant. Nonetheless, the literature demonstrates that, despite the absence of true democratic mechanisms, local officials may still be held accountable via a number of means, including admittedly flawed local elections, social organizations linking officials to citizens, promotion incentives, and professional ties between officials in different levels of local government (Heberer and Schubert, 2012; Kennedy and Shi, 2011; Kung, Cai, and X. Sun, 2009b; Luo et al., 2007b; Manion, 1996; G. Smith, 2009; Teets, 2012; Tsai, 2007a; Xiaobo Zhang et al., 2004). This literature provides a useful starting point for thinking about representation in minority areas, but given the different political institutions in operation in these areas as well as their distinctive social and geographical environment, there is reason to believe that local politics operates differently in Han and minority areas. Further, these studies give us little leverage on questions relating to the representation of different groups in a single area where social and professional ties may be organized along ethnic lines.

Thus while existing scholarship gives us a sense of what policies for ensuring de-
CHAPTER 2. WHO REPRESENTS MULTIETHNIC CHINA?

Descriptive representation look like on paper, we do not have a clear sense of how those policies are implemented in practice. And while we are learning more and more about the dynamics of substantive representation in Han areas, we know little about them in minority areas. Finally—and most centrally for this paper—we know little about the link (if one exists) between descriptive and substantive representation in the Chinese context, at least in terms of ethnicity. At the village level, we do know that elected officials seem to do their jobs better in the service of other members of their clans/surname groups (J. Chen and Huhe, 2013; Manion, 2006; Tsai, 2007a,b), although this may have as much to do with these officials’ ability to motivate their clan members to participate to local projects as it does with the actions of officials themselves (Xu and Yao, 2015). These differ in an important way from the question of ethnic representation, however, and it is not a foregone conclusion that the same dynamics would apply to representation by coethnics. Clans are socially important institutions with long historical lineages (Perry, 1985; Tsai, 2002; Woon, 1989). The same cannot necessarily be said for ethnicity. In the 1950s Chinese citizens identified themselves as belonging to literally hundreds of different ethnic groups (one with only two self-identified members: a man and his wife!). As a result of the ethnic classification project (minzu shibie) in 1956, the CCP created a closed list of 56 recognized ethnic groups. Some of these map on to deeply-felt ethnic identities with long histories, but many others are catch-all categories that combined disparate groups with little in common.

2.3 Descriptive and Substantive Representation on Paper

What does the CCP promise to the approximately ten percent of the population that belong to ethnic minority groups? Since the Long March—which took the Red Army through remote areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, many of whom were deeply suspicious of the Communists after historical Han domination and cruel treatment by the Nationalists—devising successful mechanisms for both descriptive and substantive representation has posed a key challenge for Chinese policymakers (Dreyer, 1976; Mullaney, 2011; Winnington, 1959). Theoretically, several policies work together to ensure descriptive representation of ethnic minorities: the CCP trains minority cadres (minzu ganbu) to govern the areas inhabited by their own groups; requires the head posts in government, the local People’s Consultative Committee, and the local People’s Congress to be held by members of the titular minority; and ensures visible overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the National People’s Congress (Information Office of China’s State Council, 2005). Visible displays of adherence to these policies are a predictable part of the political theater of the liang hui (the simultaneous meetings of the National People’s Congress and the NPPCC that are held
in Beijing each March). Even minority delegates from the most assimilated ethnic groups are expected to attend wearing ethnic garb, and colorful photos of these representatives are a mainstay of liang hui press coverage.\(^2\) While there are no formal quotas, nearly every one of the 55 recognized ethnic minority groups has at least one “autonomous region” (at the township, county, prefecture and/or province level), and every ethnic group has at least one representative to the NPC (Information Office of China’s State Council, 2005).

At least on paper, the CCP has a strong commitment to substantive representation of ethnic minorities as well. However, substantive representation in China is quite different from the concept as it is usually understood. First, policy congruence between officials and citizens is not a high priority in the Chinese context. While the technocratic CCP of today bears little resemblance to the revolutionary party that won the Civil War, the CCP still acts like a Leninist vanguard party in its attitude toward the policy process. In light of the Party’s virtual monopoly on talent (especially in the countryside), policy is formulated by party elites in Beijing and the provincial capitals, and decisions about implementation strategies are largely left to local and mid-level officials at the village, township and especially county levels. Indeed, as my interviews demonstrated, citizens’ opportunities to provide input on new policies are remarkably limited. For instance, when citizens in some townships in Jade County were reluctant to join the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (and to pay the ten yuan fee for participation), local officials interpreted their lack of enthusiasm as a sign that the county’s propaganda work (and not the policy itself) had been unsuccessful. If citizens only understood the policy, their thinking went, they would embrace it; the idea that they might understand but disagree with a policy was not even considered.\(^3\)

In place of policy congruence between officials and citizens, then, substantive representation in multiethnic China contains two elements. The first is a commitment to improving citizens’ economic and physical wellbeing (the primary source of the regime’s legitimacy across China). Under the Hu-Wen administration, rural development—ignored for much of the reform era—became a key policy priority, as did the re-creation of a social safety net that died along with the collective and the danwei (Saich, 2008).\(^4\) In minority areas, where citizens are poor and social service


\(^3\)Interview with employee of county people’s congress administrative office, Yunnan, 2011.

\(^4\)For more on this point, see Newland (2015). Whether these will continue to be priorities under the leadership of Xi Jinping is something of an open question; to date, Xi’s major focus has been on anti-corruption efforts, although he continues to pay lip service to the development of a “moderately prosperous” (xiao kang) society in poor areas. See, for instance, “President Xi encourages ethnic minority people,” Xinhuanet, 3 January 2014. Available from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/03/c_133017125.htm. Last accessed 8 July, 2015.
needs severe, the mandates to improve educational quality, expand access to and reduce the cost of medical care, build rural infrastructure, and alleviate poverty have been accompanied by funding from higher levels of government, in recognition of the fact that local governments in these areas often lack the resources to pay for such services themselves (L. Zhang, Luo, et al., 2006). Other policies are intended to increase minority citizens’ access to services and opportunities that disproportionately aid Han Chinese, such as a nationwide affirmative action policy allowing ethnic minorities to gain university admission with lower scores on the *gaokao* (the national college entrance exam) than their Han counterparts.

This version of substantive representation has been key to the CCP’s legitimation strategy in minority areas since even before it formally assumed power in these remote parts of the country. Party cadres were sent to minority areas to improve public health, teach residents new farming techniques, and build irrigation infrastructure, among other projects (Dreyer, 1976; Minority Affairs Council, 2009; Winnington, 1959). As one of the first accounts of the encounter between Han cadres and the Yi minority group in Yunnan notes, these seemingly apolitical projects—which yielded clear benefits to the community without (initially at least) threatening existing power structures—served as a way for the Party to gain the trust of groups that had a long history of antagonism with Han outsiders (Winnington, 1959). This remains largely true today, with the Party trumpeting its achievements in the areas of disease control, hospital care, education, and other social services in a 2005 white paper that serves as the most explicit articulation of the “party line” (fairly literally, in this case) on the history and development of China’s minority regions and the policies that govern them (Information Office of China’s State Council, 2005).

The second element of substantive representation is a geographically delimited set of political, economic, and cultural rights. These rights accrue to the areas designated as minority autonomous areas (and sometimes only to the titular minority group in a given area), rather than to individual citizens within them, and are intended to ensure that policies in minority areas are culturally appropriate and to provide the necessary resources for these areas to develop their economies and provide public services. Political rights—widely seen as the component of autonomy that is most constrained or even “nonexistent” because the issue of ethnic separatism is so sensitive—are largely limited to the guarantee that particular positions in government be occupied by members of the titular ethnic group. In terms of economic rights, autonomous areas are allowed to retain a greater share of local revenues than is the case in non-autonomous areas. Cultural rights—the biggest difference between minority

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5 The subsidies and transfers to minority areas have declined over the course of the reform era, however (C. Wong, 2007).
6 Interview with ethnic law expert, Hong Kong, 2009.
7 Interview with ethnic studies expert, Hong Kong, 2009. There is, however, an important limitation to this: natural resources are defined as “nationally owned” (*guoyou de*), and the revenues
autonomous areas and non-autonomous areas—include the right to schooling in the local language; amendments to national laws based on the local culture (for instance, a lower legal marriage age); and amendments to the criminal code (such as the right to carry a weapon, which is typically illegal under Chinese law). The one-child policy is also relaxed in most minority autonomous areas, although the number of children that families are allowed to have varies by ethnic group and region.

In theory, these benefits to minority autonomous areas should effectively target non-Han citizens: since ethnic minority populations in China have historically been clustered within minority autonomous areas, with limited migration to Han areas, the government argues that targeting policies to minority autonomous areas is the most effective way of serving the individuals who live within those areas. In reality, however, these policies may have unintended consequences that hurt ethnic minority citizens more than they help them. Critics (and ethnic minorities within autonomous areas) argue that Han citizens of minority autonomous areas are often better positioned to take advantage of preferential policies than are the minority citizens the policies were designed to benefit, increasing existing inequality (and resentment) between the two groups.

The first of these two elements of substantive representation implies a kind of “raising all boats” approach: Whatever is good for rural China is good for all citizens of rural China, Han and minority alike. At crucial moments, however, Chinese scholars and policymakers have focused on the second approach, which treats descriptive and substantive representation as intimately linked. At the PRC’s founding, when ethnic divisions were seen as a potential threat to the unity of a fragile nation-state, Mao and others saw the rapid development of a cohort of loyal minority cadres as essential for representing (and perhaps also controlling) ethnic minority areas. Recruiting members of local minority groups into the CCP and training them in Party schools and in special nationalities universities was a high priority. In Mao’s words, “Without a large number of cadres recruited from the minority nationalities, we can never succeed in thoroughly solving the nationalities problem.” The People’s Daily made more explicit the substantive importance of placing minorities in leadership positions: “It is natural that the members of any nationality will have respect for the cadres of their own nationality. Minority nationalities...have often expressed the opinion that they produce must generally be remitted to higher levels of government. Many minority areas have little human capital but a great deal of natural gas and mineral resources. However, these areas receive little benefit from their resource endowments, because local officials are afraid that aggressively pushing to retain control of these resources will hurt their own career prospects. Interview with minority law expert, Beijing, 2009.

Interview with ethnic law expert, Hong Kong, 2009.

Similar patterns have emerged in China’s nationally-designated “poverty counties” (which, like minority areas, qualify for special fiscal transfers and subsidized loans from the provincial and national government), which has led to a gradual shift from targeting poor areas to targeting poor citizens within those areas (S. Wang, Z. Li, and Ren, 2004; World Bank, 2009).
although Han cadres are very likeable, they still cannot completely understand the situation and problems of the minorities” (Dreyer, 1976, p. 109). Although recruiting and training sufficient numbers of qualified minority officials from areas where education levels are low remains a significant challenge for the state, Chinese scholars and policy experts are remarkably consistent in their belief that minority officials better understand the needs of their coethnics than Han officials ever can. This claim, accepted largely without question since 1949, has recently become the subject of some controversy, as it is tested by the inability of “minority cadres” (minzu ganbu) to preempt the growing ethnic conflict in Western China.

How do the guarantees for ethnic representation enshrined in Chinese law translate into descriptive and substantive representation on the ground? The rest of this chapter seeks to answer this question.

2.4 Data

Much of this chapter is based on an original dataset of over 3,000 county-level officials in 118 counties in Yunnan province in southwestern China. Using dozens of county-level, prefectural, and provincial yearbooks located in libraries across China and in Hong Kong, I constructed a dataset that contains information on the ethnic makeup of the county-level leadership of the 118 counties for which these data were available.\(^\text{10}\) Nearly all records are taken from the mid-2000s; where records from this time period were unavailable or did not include ethnic information for officials, I used earlier or later records (but none before 1999).\(^\text{11}\) I also coded the ethnicity of the individuals holding four key county positions: Party secretary, governor, chairman of the county-level local People’s Congress (LPC), and head of the county People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Finally, I created two measures of diversity in local leadership in order to enable comparison between the ethnic makeup of local officialdom and the ethnic makeup of the population. The dataset also includes county-level population estimates for each ethnic group in the county, taken from the

\(^{10}\) A list of the sources used to construct the dataset is available on request. The dataset contains the top two positions (each of which is often held by multiple people in a single county at a given point in time) in the four key structures of governance at the county level: the Communist Party, the government, the People’s Congress, and the People’s Consultative Committee. Some counties report more detailed lists of officeholders, which I analyze in a separate project. Out of concern for the possibility of selection effects in which counties that provide longer lists also differ from other counties in terms of their ethnic dynamics, I restrict my analysis here to the more limited set of positions that is reported quite consistently across the province.

\(^{11}\) As there were no major changes to policies regarding ethnic governance during the time period I study here, and because county leaders typically serve for relatively long terms of 4-8 years, bias induced by a correlation between the makeup of local government and the year for which ethnic records were obtained is not a serious concern here. To confirm this, wherever possible I collected local government records for a given county for multiple years. Substituting records from a different year into the county dataset did not change the results.
In addition, the chapter draws on in-depth interviews with experts, officials, and public service providers, and qualitative case studies of two counties in southwestern China, South Mountain County (a county located within an Yi autonomous prefecture) and Jade County (a non-autonomous county that could legally have been designated an Yi autonomous county based on its large Yi population but has not, to date, been designated as autonomous). Jade County has the additional advantage of enabling within-county comparison, as it contains both predominantly Han townships and several Yi autonomous townships.\(^\text{13}\)

### 2.5 Descriptive Representation in Practice

**Leadership by the Titular Minority**

The basic legal framework for descriptive representation in minority areas is laid out in the constitution and in the revised Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy (1984). The law specifies that the top position in government in a minority autonomous county, prefecture, or province-level region must be held by a member of the titular minority group (article 17). Of the chair and vice-chair positions in the local People’s Congress, at least one seat must be held by a member of the titular minority (article 16). Other minorities residing in the region are also entitled to “appropriate representation” in the People’s Congress and in the government, although no specific quotas or seat requirements are imposed (articles 16 and 18). And the staff and leadership of the People’s Court and People’s Procuratorate must include members of the titular minority, although no specific seats are set aside (article 46). My interviews also suggest that there are informal expectations that leadership in the government, the People’s Congress, and the People’s Consultative Committee—but not in the local Communist Party branch—should be exercised by the titular minority, and that positions in government and the local People’s Congress are allocated according to each group’s proportion in the population.\(^\text{14}\) These requirements are, with the exception of the requirement that the head position in government be held by the titular minority, extremely flexible (and probably deliberately so). But some scholars argue that even the requirements that do exist on paper are not followed (Potter, 2011). To what extent does China follow its own laws designed to guarantee descriptive representation of ethnic minorities?

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\(^\text{12}\)See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the usefulness of Yunnan Province as a kind of laboratory for subnational comparative analysis of ethnic representation.

\(^\text{13}\)See Chapters 1 and 3 for a more detailed description of the qualitative data.

\(^\text{14}\)Interview with academic expert on ethnic politics, Beijing, 2009; Interview with head of ethnicity research center, Guangxi, 2009.
Table 2.1 lists the proportion of seats held by the titular minority, disaggregated by position and county type. It reveals a number of interesting points. First, the overwhelming majority of minority autonomous counties designated as autonomous at the county level comply with the law requiring the county governor to be a member of the titular minority group. The variation here is limited, but suggests that the decision to appoint titular county governors (or to violate this requirement of the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy) is likely made at the prefecture level, as the only minority autonomous counties that do not have governors from the titular minority group are all located in a single prefecture. This prefecture aside, the legal requirements for ethnic representation appear to play an important role in ensuring at least some degree of descriptive representation. As further evidence for this claim, I use a logit model to assess the determinants of two dependent variables: the presence of a county governor who is a member of an ethnic minority group and the presence of a non-Han Party secretary (Table 2.2). Both in the baseline model and when economic and geographic controls are introduced, the only variables that are statistically significant predictors are autonomy status and ethnolinguistic fractionalization (ELF). Although these variables do not completely explain variation in ethnic officeholding—and additional determinants of these patterns are worthy of further investigation—these results suggest that the decision to appoint ethnic minority officials to top county-level positions is largely consistent with the mandates of the constitution and the Autonomy Law.

Returning to Table 2.1, the contrast between minority autonomous counties and counties that are located within a minority autonomous prefecture is instructive. These two types of counties are, in general, quite similar—both have large minority populations, and both are eligible for the financial benefits and special economic and cultural rights afforded to minority autonomous areas. However, whereas the governments of county-level minority autonomous counties must legally be led by a member of the titular minority group, this requirement does not hold for counties located inside a minority autonomous prefecture. Rather, in minority autonomous prefectures the prefecture, but not the counties within it, must have a governor from the titular
Table 2.2: Determinants of Ethnic Minority Leadership (Logit Models)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minority Party Sec.</th>
<th>Minority Gov.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to Prefecture</td>
<td>−0.003</td>
<td>−0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF (1990)</td>
<td>3.636***</td>
<td>1.589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.154)</td>
<td>(1.368)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous</td>
<td>0.900***</td>
<td>0.655**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.299)</td>
<td>(0.298)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity Use (1980)</td>
<td>−0.0002</td>
<td>−0.0002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−1.630*</td>
<td>−2.096**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.840)</td>
<td>(0.941)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

ethnic group. Without such a legal constraint, the governors of many counties that are autonomous at the prefecture level are Han Chinese, or—less frequently—are members of ethnic groups other than the titular group. Similarly, while the other leading positions (for which there is no formal requirement that the leader be a member of the titular ethnic group) are often held by members of the titular minority group, they are much less likely than the governorship to be held by the titular minority. While many minorities serve in positions that are not required by law to be held by non-Han officials, explicit legal requirements that specific specific positions be held by the titular minority appear to ensure some measure of descriptive representation where more ambiguous proclamations about “appropriate representation” do not.
Figure 2.1: Share of Each Minority Group in Local Officialdom and in the Population Across Counties. The dotted line represents the density curve for the share of the given minority group in local officialdom. The solid line represents the density curve for the share of the given minority group in the local population. The vertical line at proportion = .3 indicates the informal cutoff for designation of an area as a minority autonomous area.
Proportional Representation

The problem with these vaguer, less easily enforceable promises regarding ethnic representation is clear when we look at the larger set of officials in the top level of county leadership (on average, about 32 individuals in each county in the dataset). A clear pattern of underrepresentation emerges: within minority autonomous areas, nearly every minority group makes up a smaller share of local officialdom than it does of the local population. Figure 2.1 presents density curves for the distribution of six ethnic groups in the population and in local officialdom. Unlike some highly localized groups, these six groups are present in nontrivial numbers across large swaths of Yunnan Province. On each subfigure, the solid line represents the distribution across counties of the group’s size as a share of the population. The dotted line represents the distribution across counties of the group’s share of local officialdom. Counties where the given ethnic group makes up more than thirty percent of the population or local officialdom fall to the right of the vertical blue line in each subfigure.

As Figure 2.1 shows, relative to distribution of the population proportion of each of four ethnic groups (Yi, Hani, Lahu, and Miao) across counties, the distribution of these groups as a proportion of local officialdom is shifted left. We see fewer counties with significant numbers of minority officials from these ethnic groups than would be the case if they were represented in government in proportion to their prevalence in the population. However, as the bottom row of subfigures suggests, there is also interesting variation in these patterns. The Hui appear, if anything, to be somewhat overrepresented in government, a pattern that could be explained by their economic power as a group and their cultural similarity to Han Chinese; other than not eating

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15 An important extension of this project that I hope to complete during my postdoc is an examination of patterns of ethnic representation among mid-level county officials. As these officials—closer to Lipset’s “street-level bureaucrats” than the county governor and other top-level leaders are—are the ones with the greatest direct contact with citizens, we might expect their relationships with coreligionists (or lack thereof) to affect the quality of services that citizens receive. A cursory look at the data suggests that there is interesting variation in ethnic representation across different bureaus—for instance, leadership positions in the police are often disproportionately occupied by ethnic minorities, although not necessarily by members of a given area’s titular minority. Because these mid-level officials can easily number in the hundreds in a single county, wrangling paper lists of officials from a large number of counties into a usable format is a time-intensive task and one that is not yet complete.

16 All the groups included here make up at least one percent of the population in fifteen or more counties for which I have data on both the population and local officialdom. These figures show only the counties where the group makes up at least one percent of the population, since the notions of over- and under-representation of a given group are largely meaningless in counties where the group does not reside.

17 This number represents an important cutoff, as having thirty percent of the population belong to a single minority ethnic group was an informal criterion for designation of a county as autonomous. Interviews with head of ethnicity research center, Guangxi, 2009 and ethnic studies expert, Hong Kong, 2009.
pork, many Hui across China are difficult to distinguish from Han Chinese—their mother tongue is Mandarin, intermarriage with Han Chinese is frequent, and they are less geographically concentrated in minority areas than other groups. Exploring sources of group-level variation in ethnic representation is outside the scope of this chapter, but might provide a fruitful avenue for further research.

The picture is perhaps even clearer when we examine Han overrepresentation across the three types of counties (non-autonomous, autonomous at the county level, and autonomous at the prefecture level). As Figure 2.2 demonstrates, in non-autonomous counties, Han Chinese are represented in government in approximate parity with their share of the population (there are some counties where they are overrepresented and some where they are underrepresented, but the mean difference between their share of the population and their share of local officialdom is essentially zero). Han Chinese are, paradoxically, most overrepresented in minority autonomous counties, where self-government rights for minorities ought legally to be strongest (negative values indicate that Han are a larger share of local officialdom than they are of the local population). Whereas even ethnic minorities that represent a large share of the local population may hold only a handful of seats in local officialdom—and may have to fight with representatives of other minority groups for distribution of resources intended to improve the lot of local minorities—Han officials often represent a larger share of local officialdom than they do of the local population.

These patterns may affect public service provision in ethnically diverse areas in several ways. Within minority autonomous counties, Han Chinese are typically sufficiently numerous within local officialdom that they can effectively prevent forms of policy implementation that are “too ethnic.” They may also be able to channel resources more effectively to their coethnics than minority officials can to theirs. The fact that preferential policies in minority areas have disproportionately benefitted the Han residents of those areas is widely acknowledged, and is often cited as a motivating factor behind the ethnic riots in Xinjiang in 2009 (Shan and G. Chen, 2009). There are, of course, multiple reasons for this phenomenon, including interethnic differences in education and overt discrimination against ethnic minorities by Han business elites (Zang, 2011). However, my findings point to an additional mechanism for explaining this gap between the intention and the outcome of preferential policies in minority areas: the fact that the ethnic makeup of the local state enables Han officials to be responsive to the needs of their coethnics and hinders minority officials from doing so. This is an especially serious issue in poor, minority areas, where the nonstate economy is stagnant and access to economic opportunities and resources associated with the local state is essential for economic success.

In addition to their substantive implications, these patterns also suggest the an-
Figure 2.2: Han Overrepresentation in County Officialdom, by County Type

Analytical importance of disaggregating across types of minority autonomous areas. Within counties that are designated autonomous at the prefecture level, for instance, both the head of government and the head of the local People’s Congress are less likely to be members of the titular ethnic group than they are in counties that are designated autonomous at the county level. As I argue in Chapter 3, ethnic networks provide one important point of access via which citizens, as well as village- and township-level officials, can communicate their needs to and request resources from county officials. Whether the leadership difference between counties and prefectures translates into substantive differences in the strength of these ethnic networks, and into differences in the titular minority’s access to services in turn, is a question I hope to answer in a later stage of this project.

Party Leadership

Students of ethnic politics in China often state that one mechanism by which the “autonomy” granted to Chinese minorities is stripped of any value is the fact that the Party Secretary—the top figure in any bureau or locality—is virtually always Han Chinese. In contrast to the former Soviet Union, where the top position in each republic was held by a member of the titular ethnic group, in China the law only requires that the top position in government be held by the titular minority, but says nothing about ethnic representation in the Party. Numerous scholars have argued that the Party leadership entirely or overwhelmingly Han, and that even ethnic minorities in government are relatively powerless as a result (Benson and Svanberg, 1998; Bovingdon, 2010; Mackerras, 1994). These statements may hold true for the four provincial-level autonomous regions, and especially for Xinjiang and Tibet, which
have long been sites of opposition to the regime and where repression of ethnic “split-tists” is a top priority for the state. But what about the makeup of party leadership in smaller county- and prefecture-level autonomous regions, where much of China’s minority population resides?

There is substantial variation in the ethnic makeup of the highest echelon of county leadership across the 118 counties for which I have data on these positions. In general, however, there is little support for the notion that while the government may be diverse, the Party is a Han institution. In the non-autonomous counties in the dataset, 43 of the 52 county Party secretaries are Han. Although clearly the overwhelming majority of Party secretary positions in these counties are held by Han Chinese, the fact that more than 15 percent of the top positions in these counties are held by minorities is itself surprising, since there is no legal requirement that minorities be represented in government outside of minority autonomous regions. The nominal purpose of minority officials is to serve as a “transmission belt” capable both of making Party policies comprehensible to a local minority population and of transmitting the needs of this population upward to policymakers (Dreyer, 1976), but it does not appear that the minority officials who serve as Party secretaries in non-autonomous counties are being appointed with this role in mind. For instance, in the non-autonomous counties that have an Yi Party secretary, the Yi make up a small share of the population both in absolute terms and relative to other non-autonomous counties.

Turning to minority autonomous counties, there is little evidence to support the notion that only Han Chinese are appointed as Party secretaries. In county-level minority autonomous counties, 56 percent of Party secretaries (18 out of 32) are Han. And in counties that are located within minority autonomous prefectures, fewer than half of all county Party secretaries are Han. As was the case with governorships, Han Chinese are overrepresented in Party Secretary positions relative to their frequency in the population: on average, 34 percent of citizens in Yunnan’s minority autonomous counties (MACs) are Han, as are 45 percent of citizens in counties that are not designated as MACs within minority autonomous provinces. However, the CCP at the local level is not nearly as dominated by Han Chinese as existing literature might lead us to believe. Han control of the Party apparatus may undermine the value of minority representation in other positions in some counties, but in many counties minorities are allowed to ascend the Party hierarchy and assume positions of real power. However, an alternate mechanism of control emerged in my qualitative interviews and is consistent with the data presented here: divided ethnic leadership as a means of diminishing the influence of minority officials. I discuss this pattern in the next section.

19Note that the total number of Party Secretaries is higher than the total number of counties, as counties that underwent a mid-year leadership transition typically reported multiple officeholders for each top position.
CHAPTER 2. WHO REPRESENTS MULTIETHNIC CHINA?

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Ethnic Diversity in Local Leadership

While county Party secretaries in minority areas of Yunnan are nearly as likely to be members of ethnic minority groups as they are to be Han Chinese, it is exceedingly rare for members of the same minority group to hold both the top Party position and the top position in government within a single county. Of the 116 counties for which I have data on the ethnicity of both the Party secretary and the county governor, only four counties have a Party secretary and a governor who belong to the same ethnic minority group. In non-autonomous counties it is common for both top leaders to be Han, even when the local population exhibits significant ethnic diversity; 29 of the 51 counties that fall into this category have Han leaders in both positions. But minority autonomous counties typically either have leaders of different ethnic groups (82 percent of counties) or, less frequently, two Han leaders (12 percent of counties). This suggests two different forms of a “divide and conquer” strategy, at least where the top two positions in county leadership are concerned. First, top-level leadership may be internally ethnically divided (i.e., leaders rarely belong to the same ethnic group as each other). And second, interethnic divisions between local officials and the local population (either because officials are Han or because officials belong to different ethnic groups than the citizens they govern) may make it difficult for citizens to use social ties to hold officials accountable.

This is consistent with qualitative evidence that suggests that a kind of “divide and rule” strategy has been at play in multiple stages in the process of institutional design and policy implementation in China’s minority areas. When Kazak autonomous counties were established within Xinjiang Province in the 1950s, for instance, they were deliberately created in ways that crossed natural ethnic boundaries. This resulted in internally diverse autonomous counties even when different ethnic groups lived in concentrated and geographically contiguous areas (Benson and Svanberg, 1998). It is, of course, difficult to say whether this was a conscious choice on the part of the policymakers who oversaw creation of minority autonomous counties in the 1950s. The result, however, is that despite the spatial clustering of individual ethnic groups in minority areas of China, political institutions have induced “excess” ethnic diversity in the administrative regions where these groups reside, both by creating borders that cut across ethnic lines and by leading to the appointment of a set of minority officials who are more diverse than the population they govern.

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20 Whether this is a conscious policy choice or an unintended consequence is an open question, and one that would be extremely difficult to answer. My focus here is on the fact of ethnically divided leadership and its effects; the term strategy may put more emphasis than I intend on the process that produces those ethnic divisions.

21 Chapter 3 discusses this point in greater detail.
2.6 Obstacles to Substantive Representation

In what ways do the patterns of descriptive representation described above hinder the substantive representation of ethnic minorities? Below, I describe specific ways in which the ethnic fragmentation of county leadership undermines both the shared interests and the identity-driven mechanisms by which descriptive representation may produce substantive representation.

One result of the descriptive patterns elucidated above is that even when an official wishes to act in ways that are consistent with his ethnic group’s norms or preferences, the ethnic fragmentation of the local state often prevents him from doing so. Since the power to appoint county officials lies with the prefectural Party organization department, the Party appears to use appointment power across leadership groups to create an ethnic mix in local government that prevents the power of a single ethnic group from growing too strong. Qualitative evidence consistent with this pattern is useful for understanding the precise mechanisms by which this control strategy operates. For example, consider an incident in a minority autonomous county in Sichuan Province, described to me in an interview by a Chinese expert on minority law. The county’s Party secretary, a member of the titular minority group, required all cadres and local officials to study the local minority language—a policy consistent with the constitutional language rights guaranteeing autonomous areas the right to conduct government affairs in the local language. However, the other local officials hated this policy. While they lacked any formal mechanism for preventing the Party secretary from implementing the language policy, they used connections to higher-level officials to successfully lobby for a nominal promotion for the Party secretary; his transfer to another position meant that they no longer had to learn the local ethnic dialect.22 Of course, this would not have been such an imposition had the local leadership belonged to the group they governed, which they did not in this case. As long as local officialdom remains ethnically fragmented—and as long as the top two county leadership positions continue to be held by members of different ethnic groups—it is the unlikely that minority officials will have much success in pressing for implementation of the language and cultural rights that are supposed to be a distinctive feature of minority autonomous regions.

The ethnically fragmented structure of the local state also prevents a sense of social obligation from keeping minority officials accountable to their coethnic citizens. The patterns of ethnic fragmentation described above mean that even the titular minority has relatively few coethnics in government to whom to appeal (typically through informal means) for resources. I observed the importance of these informal links during my fieldwork in Jade County, an ethnically diverse, non-autonomous county in Yunnan Province. Social contact between Han officials, citizens, and ser-

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22Interview with ethnic politics expert, Hong Kong, 2009.
vice providers such as doctors and school principals in Jade County was extremely common. Many members of the county government had taught in a large middle school in a Han township before moving into the government, and maintained social relationships with their former students and colleagues, eating meals and celebrating holidays together. The county officials remained closely connected to the school at which they had once served as teachers, and the principal of the school was remarkably successful at using these social relationships to get new resources for the school, among them a large library, a computer lab, and several new buildings. None of these informal links existed between county officials and the teachers or students of the substantially less successful school in one of Jade County’s Yi minority townships. And as Jade County is not a designated minority county, it has few Yi officials who could serve as points of access for the Yi community. It is perhaps not surprising that in a non-autonomous county like Jade County, the Yi population would be relatively powerless (even though it is quite large). What is surprising, however, is that similar limitations on social access to county officials exist within minority autonomous counties as well. Although the source of these limitations is different—the county government, rather than being almost entirely Han, is fragmented among multiple ethnic groups—the result is largely the same.

Table 2.3: Effect of Titular Party Secretary or Governor on Educational Expenditures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minor. Auton. Counties</th>
<th>Non-ACs in MAPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) (2) (3)</td>
<td>(4) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titular Sec.</td>
<td>663.61*</td>
<td>42.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(334.06)</td>
<td>(94.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titular Gov</td>
<td>197.39</td>
<td>47.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(340.39)</td>
<td>(93.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>−1.65</td>
<td>−0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.18)</td>
<td>(0.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (log)</td>
<td>−872.62***</td>
<td>−639.91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(181.30)</td>
<td>(135.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue (log)</td>
<td>459.81***</td>
<td>148.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(145.99)</td>
<td>(81.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1,830.46***</td>
<td>8,368.93***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(113.48)</td>
<td>(1,325.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

The nature of my quantitative data does not allow me to directly test these different mechanisms in a large-n framework. We can, however, use county-level data
on ethnic representation and public services to assess whether representation by co-ethnics is associated with better public provision of public services—one measure, although certainly not the only one, of substantive representation.\textsuperscript{23} I use OLS regression on two sets of counties—minority autonomous counties and counties located within minority autonomous prefectures but not designated autonomous at the county level—to assess the relationship between having a Party secretary or county governor who is a member of the titular ethnic group and a variety of measures of health and education service quality.\textsuperscript{24} Perhaps unsurprisingly given the dynamics described above, the results suggest that one of the key components of China’s system of ethnic representation—the requirement that minority autonomous areas have a governor who is a member of the titular ethnic group—has no effect on the quality of local public services. This is consistent across specifications and holds for several measures of public services: educational expenditures per school-aged child (see Table 2.3, Columns 3 and 5), county-level participation in the New Cooperative Medical Scheme, \textit{gaokao} exam pass rates,\textsuperscript{25} and per capita health spending.\textsuperscript{26}

What about the importance of having a Party secretary who is a member of the titular ethnic group? There, the results are a bit more mixed. They suggest that the presence of a titular Party secretary is positively associated with per-child educational expenditures, although this relationship is only statistically significant for minority autonomous counties (Table 2.3, Columns 1, 2, and 4). Since the Party secretary is the most powerful figure in the county, there is certainly an intuitive explanation for this result: a Party secretary, unlike a governor (\textit{xianzhang}), has enough power to unilaterally push through an agenda that benefits the population (many of whom are his coethnics). However, the presence of a titular Party secretary seems to have no effect on any of the other measures of public service provision that I mention in the previous paragraph. This fact, combined with the low numbers here (there are only

\textsuperscript{23}Chapter 3 contains a more detailed description of this dataset.
\textsuperscript{24}The presence of a county governor who is a member of the titular ethnic group and the presence of a county Party secretary from the titular ethnicity measure somewhat different aspects of descriptive representation. Since Chinese law requires the county governor to be a member of the titular minority, the effect of a titular governor on public services can help us assess whether China’s legal guarantees have meaningful results. This is quite different from a Party secretary, who is not legally required to be a member of the titular ethnic group but is typically the most powerful person in a county. During my postdoc, I hope to expand this analysis to look at what public service outcomes are associated with ethnically divided leadership (i.e., a county governor and Party secretary from two different ethnic groups). Because so few counties in Yunnan have a party secretary and county governor of the same minority ethnic group, this will require looking at additional cases outside Yunnan.
\textsuperscript{25}I only examine this outcome for counties in minority autonomous prefectures; the relatively small number of minority autonomous counties and the substantial amount of missing data on \textit{Exam Pass} make this variable unusable for the minority autonomous counties subset.
\textsuperscript{26}Since none of the variables of interest are substantively or statistically significant in any of the other specifications, I do not include additional tables here. Tables for these results are available on request.
26 minority autonomous counties in the dataset, and only a few of these have titular Party secretaries), makes me suspicious that this positive result is a fluke.

2.7 Conclusion

Using a new dataset compiled from local government sources, this chapter has provided the first systematic look at the makeup of the local state in multiethnic China. My findings suggest both necessary corrections to the conventional wisdom on the topic and new explanations for the poor performance of multiethnic areas since the advent of China’s economic reforms. First, I find that the Communist Party leadership is substantially more diverse than previous research suggests. While Han Chinese are (unsurprisingly) overrepresented in county leadership positions, the claim that ethnic autonomy is meaningless because Han party secretaries rule is untrue. It is, however, extremely rare for both the Party secretary and the county governor (the top two positions in the county Party-state) to be members of the titular ethnic minority group.

Second, most—but not all—ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in government relative to their proportion in the population. There does, however, appear to be interesting variation across ethnic groups (the Hui are somewhat overrepresented, for instance) that warrants further study. The constitutional guarantees of ethnic representation do not appear to ameliorate this problem, as Han overrepresentation is more severe in minority autonomous areas than in areas that are not designated as autonomous.

Third, a pattern of ethnically divided leadership—evident both in the fact that the top two positions in a minority autonomous county are rarely held by members of the same ethnic group, and in the fact that the larger leadership group in minority areas tends to be more diverse than the population it governs—appears to be widespread across the counties in the dataset. These patterns of underrepresentation and fragmentation pose real challenges for substantive representation, as they limit the ability of minority citizens to use ethnic ties to seek resources from the local state, and prevent minority officials from implementing policies that benefit their coethnics.

Of course, these patterns of ethnic representation are not the only ones that undermine minority officials’ ability to represent the interests of their coethnics. The ability of ethnic networks to hold minority officials accountable is also undercut by these officials’ professional incentives. If officials wish to be promoted, they must avoid the perception that they are too committed to promoting the rights of their own ethnic group. As one ethnic politics expert put it, “local leaders all look up”; because they are afraid of alienating higher-level officials who belong to a different ethnic group, this makes implementation of autonomy laws “insufficiently forceful”
They also must work effectively in a largely Han environment and forge patron-client ties with higher-level officials who are typically not members of the same ethnic group. This creates strong incentives for officials to emphasize skills and relationships that are useful in interethnic relationships over those that are useful only in intraethnic ones. As a result, minority officials often have little to connect them to their ethnic group. The only Yi official I met in Jade County, for instance, was the head of a health center in an Yi township. However, he described himself as “very assimilated” (hanhua) and unable to speak the local Yi dialect. The health center had three other Yi doctors on staff, but according to the health center head all were “just like him.” In some minority areas, this dynamic has created a rift between minority officials and the ethnic group to which they nominally belong; Heberer (2007) finds that residents of an Yi autonomous prefecture viewed minority officials as more Han than Yi.

Although the qualitative and quantitative results are quite consistent here, there are several limitations to the quantitative analysis presented in this chapter that warrant further exploration. First, the dependent variables I investigate here—a variety of measures of county-level public service expenditures, citizens’ use of public services, and public service outcomes—are useful measures of how well local governments serve citizens in general, but provide only indirect evidence (or, more accurately given the results, a lack of evidence) of how well local minority officials represent the interests of their coethnics. Three additional types of data would be helpful to answer that question more directly: a direct measure of what minority populations in different counties actually want, individual-level data to assess which groups are actually benefiting from these services, and measures of a broader range of outcomes. The first should not necessarily be taken as definitive proof of citizens’ interests; sometimes local governments must implement policies that are unpopular but ultimately good for citizens’ welfare. However, given the evidence presented elsewhere in the dissertation that citizens in minority areas are often reluctant to use the services that local governments provide, a better sense of what citizens actually want might make the reasons for this disconnect easier to identify. Unfortunately, this information is likely impossible to obtain for a large set of counties.

Second, it would also be helpful to know which citizens are benefiting most from these services. If the benefits of public service spending accrue disproportionately to the Han Chinese residents of a given county, then county-level improvements in public service spending should not be taken as a sign of substantive representation of the county’s minority residents. The household-level China Health and Nutrition Survey may make it possible to supplement the county-level analysis presented here with individual-level analysis of some public service outcomes, an extension to the

\[^{27}\text{Interview with ethnic politics expert, Beijing, 2009.}\]
\[^{28}\text{Interview with head of township health center, Yunnan, 2011.}\]
Finally, it is certainly possible that representation by one’s coethnics has little effect on public services but does lead to substantive representation in other areas more directly guaranteed by the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy, such as language and cultural rights. Some of the qualitative discussion earlier in this chapter does not make me particularly optimistic that that is the case, but it would nonetheless be helpful to investigate the association between patterns of representation and a wider range of outcomes.

\footnote{Yunnan Province is not covered by the CHNS, but the survey does include several provinces with large minority populations.}
Chapter 3

The Political Geography of Public Service Provision in China’s Minority Areas

3.1 Introduction

When riots broke out in 2009 in Xinjiang, the Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwestern China, scholars and journalists alike were quick to point to economic inequality between Uyghurs and the Han majority and the limited opportunities available to Uyghurs as key sources of Uyghur discontent (Shan and G. Chen, 2009). Indeed, persistent inequality and poverty in minority areas have long been thorns in the side of the Chinese Communist Party. While coastal cities have grown at a rapid pace, life in minority areas has changed little since the onset of economic liberalization. At first blush, this is hardly surprising: ethnic minorities typically live in remote, mountainous areas, conditions that hardly lend themselves to rapid economic growth. But what makes the stagnation of minority areas particularly puzzling is the fact that it has occurred in spite of large-scale policy interventions designed to prevent it. Out of fear of precisely the kind of ethnic unrest that occurred in Tibet in 2008 and Xinjiang in 2009, the central government has made investment in minority areas a clear priority, targeting domestic and foreign aid to these areas and granting them preferential access to subsidized loans, infrastructure development projects, and teacher training and recruitment programs, among others.¹

Why has this appeasement strategy been so ineffective? Put differently, why has

¹The central government has long provided fiscal transfers to local governments in minority areas to pay for public services and development projects (L. Zhang, Luo, et al., 2006). Some scholars argue that the subsidies and transfers to minority areas have declined over the course of the reform era, however (C. Wong, 2007). But my interviews suggest that this trend has been interrupted by unrest in minority areas, with Tibet and Xinjiang receiving significant additional resources in the wake of riots in both areas at the end of the last decade.
CHAPTER 3. THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION IN CHINA’S MINORITY AREAS

the generally capable central government been unable to bring its stated goals to fruition in the case of developing minority areas? That central policies may be undermined by incompetent, corrupt, or simply self-interested local agents is hardly a new discovery (G. Guo, 2009; Liu et al., 2009; O’Brien and L. Li, 1999; Woo, 1999). Yet numerous scholars have noted that, at least for the policies it deems most important, the central government maintains a remarkable ability to ensure compliance. From enforcing the one-child policy to rooting out members of the banned Falun Gong, the central government has shown itself able, through a combination of incentives and punishments, to transform ambitious goals into reality (Edin, 2003; Read, 2012). And yet, many of the areas that have received the most targeted aid have been the least successful at moving citizens out of poverty (Bhalla and Qiu, 2006).

This chapter argues that the political institutions for supervision and merit-based promotion of lower-level officials, the primary means of ensuring that local officials comply with higher-level policies in much of China, operate poorly in geographically remote areas and ethnically diverse areas. Using county government provision of education and health services as a lens through which to view local government performance, I show that public services are both harder to provide and, under the Chinese promotion system, less likely to reap political rewards for their providers in remote, minority areas. “Bottom-up” mechanisms of accountability provided by social ties between officials and citizens also break down in minority areas. Spatial patterns in within-county career trajectories mean that officials have strong ties to citizens who live near the county seat but feel little sense of obligation to (and know little about) citizens in townships that are more remote in terms of physical or cultural distance. In addition, the ethnic fragmentation of local officialdom in minority autonomous counties weakens the ability of minority citizens to use ethnically bounded social networks to hold their coethnics in government accountable.

In this chapter, I lay out these arguments in greater detail, drawing primarily on two data sources: my fieldwork in southwestern China and an original dataset of geospatial, ethnic, and public service indicators for the 129 county-level units in Yunnan Province. The chapter proceeds as follows. I first briefly describe the existing literature on local governance in China and discuss the role that political geography has played in existing work on rural politics (the introduction to this dissertation contains a more complete literature review). I next describe my data and methods. Section 3.4 briefly describes some of the outcomes that this chapter seeks to explain: the unequal provision of public services (and related outcomes) between Han and minority areas. Sections 3.5 and 3.6 use qualitative evidence to develop a two-pronged explanation for this outcome, focusing first on how officials are supervised from above by higher-level cadres, and next on how they are supervised from below, by citizens.

2See chapter 1 for a discussion of the value of conducting subnational comparison of counties within Yunnan.
Section 3.7 tests the generalizability of this explanation with a statistical analysis of county-level data for 129 counties in Yunnan province. Section 3.8 concludes.

3.2 Existing Literature

This project engages with an already vibrant debate on the determinants of local government performance in rural China. It also seeks to draw attention to an under-studied topic in Chinese political economy: namely, the role that geography plays in altering the behavior of local officials. While the introductory chapter discusses the literature on local governance in rural China in greater detail, I provide a brief recap below. Finally, while there is virtually no research to date on rural political geography in China, geographic factors are often treated as control variables in large-N work on politics in rural China. In the second section of the literature review I briefly describe this body of work and argue for more explicit attention to the different mechanisms by which geography might affect the quality of local governance.

Incentives, Relationships, and Local Governance in China

Over the past two decades, a large and growing literature has explored the various mechanisms—among them admittedly flawed local elections, promotion incentives, and social organizations—by which local officials may be held accountable in the absence of democracy in China (Kennedy and Shi, 2011; Kung, Cai, and X. Sun, 2009a; Luo et al., 2007a; Manion, 1996; Martinez-Bravo et al., 2014; G. Smith, 2009; Teets, 2012; Tsai, 2007a,b; Xiaobo Zhang et al., 2004). Existing work on the quality of local governance in rural China—including research on village-level electoral procedures and outcomes, debates over the local state as predatory vs. developmental, and work on public goods provision at the village, township, and county levels—draws a somewhat puzzling distinction between the determinants of village officials’ performance and those of township and county officials’ performance. Research on village-level governance typically treats officials as being embedded within the communities they serve, with implications for their job performance (J. Chen and Huhe, 2013; Manion, 1996; Tsai, 2007a,b; Xu and Yao, 2015). The particular configuration of social institutions (churches, clans, retirees’ associations, and the like) within a village may affect the degree to which village officials feel obligated to serve their constituents, as well as their inclination to provide generalized or particularistic services. But the idea that social ties are central to officials’ decisions is generally taken for granted.

By contrast, the debate over the determinants of township- and county-level official performance largely ignores the role of social relationships, focusing instead on the material incentives for good performance in some cases and predatory behavior
Early work treated these mid-level officials as rational actors responding to the personal financial incentives created by Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) in the 1980s (Oi, 1992). Since the decline of the TVEs, scholars have focused instead on the career incentives created by the Cadre Responsibility System and the ways in which central-level policies encourage local officials to maximize their chances of promotion rather than (or in addition to) monetary gain (Edin, 2003, 2003a; O’Brien and L. Li, 1999; Rosenberg, 2015; Xueguang Zhou, 2010). Whether these career incentives are effective at ensuring (somewhat) competent governance in the countryside remains a matter of substantial debate. While few would deny that principal-agent problems within the vast and multilayered Chinese Party-state are severe, some argue that center’s ability to monitor and control local officials has increased, and that local policy implementation—at least when it comes to policies that are high priorities for the central government—has improved as a result (Ahlers and Schubert, 2009; Edin, 2003; Heberer and Schubert, 2012). Detractors generally outnumber these optimists, however, arguing that local officials have become masters at gaming the system. For the sake of fulfilling targets set by the central government (and improving their own chances of promotion), these scholars argue, local officials build wasteful infrastructure projects at the expense of meaningful investment and dutifully meet “hard targets” while failing to implement popular and potentially beneficial policies.

In short, scholarship on local governance in China typically characterizes village officials as socially embedded and higher-level rural officials as incentive-driven and atomized. This conventional wisdom has some basis in fact. Villages are relatively small in size and have stable permanent populations; village leaders are certainly part of social networks that predate their tenure in office and tie them to the citizens they govern in complex ways. By contrast, a single county may contain 100,000 people or more, and the highest-ranking county officials are deliberately chosen from outside the county to prevent local social groups from exerting too strong an influence over county leaders. Nevertheless, this assumed distinction between the behavioral motivations of village-level and higher-level rural officials has resulted in overly mechanistic depictions of why county officials and township officials do the things they do. Although the highest-ranking county officials may be temporary residents, bound for another locale after a four-to-eight-year tour of duty, the majority of county- and township-level officials spend their entire careers in the county in which they grew up.

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3Persson and Zhuravskaya (2012) argue for the importance of social ties between local and provincial leaders, but these are also a product of the patron-client relationships between leaders at different levels of the Party-state’s administrative hierarchy. The notion that mid-level officials are embedded in social relationships with citizens has largely been ignored.

4A notable exception is Lu (2000).

5For these and other arguments about the negative consequences of the cadre responsibility system, see Duan and Zhan (2011), Minzner (2009), O’Brien and L. Li (1999), G. Smith (2009), and Xueguang Zhou (2010).
CHAPTER 3. THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION IN CHINA’S MINORITY AREAS

up. Tied to specific groups of citizens by ethnic, clan, or hometown identities, and to others by shared professional experience or recreational habits, county officials live within overlapping sets of social networks. I argue that how they provide public services—and to whom—is partly a product of these social ties, just as it is for village officials.

Political Geography in Rural China

It is widely assumed that geography exerts some influence on politics in China; citizens and officials alike often comment on China’s size and topography as obstacles to good governance. At the national level, China’s political geography has received substantial attention from students of regional political economy (Hurst, 2004), economic inequality (Jian, Sachs, and Warner, 1996; Kanbur and Xiaobo Zhang, 2005; C. Li and J. Gibson, 2013), and natural resource politics (Lebel, Garden, and Imamura, 2005; Naughton, 2007). More generally, the assumption that geography affects politics is embedded in much of the quantitative work on rural governance in China, as the inclusion of one or more geographic control variables in nearly every regression-based study of the topic suggests (see Table 3.1 for several illustrative examples).

For scholars interested in understanding how and why geography influences political and economic development, however, this body of work leaves much to be desired. First, the proliferation of different measures of geographic distance or remoteness, and the lack of any theoretical justification for the selection of one metric over another, makes it difficult to aggregate knowledge. Indeed, it is hard even to know whether different variables are measuring the same underlying concept (or to know whether the various authors even intend them to do so). Table 3.1, intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive, points to the magnitude of this problem. It suggests that remoteness and geographic dispersion—the concepts I take these authors to be trying to measure—are, on balance, bad for public goods provision and for local political representation. But how bad they are, and under what conditions, may vary significantly depending on which measures of remoteness and dispersion are used. For example, S. Guo et al. (2014) argue that more steeply sloped land is associated with higher spending on village public goods projects, a finding that is inconsistent with Tsai (2007a)’s finding that rough terrain is negatively associated with the existence of paved roads or paths. (and that suggests that sloping land might affect public goods quite differently than other geographic qualities do).

Furthermore, as these authors all treat their geographic measures as control variables rather than as independent variables of interest, they devote little space to
Table 3.1: Geographic Controls in Research on Rural China (Illustrative Sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Geographic Control</th>
<th>Dependent Variable(s)</th>
<th>Effect of Geog. Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tsai (2007a)</td>
<td>Village dist. from county</td>
<td>6 measures of village PGs</td>
<td>Negative, signif. predictor of paved roads &amp; paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rough terrain (dummy)</td>
<td>6 measures of village PGs</td>
<td>Negative, nonsignif. predictor of paved roads &amp; paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># natural villages w/in admin. village</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative, nonsignif. predictor of paved roads &amp; paths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kung, Cai, &amp; Sun (2009)</td>
<td>Region dummies</td>
<td>Village PG expenditure</td>
<td>“West” is a negative, signif. predictor of PG expenditure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manion (1996), citing Chinese sources</td>
<td>Village size</td>
<td>Quality of village elections</td>
<td>Participation decreases when villages are ‘too large or the population widely dispersed’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Dist. from village to township seat</td>
<td># PG projects &amp; level of PG investment</td>
<td>Negative, signif. predictor of # of PG projects; no relationship with level of investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dist. from village committee to nearest road</td>
<td># PG projects &amp; level of PG investment</td>
<td>Negative and significant for both DVs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dist. between two most distant gps. w/in village</td>
<td># PG projects &amp; level of PG investment</td>
<td>Pos. and signif. for # PG projects; neg. and signif. for investment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% hilly land (slope &gt; 25 degrees)</td>
<td># PG projects &amp; level of PG investment</td>
<td>Positive and significant for both DVs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Slope</td>
<td>Level of PG investment</td>
<td>Positive and significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guo et al. (2014)</td>
<td>Dist. from village to township gov’t</td>
<td>Level of PG investment</td>
<td>Negative; significance varies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dist. from village to concrete road</td>
<td>level of PG investment</td>
<td>Positive, nonsignificant</td>
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a discussion of the reasons behind the effects they find—a fact that is particularly problematic when we consider that, in several cases, the effect size and significance of these geographic controls is as large as or larger than those of the independent variables on which the authors focus. The role of geography in economic development has received substantial attention from economists and political scientists, but whether the causal mechanisms that these sources identify can explain subnational variation within China has not been explored to date. These problems beg for a more consistent and reasoned approach to measurement of geographic concepts in research on political and economic development in rural China. Even more importantly, they point to the need for qualitative research to supplement (and make sense of) regression-based work that acknowledges the importance of geography but does little to explain why geography affects the quality of local governance in China, or what elements of geography are driving these effects. Indeed, as the evidence I present later in the chapter suggests, some of the apparent inconsistencies between different measures described in Table 3.1 make perfect sense in the context of the incentive structure in which local officials in China decide where to invest their energy and resources. This chapter thus argues for a kind of synthesis of the geographical and institutional perspectives: I argue that both formal and informal institutions for constraining officials’ behavior operate less effectively in remote locations than proximate ones.

### 3.3 Data and Methods

This chapter draws on more than sixty interviews conducted between 2009 and 2012 with experts, local officials, public service providers, and citizens in Beijing, Kunming, and several rural areas of southwestern China. It also draws on in-depth fieldwork in the southwestern provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan, including visits to hospitals, schools, and public health training programs run by a local NGO. I discuss two counties, Jade County and South Mountain County, in depth.

Jade County and South Mountain County share some important similarities. Both are rural counties located far from Beijing in China’s poor southwest. Both counties contain a large Yi minority population, enabling me to hold constant some cultural and linguistic factors that are not the focus of my research here. In terms of their mountainousness, economic opportunities, political institutions, and population demographics the two counties differ significantly from one another in ways that enable...
useful between- and within-county comparisons. I briefly describe some of the characteristics of each county below.

South Mountain County. Located in a mountainous area on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau, South Mountain County is one of the poorest counties in China. It is primarily agricultural, but the land is of poor quality and most families live on a diet comprised almost exclusively of potatoes and corn. The population is quite ethnically homogenous, belonging almost exclusively to the Yi minority group (there are also small Han and Tibetan populations). In the past two decades, South Mountain County has been absorbed into the regional drug economy, with residents helping to move drugs across a nearby border with Southeast Asia and then into inland Chinese cities. As a result, the health problems in South Mountain County are severe; it has one of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in all of China and has high rates of opiate addiction.\(^\text{10}\) South Mountain County is located within a minority autonomous prefecture, a designation that carries with it nominal self-government rights and mandates quotas for representation of the Yi in the government and people’s congress.\(^\text{11}\)

Jade County. Jade County, Yunnan is a middle-income county about an hour’s drive from the provincial capital. Like South Mountain County, the dominant minority is the Yi; the population of Jade County is relatively ethnically polarized, however, with approximately 70 percent of citizens belonging to the Han majority. Although the Yi population (approximately 30 percent of the total population) is large enough to qualify Jade County for categorization as a minority autonomous county, it does not have this designation and nearly all of its officials are Han Chinese. Jade County’s Yi population is largely concentrated within four townships within the county. This makes possible useful within-county comparison, as the overwhelmingly Han county-level officials are responsible for supervising both Han and Yi townships. Unlike many areas with large minority populations, Jade County is located in a relatively flat, fertile area; there is a significant agricultural component to the economy (including cash crops such as tobacco and cultivated mushrooms), but the cement and porcelain industries are also major local employers.

The last part of the analysis tests the argument developed from these qualitative cases on a broader range of counties. This section relies on an original dataset constructed using a variety of Chinese-language sources—among them county yearbooks and gazetteers, census data, county government websites, and various publications of the National Bureau of Statistics—as well as Google Maps. The dataset covers the 129 counties in Yunnan Province, and includes information on geographical remoteness, several measures of ethnic diversity (both in the population and in the

\(^{10}\) Interview with employee of local NGO, Sichuan, 2010.

\(^{11}\) For more on the implications for representation of minority autonomous county status, see Chapter 2.
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county government), health and education service provision measures, and economic and demographic controls. Outcome variables are typically from the late 2000s, although exact years vary due to data availability. Key measures from this dataset are described in the appendix.

3.4 The Public Services Crisis in China’s Minority Areas

Over the course of the Long March and after the Communist victory in 1949, building infrastructure and providing health services were key components of the Communist strategy for winning over ethnic minority populations with long memories of oppression at the hands of Han Chinese warlords, local elites, and (in some cases) KMT soldiers (Dreyer, 1976). Many ethnic minority groups remained suspicious of the new ruling party, and minority areas were some of the last to be brought under Red Army control. And yet, the Red Army’s seemingly genuine interest in “serving the people”—even those at the bottom of local power hierarchies—lay at the heart of the Communist strategy for winning over populations that often had little in common with their new rulers. However, over the course of its first fifty years of rule, marked both by a general turn away from rural public service provision and by periods (most notably the Cultural Revolution) of overt hostility to minority cultures, the Party gradually abandoned these commitments. By 2000, minority areas had fallen far behind their predominantly Han counterparts in public health and education outcomes. Township-level data from the 2000 population census of Yunnan Province starkly demonstrates this problem (see Figure 3.1).

As Figure 3.1 shows, there is a negative relationship between the proportion of a township’s population that is Han Chinese and the township’s infant mortality rate (IMR); this relationship looks quite similar (and, in some cases, is even stronger) across townships in other ethnically diverse provinces in the West and Southwest. Similar relationships hold for other public service outcomes as well. For instance, there is a positive relationship between township-level educational attainment and the proportion of the population that is Han Chinese.12

Under the Hu-Wen administration, driven by concerns over the growing inequality between rural and urban areas and about growing unrest in the countryside, rural public service provision became a high priority for the central government. Significant resources have been invested in rural infrastructure, the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (a national rural health insurance program), and other rural public services, many as part of the “Building a New Socialist Countryside” campaign (Ahlers and Schubert, 2009; Looney, 2015 (forthcoming); Michelson, 2012; Su, 2009). Yet evi-

12Author calculations from 2000 census data.
dence suggests that these programs have been more effective at reaching rural Han Chinese populations than ethnic minorities. Infant mortality rates in many minority areas remain high, despite the fact that governments in these minority areas have instituted programs to cover the full cost of prenatal care and hospital birth for minority women. And, as one education official in Jade County noted, dropout problems are higher among Yi minority students and students from remote townships, despite new funding programs designed to make it easier for poor students to stay in school for the nine years of compulsory education now required by national law.\(^\text{13}\) That these patterns have persisted in the face of social and economic programs intended to help minority areas catch up with their Han counterparts is puzzling. In the following sections, I describe the intersection of geography with political and social factors that, I argue, helps to explain these poor outcomes.

### 3.5 Top-Down Supervision: Career Incentives and the Spatial Logic of Public Service Provision

Despite recent policy changes that have directed resources and national-level attention to rural public service provision, promoting economic growth and maintaining social

\(^{13}\)Interview with office head, Jade County Education Bureau, May 2011.
stability remain the core objectives of county-level officials.\textsuperscript{14} An official’s prospects for promotion (and demotion) rest in large part on higher-level officials’ assessments of their performance on these and other “hard targets.” But career-minded officials can also gain the attention of their superiors (and increase their chances of promotion as a result) by implementing innovative programs in a variety of policy areas—public service provision among them.\textsuperscript{15} Unfortunately for remote areas, especially remote minority areas, the payoff for working hard to implement innovative programs is likely to be low, as higher-level officials are reluctant to visit.

During my fieldwork in ethnically diverse, middle-income Jade County, contact between county-level officials and their municipal and provincial superiors was constant. An uninterrupted parade of municipal Party committee members and business and political elites from the nearby provincial capital stayed at the local hotel, which is owned by the county Party committee, for both meetings and social visits. Public service providers also described frequent supervision by higher-level officials. One middle school I visited in a township near the county seat was visited several times per month by officials from the county education bureau, and had been visited the previous week by officials from the environmental protection bureau. It had also been visited by higher-level officials, including a visit several months earlier by a vice-mayor (\textit{fushizhang}) of the city in which Jade County is located.\textsuperscript{16} As Graeme Smith has noted, accompanying higher-level officials on visits and study tours is taking up more and more of the time of township-level officials, resulting in a “hollow state” in which officials spend less and less time and money doing their jobs and instead expend resources on entertaining their superiors (G. Smith, 2010). In the absence of other mechanisms for monitoring the behavior of these officials, however, visits and study tours provide one admittedly imperfect mechanism for ensuring that officials do their jobs—and for incentivizing local officials to create programs that they can show off to their superiors. In remote, minority areas, however, supervision by higher-level officials is minimal, and these incentives break down as a result.

In remote counties, visits by higher-level officials are infrequent and opportunities for mismanagement are rife as a result. With little supervision, local officials make only superficial contributions, doing little to meaningfully improve the quality of the services citizens receive. As one NGO employee in South Mountain County put it:

\begin{quote}
There has been a lot of new investment, most of it from national transfers—building new school buildings, new houses, and so on. However, none of it really benefits the common people (\textit{laobaixing}). For instance, township schools
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{15}Head of local GONGO (government-organized non-governmental organization), Yunnan, 2010.

\textsuperscript{16}Interview with middle school principal, Jade County, Yunnan, 2011.
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have new buildings, but teacher quality is very low. There are kids who have attended several years of school but can’t count from one to one hundred; their educational level is lower than that of kindergarten students in [the prefectural capital]. If you go into a township government office, the offices are empty. Township officials don’t “serve the people,” they take their salaries and move to the county seat or another city. Teachers stick around, but whether they actually teach is another question. Maybe they only teach when someone shows up to observe the school.\footnote{17} The distance that impedes higher-level officials from visiting remote, minority areas is not merely physical, but also cultural. While travel time serves as a disincentive for officials to visit remote areas, stereotypes about ethnic minorities and minority areas make higher-level officials, who are typically Han Chinese or assimilated members of ethnic minority groups, especially reluctant to visit these areas. According to one rural health expert who has been involved with health care pilot programs in a Tibetan area of Yunnan, the poor quality of health services in this area can be attributed in part to the fact that they are ignored by higher officials. Transportation to the area from provincial and prefectural administrative centers is inconvenient. But just as importantly, “Han officials are afraid of the sanitation conditions there,” and are reluctant to travel there as a result.\footnote{18}

Even within the county, the geographic logic of supervision further disadvantages the remote areas least able to develop on their own. Innovative programs are rare in South Mountain County, but the ones that exist are located close to the county seat. Local officials pointed to a small greenhouse project in one village as one of the county’s most successful development projects; the village selected as the “test point” for this project was one of the closest villages to the county seat.\footnote{19} According to a local Yi elite whose NGO promotes health and education projects within the area, the South Mountain County government typically considers two factors when deciding which areas to select for experimental programs; the first of these is the ease of transportation to these areas, as officials only rarely visit remote villages and prefer to invest resources in areas that are convenient for them to visit.\footnote{20}

Experimental projects are not the only types of government investment that benefit centrally located areas over remote ones; even funds that target individual beneficiaries (and which need not be tied to location, since the funds can typically be transferred directly to recipients’ bank accounts) tend to follow a geographic logic. The “three exemptions and one subsidy” (san mian yi bu) policy—implemented to enable poor families to comply with the new requirement that students receive nine

\footnote{17}Interview with NGO employee, South Mountain County, 2010.\footnote{18}Interview with head of local public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.\footnote{19}Interview with head of county women’s bureau, South Mountain County, 2010.\footnote{20}Interview with head of local NGO, South Mountain County, 2010.
years of compulsory education—provides free tuition, fees, and textbooks, and sub-
sidizes boarding expenses for poor students. Inequality even within poor, minority
areas is pronounced; the best educated and most assimilated minority residents typ-
ically move to the county seat, leaving the poorest residents in the villages. Despite
this fact, san mian yi bu funding has disproportionately targeted the centrally lo-
cated students in county seats over those in township schools. J. Guo (2008)’s work
on several counties in the Inner Mongolia Minority Autonomous Region, for instance,
identified large intra-county differences in the definition of poverty. San mian yi bu
funds are distributed to students whose family income fell below a locally defined
poverty line. These lines were set significantly higher in the county seats than in out-
lying townships, with the result that students in county town schools received higher
subsidies and county seats held “a rather irrational preponderance of poor students”
(J. Guo, 2008, p. 41).

Because county and prefectoral officials exercise great control over where (and
whether) NGOs are allowed to operate, the same geographic logic typically guides
implementation of public service programs by non-state actors. Without close coop-
eration with local and intermediate-level government, NGOs find their paths blocked
at every turn. Even if they are allowed to operate, they are rendered ineffective by the
fact that citizens fear repercussions from local government for using the NGO’s ser-
vices; in the case of one environmental and economic development NGO in Yunnan,
this problem was so serious that the organization ultimately ceased to operate. Although
many local officials are suspicious of NGOs, some recognize that they can use
the organizations to serve their own purposes. NGOs provide services (and funding)
that local governments might otherwise have to provide. They also provide opportu-
nities for local officials to claim credit for implementing innovative service provision
strategies. As a result, local officials encourage (or permit) NGOs to operate in the
same kinds of localities where they are most likely to provide the best services more
broadly—the ones where their “innovative” approach is most likely to be observed by
higher-level officials and earn them career rewards as a result.

Even NGOs that are explicitly concerned with reaching citizens in remote areas
may thus find themselves shunted into areas that qualify as the “least remote of the
remote.” As the head of one educational equity NGO related, although the
organization’s goal is to help high-need schools, the organization is currently focusing
its efforts on schools in the prefectural capital and the nearby counties. While these
schools are not truly high-need, especially in comparison to more remote schools, the
organization saw this strategy as necessary to “give face” to prefectural officials who
wanted programs implemented in nearby schools. For the organization’s key ally in

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21 Chapter 4 discusses the topic of non-state service providers and their interactions with local
governments in much greater detail.
22 Interview with head of local NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
23 Interview with foreign employee of international public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
3.6 Bottom-Up Supervision: Spatial Social Networks Between Officials, Service Providers, and Citizens

As I argued above, promotion incentives play an important role in encouraging local officials to provide high-quality services if (and where) those services are likely to be observed by higher-level officials. But in Jade County, I also met local officials who had spent their whole careers in Jade County, evinced little interest in being promoted out of the county, and yet seemed genuinely committed to improving the quality of public services (most notably education services) there. Given that Chinese local officials are so often known for doing nothing unless required to by their superiors, why were these particular officials so civic-minded despite their apparent indifference to the incentives that keep some officials in check? In the following section, I describe some of the informal mechanisms by which local officials can be held accountable for providing public services—mechanisms that again tend to place remote areas, where county officials typically have few social and professional ties, at a disadvantage.

Other scholars have shown that, at the village level, social networks and non-state institutions such as churches and clan associations can play an important role in constraining local officials and improving the quality of local public goods (J. Chen and Huhe, 2013; Tsai, 2002, 2007a; Xu and Yao, 2015). The relationships between village officials and villagers are undoubtedly more intimate than the relationships between citizens and higher-level officials. Nonetheless, the tendency to treat county officials as atomized figures, located within communities of fellow officials rather than within a broader social context (if they are seen as community members at all), is problematic. Indeed, paying attention to two components of county officials’ nonprofessional identities—their role as consumers rather than providers of public services and their social ties to particular, geographically defined groups of citizens and public service providers—can help us better understand why these officials set the priorities they do.

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24 Interview with head of foreign educational NGO, Beijing, 2010.

25 For a more negative view of the role that social ties such as clan allegiances can play in coloring local governance, see Manion (2006).
A number of different career trajectories typically bring officials to county-level positions. Common paths to county office lie in military service, temporary work transfer from a prefectoral post, lateral transfer from another county, employment as a township official within the county, and teaching in a school within the county. These last two paths to county government service point to another mechanism that can enable local government oversight of particular public services within the county. Officials who previously served as teachers retain a number of social and professional ties that are conducive to good provision of education services. First, they retain social ties to the teachers and principals at their former work sites. They visit these sites not only during formal official visits, but also for social reasons, and are more intimately familiar with the schools’ conditions than they are with other schools within the county. During my research in Jade County, officials from the county people’s congress, propaganda bureau, and education bureau accompanied me on a visit to relatively high-performing L Middle School. All three had begun their careers as teachers at the middle school before moving into positions of leadership in the county. They remained close to the schools current principal, who was a teacher at the same time as the three officials before moving to another school and then being promoted to principal of L Middle School.26

These social ties can improve the quality of public services in a number of ways. First, the frequent presence of local officials—even for purely social visits—can serve as an incentive for schools to perform at a high level all the time and not just for scheduled inspections. Perhaps even more importantly, principals can more effectively lobby for resources for their school when they maintain close social ties to county-level officials, who are responsible for dividing limited resources among the schools (a process that typically allows county officials a high degree of discretion). Unsurprisingly, in the case of L Middle School, the principal had put his close ties to county officials to good use, securing resources for an award-winning computer lab and for significant upgrades to the school’s library and grounds.

Hypothetically, close ties between officials and public service providers can develop in any context. In reality, however, these ties are most likely to develop and persist between county-level officials and service providers in townships close to the county seat. For precisely the reasons I described earlier, township-level officials and teachers are most likely to be promoted to county posts when they work in conveniently townships. Even for the relatively rare county official who is promoted from remote townships to positions in the county seat, maintaining close ties to schools in these relatively distant locations can be difficult. County officials evince tremendous reluctance to drive to distant parts of the county; even if they maintain social ties to former co-workers, they are unlikely to put in the time to actually visit their former sites of employment unless they are required to do so.

26Interview with middle school principal, Jade County, 2011.
County officials’ roles as consumers of public services can also affect the quality of those services. When officials’ children attend local schools, those officials gain both direct exposure to the quality of the schools and a personal stake in improving their quality. Unfortunately, this influence does not necessarily improve the quality of schools for all students, and may further disadvantage students in remote areas. County officials’ children typically attend schools in the county seat. Even within these schools, officials use their influence to have their children placed in the best classes.\footnote{Interview with middle school teacher, Yunnan, 2011.} While the school as a whole may benefit from greater resources through closer informal ties to county government, the notion that high-quality schooling is a public good—that is, that the benefits of these resources accrue to all students—is simply not the case (and, indeed, the clustering of officials’ children in the best classes may worsen the educational experience of other students). Furthermore, within remote areas where there is little oversight of county officials, officials may simply use their resources to move away from dependence on local public services entirely. In South Mountain County, for instance, the head of the county women’s federation sent her daughter to a top school in the prefectural capital several hours away.\footnote{Interview with head of county women’s bureau, South Mountain County, 2010.} Given that even teachers in South Mountain County speak poor Mandarin and have limited education, this decision is not surprising. If it is indicative of a broader phenomenon, however, it does mean that the social mechanisms for overseeing schools work no better in South Mountain County than the formal mechanisms of accountability do.

Ethnic Fragmentation: An Impediment to Bottom-Up Supervision

Citizens in ethnically diverse counties face an additional barrier to using social ties to hold local officials accountable. On paper, Chinese law requires “minority autonomous counties” to be led by members of the titular minority. As the previous chapter details, this policy was intended to ensure that local officials understand the needs of the local ethnic population; these minority officials serve as a “transmission belt” for conveying their coethnics’ needs to policymakers and introducing Party policies to the areas they govern (Dreyer, 1976). My research suggests, however, that county officialdom in minority autonomous counties is more ethnically divided than either the law or local demographic conditions would predict. Although social life in ethnically diverse areas of China is typically organized along ethnic lines, these patterns make it difficult for minority residents to use ethnic social ties to hold their coethnics in government accountable.\footnote{See chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of patterns of ethnic representation and their implications for the services that citizens receive.} Ethnic minority populations in areas that are not designated as autonomous face similar problems for a slightly different reason.
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With no formal guarantees of ethnic representation in these areas, county officials are typically overwhelmingly Han Chinese (even when the local population has a sizeable minority population). As in minority autonomous counties, this makes social networks an ineffective tool for holding officials accountable to ethnic outgroup members in these areas.

The strength of ethnically bounded social networks between Han officials and Han citizens in Jade County provides a useful point of contrast. In Jade County—a non-autonomous county with a sizeable Yi population—a number of Yi were employed as “street-level bureaucrats” (teachers, principals, hospital administrators, etc.) within Yi minority townships. However, few of these individuals advanced into county government, in stark contrast to the promotion patterns that were typical of the county’s Han officials. Han county officials who had been teachers before advancing into government maintained strong social relationships with their former students in the predominantly Han townships where they served, celebrating holidays together and exchanging gifts many years after their formal relationships had ended. Even when this social contact was occasional, it had important consequences for county officials’ perceptions of their obligation to citizens.

One county official with whom I became well acquainted travelled every year to a township where she had worked to celebrate the “killing the pig dinner” (sha zhu fan, a celebratory meal that precedes the lunar new year celebration in much of rural China). During the rest of the year, the official’s contact with her former students (and now their children) in the township was sporadic. Their ongoing social relationship nonetheless served two important functions, however. First, it sustained a sense of obligation between the official and her former students. The official had watched her students grow up, and seemed genuinely invested in their continued success. She anticipated continuing the spend time with them for years to come, and wanted to do what she could to help them when she could. This official, more than many I met in the course of my research, seemed to take the notion of “serving the people” (wei renmin fuwu) to heart. Understandably, the people she seemed most determined to serve were the ones she knew well (and who showed their gratitude to her with invitations to their homes and gifts of meat and crops that they grew).

Second, the social relationships between the county official and her former students provided important information about the needs of (some) citizens—an invaluable asset in an autocracy where information is strictly controlled. When the media are strictly censored, both officials and citizens pay a cost: citizens have limited means to learn about the outside world and organize opposition to the regime, but regime insiders also have little access to information about sources of popular discontent that might undermine the regime’s legitimacy. In China—ranked 176th

30See Lorentzen (2014) and Newland and Lorentzen (2015) for more on this point.
out of 180 countries in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index—relationships with citizens can provide officials with information about local grievances where traditional media cannot.\textsuperscript{31} Personal relationships like the ones between the county official and her former students thus filled in an important gap, in that they gave the official insight into problems in the township and the grievances that might make local citizens angry at the county government. The county official was able to speak in detail about two such problems: the land and water pollution issues related to heavy pesticide use by some local producers (her former students, who tried to use minimal pesticides, were angry at the way that this affected their own land), and the high cost of medical care (a family member of one of her former students had gotten cancer and treatment was exceedingly expensive despite the creation of the New Cooperative Medical Scheme).\textsuperscript{32} The combination of detailed information about her former students’ lives with a sense of obligation to make those lives better colored the official’s perceptions of who she should serve and what she could do to best serve them.

By contrast, the county-level officials I spent time with in Jade County could speak in only the vaguest terms about the county’s Yi communities, and stated that they rarely traveled to them because they were inconvenient (a claim that was more perception than reality: Jade County is not especially large, and recently constructed roads make two of the county’s Yi townships quite easy to reach from the county seat). With greater Yi representation in county government would likely come greater opportunities for social contact between the Yi population and county officialdom. Their severe underrepresentation in government meant, however, that the Yi had little access to the local state in Jade County (and, conversely, members of the local state evinced little knowledge of or interest in the Yi population they governed). In contrast to county officials’ frequent social and professional interactions with teachers and administrators from the largely Han L middle school, education bureau officials had trouble even finding their way to an Yi township school that they took me to visit. The lack of social ties between county officials and the students, graduates, and teachers in the Yi schools meant that they had little knowledge about those communities’ needs, and even well-intentioned programs missed their mark as a result. For instance, a program organized by the county Association of Industry and Commerce (\textit{gongshanglian}) to improve education for minority students focused on giving schol-

\textsuperscript{31}Much has been made of the role of the internet as a new source of information (and one that is difficult to censor relative to traditional media) in China and other authoritarian regimes. While the internet may provide savvy local officials with an independent source of information in some locales, in my fieldwork sites it seemed to either play no role at all or to merely reinforce the strength of the state-controlled local print media. In Jade County, for instance, several officials received news alerts on their smartphones—but these all came from the county government’s website, and officials seemed unsure of how else one would access information on the internet (they were extremely surprised that I knew about a corruption scandal in a neighboring county, for instance, despite the fact that it had been widely reported on provincial blogs and news sites.).

\textsuperscript{32}Interview with county people’s congress employee, Jade County, 2012.
arships for incidental expenses to poor and minority university students—despite the fact that few students from these communities went on to college (or even graduated from high school), and the ones that did were likely the ones least in need of additional assistance. This knowledge gap may be less severe in areas designated as minority autonomous areas, as at least some high-ranking officials in those areas typically belong to the titular ethnic group and to other ethnic groups that are represented in the local population. However, as I discussed in detail in Chapter 2, these areas face a different challenge: patterns of ethnically divided government there typically make it difficult for officials to act on the knowledge they have about the needs of particular ethnic communities.

3.7 Exploring Public Service Provision, Remoteness, and Ethnic Diversity in a Broader Range of Cases

To what extent can these arguments be generalized to a larger set of county cases? The next sections seek to answer this question using an original dataset of measures of ethnic diversity, remoteness, and health and education service quality for the 129 counties in Yunnan Province. Overall, the qualitative and quantitative findings are quite consistent. I show that a county’s distance and travel time to the prefectural government by which it is supervised are negatively associated with a variety of measures of public service expenditure, usage, and outcomes. Various measures of ethnic diversity—most consistently ethnolinguistic fractionalization (ELF) and the proportion Han Chinese in the local population—are also negatively associated with public service uptake and outcomes. Finally, I exploit variation in the timing of the implementation of an important health policy—the rural public health insurance program called the New Cooperative Medical Scheme—to test one of the key causal mechanisms proposed in the previous sections: the notion that remote, minority counties are subject to weak oversight by higher level officials.

The larger set of counties here is useful not only because these results dovetail nicely with the main conclusions of the previous chapter, but also because the quantitative analysis allows us to disaggregate several characteristics that covary or that could not be explored in detail in the qualitative case studies. The results in this chapter suggest, for example, that public service spending, public service uptake, and public service outcomes do not necessarily go hand in hand. The determinants of public service spending appear to be quite different from the other categories, and warrant further exploration. While some of these dynamics are explored in the results section, others require additional data and are described as possible extensions of this project in the final section.
### Table 3.2: Description of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>Distance from county government to prefectural government (km)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel time</td>
<td>Travel time from county government to prefectural government (shortest route, minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF</td>
<td>Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization (index ranging from 0 to 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prop. Han</td>
<td>Share of the county population that is Han Chinese, 2006 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton. Cty</td>
<td>1 if county is designated as a minority autonomous county, 0 otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton. Pref</td>
<td>1 if county is in a minority autonomous prefecture but not designated as a MAC, 0 otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton</td>
<td>1 if designated autonomous at either the county or prefecture level, 0 otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue a</td>
<td>Normal budgetary revenue and extrabudgetary revenue, 2006 (10,000 yuan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population b</td>
<td>Number of county residents, 2000 (indiv.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edu. Exp.</td>
<td>Educational expenditure per school-aged child (yuan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam Takers</td>
<td>Number of <em>gaokao</em> (college entrance exam) takers per 100 people aged 15-19 (indiv.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam Pass</td>
<td>Number of <em>gaokao</em> takers who pass the exam (indiv.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCMS Start</td>
<td>Year of initial implementation of New Cooperative Medical Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCMS Enrolled</td>
<td>Eligible residents enrolled in the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (public rural health insurance) (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>Rural Electricity Use, 1980 (kilowatt-hours)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The autonomy indicator is used in the correlation matrix for simplicity. The descriptive statistics suggest that there are substantial differences between minority autonomous counties and counties located within minority autonomous prefectures, however. As a result, in the regression results, I disaggregate the two types of autonomous counties.*

*Data on county population aged 6-15 comes from the 2000 population census. Educational expenditure data comes from the 2006 *Locality, City, and County Finance Statistics Yearbook*.
### Table 3.3: Correlation Matrix (all counties, pairwise complete observations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dist</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Rev</th>
<th>Pop</th>
<th>Auton</th>
<th>ELF</th>
<th>NCMSyr</th>
<th>ExamPass</th>
<th>ExamTakers</th>
<th>HESpend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCMSyr</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExamPass</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExamTakers</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HESpend</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 3. THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION IN CHINA’S MINORITY AREAS

Results

Some descriptive statistics are helpful as a first look at the data. Table 3.4 presents descriptive statistics for the counties in Yunnan Province that are not designated as minority autonomous areas at either the county or the prefectural level. Table 3.5 presents descriptive statistics for the counties that are designated as Minority Autonomous Counties (MACs, or shaoshu minzu zizhi xian) located within either autonomous or non-autonomous prefectures. Table 3.6 looks at a different subset of the data: the counties that are located within Minority Autonomous Provinces (MAPs, or shaoshu minzu zizhi zhou) but are not designated as Minority Autonomous Counties. Some clear differences between autonomous and non-autonomous counties jump out. Both MACs and non-autonomous counties within MAPs are more ethnically diverse and poorer than non-autonomous counties, spend less on public services, and do worse than non-autonomous counties in terms of various public service outcomes.33 Of the two types of autonomous areas, Minority Autonomous Counties are the worst underperformers. In terms of geography, there are minimal differences between non-autonomous areas and non-autonomous counties located within MAPs, but MACs are substantially more remote than other counties. However, these tables also reveal that in some respects the three types of counties are more similar than we might expect. It is often assumed that minority populations are completely concentrated within minority autonomous areas, but non-autonomous areas of Yunnan can be quite ethnically diverse as well (ELF ranges from .01 to a quite high value of .61 for non-autonomous counties).

Table 3.4: County-Level Variables: Descriptive Statistics (Non-Autonomous Areas)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance to prefecture (km)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>91.21</td>
<td>82.58</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>299.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel time to pref.(min)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>116.14</td>
<td>119.31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF (2006)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCMS Enrollment (%)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>94.15</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>84.30</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaokao pass rate (%)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>76.88</td>
<td>14.18</td>
<td>35.60</td>
<td>96.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaokao takers (indiv.)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1,362.67</td>
<td>1,088.80</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>4,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Expenditures (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11,117.51</td>
<td>6,020.48</td>
<td>2,584</td>
<td>35,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Expenditures (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3,207.43</td>
<td>2,050.34</td>
<td>878</td>
<td>11,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgetary Revenue (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>20,576.73</td>
<td>20,556.51</td>
<td>1,777</td>
<td>87,519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrabudgetary Revenue (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2,357.63</td>
<td>2,429.40</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>9,138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

33It is important to note that although the revenue and expenditure differences look quite dramatic here, these are total rather than per capita figures. Since minority areas typically have smaller populations than non-minority areas, minority areas still perform poorly in per capita terms, but the differences are not as dramatic.
### Table 3.5: County-Level Variables: Descriptive Statistics (Minority Autonomous Counties Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance to prefecture (km)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>134.66</td>
<td>70.92</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>257.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel time to pref.(min)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>187.90</td>
<td>125.28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF (2006)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCMS Enrollment (%)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>92.56</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>81.10</td>
<td>99.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaokao pass rate(%)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>66.51</td>
<td>18.23</td>
<td>28.20</td>
<td>93.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaokao takers (indiv.)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>590.40</td>
<td>429.23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Expenditures (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7,252.69</td>
<td>3,126.60</td>
<td>1,847</td>
<td>15,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Expenditures (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2,226.76</td>
<td>1,053.12</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>5,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgetary Revenue (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6,889.14</td>
<td>4,745.54</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>18,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrabudgetary Revenue (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>829.59</td>
<td>583.49</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>2,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.6: County-Level Variables: Descriptive Statistics (Counties within Minority Autonomous Prefectures not designated as MACs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance to prefecture (km)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>90.58</td>
<td>61.48</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>231.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel time to pref.(min)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>113.94</td>
<td>81.23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF (2006)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCMS Enrollment (%)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>92.10</td>
<td>6.74</td>
<td>56.00</td>
<td>98.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaokao pass rate(%)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>68.56</td>
<td>15.89</td>
<td>35.24</td>
<td>94.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaokao takers (indiv.)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>837.56</td>
<td>437.89</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>2,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Expenditures (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>8,476.98</td>
<td>3,240.93</td>
<td>3,156</td>
<td>18,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Expenditures (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2,542.12</td>
<td>1,272.91</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>6,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgetary Revenue (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>12,231.53</td>
<td>13,593.93</td>
<td>1,222</td>
<td>74,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrabudgetary Revenue (10,000 yuan)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1,903.16</td>
<td>2,270.73</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>13,792</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The rest of this section proceeds as follows. I examine each of the three categories of public service quality measures (expenditures, uptake, and outcomes) in turn. The fourth subsection exploits variation in the timing of NCMS (rural public health insurance) implementation to test one of the causal mechanisms I propose in this dissertation (that remote, minority areas receive less attention from higher-level officials than do other counties).

**Health and Education Expenditures**

How well do patterns of health and education spending support the claim that remote, minority areas receive poor public services? Table 3.7 presents the results of regressing educational expenditure per school-aged child on different measures of ethnic diversity and remoteness. Remoteness (measured as either distance or travel time) is negatively correlated with expenditures, although in model (6) this correlation is not statistically significant. A 100-kilometer increase in a county’s distance from the prefectural capital is associated with a 99-244 yuan decrease in per-child education spending (depending on the specification); these figures represent 3.1-7.6 percent of the range of the variable.

The results for per capita health expenditures (Table 3.8) look quite different. In fact, this set of results is inconsistent both with my hypotheses and with the other results. Travel time and distance have no statistically significant relationship to per capita health spending. The diversity measures are statistically significant in some but not all specifications, and all go against my expectations (ELF and regional autonomy are associated with higher per capita expenditures, and the proportion of the population that is Han is associated with lower expenditures).

One potential threat to inference is that ethnic diversity might be a consequence as well as (or instead of) a cause of public service quality. If some ethnic groups are better able than others to “vote with their feet” and move away from a county in response to low-quality public goods there, we might see counties become more or less ethnically diverse in response to the quality of public services that their governments provide. I use an instrumental variables approach to deal with this problem. Using data from China’s fourth national census (1990), I construct a measure of ethnolinguistic fractionalization (ELF) for each county in 1990. The two measures of ELF are very closely correlated (see Figure 3.2). Table 3.8, Column 7 reports results of the instrumental variables specification with controls. The results remain unchanged from Column 4 (the coefficient on ELF is not significantly different from zero in either case).

Could the 1990 measure still be an outcome of contemporary public service provision? This might be a concern if citizens had knowledge in 1990 of the kinds of public goods and services that different counties would provide down the line. This is implausible for two reasons, however. First, *de facto* restrictions on movement were
Table 3.7: Educational Expenditure per School-Aged Child vs. Diversity and Remoteness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline Results</th>
<th>With Controls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>−2.00***</td>
<td>−2.18***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.74)</td>
<td>(0.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>−1.26**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.49)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF</td>
<td>21.51</td>
<td>51.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(243.19)</td>
<td>(244.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>−189.84</td>
<td>−280.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(184.13)</td>
<td>(197.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton. County</td>
<td></td>
<td>183.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(142.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton. Pref.</td>
<td></td>
<td>−161.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(119.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue (log)</td>
<td></td>
<td>85.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(67.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop. (log)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2,001.87***</td>
<td>1,952.14***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(138.37)</td>
<td>(131.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01
### Table 3.8: Per Capita Health Expenditures vs. Remoteness and Diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OLS</th>
<th>IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.0005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
<td>(0.049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Time</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF</td>
<td>34.563**</td>
<td>34.403**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton. Cty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.057***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9.414)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton. Pref.</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(7.946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prop. Han</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−32.145***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10.437)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (log)</td>
<td>−52.358***</td>
<td>−48.608***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue (log)</td>
<td>16.589***</td>
<td>18.304***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.258)</td>
<td>(4.162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>76.449***</td>
<td>77.548***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.989)</td>
<td>(8.535)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01
much greater in 1990 than they are today, even if many of the same restrictions remain on paper. The *hu**kou* (household registration) system makes it difficult for citizens in China today to “vote with their feet” (although my interviews suggest that they do so anyway, at least if the payoffs are sufficiently high). Doing so in 1990 would have been extremely difficult. It is difficult to imagine many citizens taking this risk on the basis of public services the government might provide in the future, especially given that the state had almost completely withdrawn from rural public service provision at that time. Second, because rural public service provision was dramatically different in 1990 than it is today, it is implausible that the 1990 census would reflect citizens’ preemptive decisions about where to move.

What do the somewhat puzzling results presented in Tables 3.7 and 3.8 tell us about public service provision in remote, minority areas? On the basis of the qualitative research presented elsewhere in the dissertation, we should expect both the remoteness measures and the ethnic diversity measures to be negatively associated with public service expenditure. Instead, we find that remoteness is associated with lower levels of education spending (but has no effect on health spending). And ethnic diversity has no significant association with education spending, but a *positive* (although not always significant) association with health spending. These results are puzzling because they are consistent neither with the qualitative evidence nor with the other quantitative results presented in this chapter.

There are several possible explanations for this inconsistency. First, the data might be wrong. This is always a concern when working with Chinese government
data, which are notoriously unreliable. Is there a reason to think that data on expenditures are more vulnerable to manipulation than the other outcome measures used in this chapter? Perhaps. First, these expenditure measures are the only outcome variables used in this analysis that came from a centrally published source (the 2006 National Financial Statistical Information for Localities, Cities, and Counties, a publication of the National Finance Bureau. There is some possibility that finance bureau officials “harmonized” these numbers before the publication, originally an internal document, was released to researchers. The lack of transparency in county spending also might make these numbers easier to fudge than many of the other statistics included in this chapter.34

A second possibility is that the data are right and the argument of this dissertation is wrong. The fact that the other results presented in this chapter are so consistent with each other and with my hypotheses gives me some confidence (or at least hope!) that this is not the case.

A third possibility—and the one that seems most plausible to me—is that expenditure dynamics differ in a substantively meaningful way from the dynamics of public service uptake and citizen outcomes, and that these seemingly inconsistent results are in fact capturing some of those differences. There is evidence to support this claim. First, other scholars have documented the acrobatics that county officials engage in in order to redirect public service spending away from its intended purpose (Liu et al., 2009). Second, as other parts of this dissertation describe, spending is not really the problem. The CCP invests enormous resources in ethnic minority areas via fiscal transfers, targeted poverty alleviation loans, special programs to incentivize teachers and doctors to serve in these areas, and so on. As Chapter 1 describes, the puzzle here is not how much money is spent on public services in minority areas, but rather why the quality of the public services that result from all this spending has remained so low.

In fact, one might argue that the disconnect between the expenditure results and the other results presented in this chapter is itself evidence in support of this dissertation’s central argument. I claim that the lack of supervision of officials in remote, minority areas enables graft and mismanagement. If the results of this chapter are to be believed, ethnically diverse areas spend more on health and education services than Han areas, holding all else equal—but still have worse public service outcomes. While graft and mismanagement are certainly not the only possible explanations for this disconnect, they are one compelling possibility.

34 As a point of contrast, consider the neighborhood bulletin boards throughout rural and urban China on which the names and exam results of school exam takers are posted. Especially in a relatively small county, statistics like the number of students who take the gaokao and the gaokao pass rate are publicly verifiable in a way that county spending is not.
Public Service Uptake

In this section, I use two measures of public service uptake. For educational service uptake, I look at the number of people who take the national college entrance exam per 100 people aged 15-19 in the local population (Tables 3.9 and 3.10). To examine health service uptake, I look at the percent of the local population participating in the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (Table 3.11). Several consistent findings emerge.

Table 3.9: Exam Takers vs. Ethnicity and Distance (baseline models)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
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<th>(3)</th>
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<td>(-0.007)</td>
<td>(-0.010^*)</td>
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<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
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<td>(-0.004)</td>
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<td>(-3.721^{**})</td>
<td>(-3.802^{***})</td>
<td>(-3.721^{**})</td>
<td>(-3.802^{***})</td>
<td>(-3.721^{**})</td>
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<td>(1.401)</td>
<td>(1.395)</td>
<td>(1.401)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prop. Han</td>
<td>2.665^{**}</td>
<td>2.634^{**}</td>
<td>2.665^{**}</td>
<td>2.634^{**}</td>
<td>2.665^{**}</td>
<td>2.634^{**}</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(1.166)</td>
<td>(1.178)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(-1.248)</td>
<td>(-1.235)</td>
<td>(-1.248)</td>
<td>(-1.235)</td>
<td>(-1.248)</td>
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<td>(0.910)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auton. Pref</td>
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<td>(-1.135)</td>
<td>(-1.194)</td>
<td>(-1.135)</td>
<td>(-1.194)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.987)</td>
<td>(0.948)</td>
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<td>59</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

First, the coefficients on distance and travel time are negative in all specifications, but these results are not statistically significant when controls are introduced (education models) or at all (NCMS models). Second, ethnolinguistic fractionalization and proportion Han are consistently associated with public service uptake as expected; these associations are generally robust to the introduction of controls, and the ELF results do not change when I instrument for 2006 ELF with a measure of ELF constructed from 1990 census data. Moving from complete ethnic homogeneity (ELF = 0) to complete ethnic heterogeneity (ELF = 1) is associated with a decrease of about four exam takers per 100 residents aged 15 to 19.\(^{35}\) In the NCMS models, that same shift is associated with a 5–6 percent decrease in the NCMS enrollment rate.

\(^{35}\)However, that the point estimates on Exam Takers should not be taken too seriously, as the ratio’s denominator overestimates the size of the pool of prospective gaokao takers in a given year.
Interestingly, a county’s designation as autonomous at the county or prefectural level seems to not matter very much in terms of either of the outcomes studied here. The coefficient on each autonomy designation is consistently negative, as expected, but these coefficients are generally not statistically significant. Taken together, the results of the three ethnic diversity measures suggest that the social dimensions within diverse areas, rather than the political institutions associated with ethnic autonomy, are driving underprovision of public services.\footnote{As a side note, it is interesting that while per-capita health expenditures are positively and significantly associated with NCMS enrollment, the relationship between per-child school spending and the number of exam takers is not significantly different from zero. This could simply be an artifact of the large amount of missing data on Exam Takers, but it could also be another indication that the relationship between public service spending and the other two categories (uptake and outcomes) is not as simple as we might expect, or that this relationship varies by category of public service.}

Table 3.10: Exam Takers vs. Ethnicity and Distance (controls and IV specifications)

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<td>Distance</td>
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<td>ELF</td>
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<td>(1.331)</td>
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<td>Prop. Han</td>
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<td>2.758**</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(1.171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton.Cty</td>
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<td>-1.582*</td>
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<td>(0.918)</td>
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<td>-0.952</td>
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<td>Ed. Exp. (log)</td>
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<td>1.088**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.433)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revenue (log)</td>
<td>-1.918***</td>
<td>-1.919***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.683)</td>
<td>(0.706)</td>
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<td>(7.180)</td>
<td>(7.233)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

One potential concern about the results in Tables 3.9 and 3.10 is that they may
be biased by the large amount of missing data on the dependent variable (I only have information on *gaokao* takers and pass rates for about half the counties in the dataset). To test for this possibility, I compare the characteristics of counties for which data about the *gaokao* is missing to those for which it is not. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which assesses the probability that two samples are drawn from the same distribution, is used to compare counties with missing and non-missing values of *Exam Takers* in terms of the distribution of three variables (*ELF*, proportion Han, and *distance to the prefectural capital*). In each case, the test cannot reject the null hypothesis that the two samples are drawn from the same distribution ($p = .29$, $p = .46$, $p = .28$, respectively). During my postdoc, I hope to collect additional data to make the exam-related variables more complete (some county governments have begun to make this type of information more widely available on their websites). In the meantime, though, there is no evidence here that missingness on the *gaokao* takers variable is correlated with any of the key variables of interest, increasing my confidence that the results in Tables 3.9 and 3.10 are not the product of selection bias.

The results presented in this section are consistent with many of my interviews, which emphasized the difficulties that the CCP faces in getting ethnic minorities to use public services. In the case of educational services, cost may present a significant barrier. The expense of continuing education through the end of high school can be high; nine years of schooling are now free and compulsory across China, but those who choose to continue their education in high school and beyond must pay for books, supplies, and often boarding expenses—most students live too far from the local school to live at home—as well as a variety of other fees. One Yi villager, unusual for sending his daughters to high school, complained bitterly (despite the concerted efforts of my county minders to get him to stop talking) about the low cap on *dibao* payments and the high costs associated with high school education. These costs are a substantial burden for families across rural China, but may place an especially large burden on ethnic minorities, who are disproportionately represented among China’s poorest residents.

The example of NCMS participation, however, suggests that these effects are not driven only by cost. In most counties, individuals pay a token fee (ten *yuan*, or about $1.60) to participate in the NCMS. In the first year of implementation, convincing villagers to part with even this relatively small amount of money was a challenge, although even then participation rates were high (85 percent in Jade County, for ex-

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37 Recall that high $p$-values are desirable here; if the two distributions were significantly different from each other, we would be concerned that selection into the subset of counties that publish *gaokao* data, rather than the key variables of interest here, are driving these results.
38 Interview with head of local public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
Table 3.11: NCMS Enrollment Rate (2009) vs. Diversity and Remoteness

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prop. Han</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1.73)</td>
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<td>ELF</td>
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<td>(2.27)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton. Cty</td>
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<td>−1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.32)</td>
<td>(1.37)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auton. Pref.</td>
<td>−2.10*</td>
<td>−1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.15)</td>
<td>(1.16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (log)</td>
<td>−0.88</td>
<td>−0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.35)</td>
<td>(1.37)</td>
<td>(1.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue (log)</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td>(0.80)</td>
<td>(0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Exp. (log)</td>
<td>3.73**</td>
<td>3.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.59)</td>
<td>(1.59)</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>(1.45)</td>
<td>(1.26)</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>108</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

But my interviews and existing quantitative research on the NCMS both suggest that in much of China, villagers quickly began to take advantage of NCMS coverage. The number of inpatient hospital stays increased dramatically, as did doctors’ workloads of both inpatient care and outpatient visits, to such a great degree that doctors felt increasingly stressed by the demands of their jobs. In short, the cost to participation is low, and the benefits were clear to participants from the start. The fact that participation has risen steadily year on year also suggests that citizens who participate in the NCMS perceive the costs as “worth it” (since they would likely withdraw from the program if they did not).

40 Interview with vice head of county health bureau (dual appointment as head of the county NCMS office), Jade County, 2011. On the difficulty of getting villagers to voluntarily contribute funds to government-managed projects given the history of financial mismanagement, see Xueguang Zhou (2010).

41 Interview with vice director of Chinese medicine hospital, Jade County, 2011; interview with doctor at Chinese medicine hospital, Jade County, 2011; interview with village clinic doctor, Jade County, 2011; interview with head of township health center, Jade County, 2011.
Setting aside the issue of cost, then, why else might uptake of public services be lower in ethnically diverse areas? My interviews suggest two additional mechanisms: information and trust. According to the head of the NCMS office for Jade County, those who do not participate in the NCMS either do not know about the program or know about it but don’t understand it well. This might seem like a self-serving explanation—it ignores the possibility that citizens could understand but dislike a program run by the interviewee—but other, more disinterested sources make similar claims. The head of a Yunnan-based public health NGO similarly argued that access to information about the program was one driver of differences in NCMS participation. Consistent with the results presented here, he believed that minority areas received less information about the program than other areas.

What about trust? My qualitative research suggests that this is a core reason for the gap in service uptake between minority and non-minority areas. Members of ethnic minority groups may be fearful that government services will undermine valued cultural practices (a belief that is certainly understandable, especially—but not exclusively—for citizens old enough to have lived through the brutal treatment of ethnic minorities during the Cultural Revolution). In a Tibetan area with high infant mortality rates, for instance, the government invested significant resources in improving health services, and made hospital births and prenatal care free for minority women. Despite these investments, few women took advantage of the free services, and health outcomes generally failed to improve. One of my interviewees suggested that cultural factors diminished demand for these services and made citizens skeptical of officials’ attempts to encourage them to use public services. Tibetan traditional birth practices make women in this area reluctant to give birth away from home, and doctors in county hospitals have been reluctant to make concessions—such as returning the placenta to the mother after delivery rather than treating it as medical waste—that could allay women’s fears about hospital births. In the context of this discussion, it makes sense that ethnic diversity appears to have a stronger effect on public service uptake than distance does, as there is no obvious reason to think that the strength of distrust based on ethnic difference would vary with distance.

These results highlight an important way in which the dynamics of public service provision in China (or at least in ethnically diverse areas of China) differ from those dynamics elsewhere. Classic work on public goods has focused on the “free rider problem”—the notion that overuse often undermines the quality of public goods and services when individual users cannot be excluded if they do not contribute to the cost (Ostrom, 1990; Samuelson, 1954). This was a concern of Chinese policymakers.

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42 Interview with vice head of county health bureau (dual appointment as head of the county NCMS office), Jade County, 2011.
43 Interview with head of local public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
44 Interview with head of local public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
when they began to implement the New Cooperative Medical Scheme; they worried that once citizens no longer bore the full cost of medical care, they would overuse health services and overwhelm the rudimentary rural medical system. In minority areas, however, the challenge seems to be the opposite: far from overusing public services, citizens are reluctant to use these services at all.

Public Service Outcomes

As was the case with Exam Takers, many counties do not report gaokao exam pass rates in their yearbooks, and as a result there is a significant amount of missing data on Exam Pass. Systematic differences between the counties that report exam pass rates and those that do not might cause us to worry that selection bias is driving these results. As in the discussion of Exam Takers in the previous section, I use a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to assess whether key explanatory variables are similarly distributed in the subset of counties for which Exam Pass is missing and those for which it is not. Fortunately, there is no evidence that the distributions of ELF (2006), distance to the prefectural capital, and proportion Han differ between these two sets of cases ($p = .20$, $p = .41$, $p = .16$ respectively).

Table 3.12 presents the results of regressing gaokao pass rate on ethnic diversity and remoteness. As expected, distance to the prefectural government (and travel time, although these results are not reported in the table) is consistently negatively associated with the exam pass rate, although these results are not statistically significant when controls are introduced. A 100-kilometer increase in the distance between a county and the prefectural government that supervises it is associated with a decrease in the exam pass rate of 1.1–6 percentage points, depending on the specification. The different measures of diversity are also all associated with the outcome as expected, and these effects are quite large. Autonomous counties have an exam pass rate that is 8.2 percentage points lower than the pass rate in otherwise similar non-autonomous counties. Counties located within autonomous prefectures (but not designated as minority autonomous counties) are associated with a 6.5–8.2 percentage point decrease in exam pass rate relative to nonautonomous counties, although the autonomy results are not statistically significant once controls are introduced. The results for ELF and Proportion Han are statistically significant in all specifications, however, including the IV specifications in which ELF (1990) is used as an instrument for ELF (2006). These effects are of comparable size: moving from 0 to 100 percent Han is associated with a 24–25 percentage point increase in the exam pass rate, and moving from complete ethnic homogeneity ($ELF = 0$) to complete heterogeneity ($ELF = 1$) is associated with a 23–26 percentage point decrease in the exam pass rate. These figures represent 32 to 38 percent of the range of Exam Pass—a very large effect.

45Interview with head of local public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
Table 3.12: Exam Pass Rate vs. Diversity and Remoteness

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<td>-0.046*</td>
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<td>-0.024</td>
<td>-0.060**</td>
<td>-0.033</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prop. Han</td>
<td>25.050***</td>
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<td>23.955***</td>
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<td>-8.191**</td>
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<td>-6.548</td>
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*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01
These results also provide useful insight into the relative importance of the different measures of ethnic diversity. In the baseline models, proportion Han explains much more of the variation in Exam Pass (adjusted $r^2 = .25$) than either ELF (.16) or the autonomy indicators (.08). It is particularly interesting that, throughout the analysis presented in this chapter, the political institutions associated with regional autonomy seem not to matter very much (their effects on the different dependent variables are often not significantly different from 0, and they explain quite little of the variation in the dependent variables).

### 3.8 Testing the Mechanism: Assessing Attention by Higher-Level Officials Using the Timing of Policy Implementation

This dissertation argues that that one important mechanism by which remoteness and ethnic diversity lead to poor provision of public services is a lack of attention from higher-level officials. Cadres in remote, minority areas are poorly supervised by their superiors in the prefectural and provincial capitals, and have little incentive to provide public goods and services as a result. While my qualitative research provides substantial evidence for this claim, the attention mechanism is difficult to test directly using quantitative data.\(^{46}\) However, the dominant Chinese approach to implementation of new policies means that the timing of policy implementation can serve as a useful proxy for attention by higher-level officials. In this section I explain the logic of this claim and show that the timing of implementation of the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (NCMS) supports the argument that physically remote places receive less attention than more proximate ones.\(^{47}\)

New policy implementation in reform-era China has nearly always been a gradual process. Deng Xiaoping referred to this approach as “crossing the river by feeling for stones,” and it remains the norm more than thirty years later. First, a small set of counties are selected as “test point” (shidian) counties. Which counties are designated as “test points” for a particular policy is typically determined by the province (or sometimes by the national government), with some input from counties (ambitious county officials may lobby for their county to become a “test point”).\(^{48}\) Counties that

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\(^{46}\)In addition to the method I use here, I plan to implement a second test of this mechanism using official calendars. Many county yearbooks include a calendar of important events in county politics throughout the year; these typically include mentions of visits by important higher-level officials. I collected many of these calendars during my fieldwork in China but have not yet had the time to create a usable dataset from these documents.

\(^{47}\)Ethnic diversity may also be associated with less attention, but those results, while consistent in direction and in the magnitude of the effect, are only statistically significant in one specification.

\(^{48}\)The same logic applies to other levels of the geographic hierarchy as well: within a county, particular townships may be designated as “test point” townships for a new program, for instance.
are designated as “test points” for a given policy are closely observed by officials at every level of government, because the county’s success or failure in implementing the policy will inform the decisionmaking process about whether (and in what form) to expand the policy nationwide.\textsuperscript{49} The rollout of a new policy typically occurs in waves. The NCMS was first implemented in a small set of “test point” counties in 2003, with additional counties added in each subsequent year. Because the initial results of the policy were quite positive, the policy was nationalized quite quickly; all counties in Yunnan were covered by the NCMS by 2007.

This structure means that, for many policies, the payoff to being an “early adopter” in terms of direct benefits to citizens may be small (because the policies, if successful, are quickly expanded to other counties). But there may be important indirect benefits to early adoption that result from increased monitoring by higher-level officials. These benefits do not accrue to late adopters; once the decision has been made to nationalize a policy, there is little reason for the intensive attention that “test points” receive (and providing this attention to every county would be impractical in a country of approximately 3,000 counties). And while the monitoring that “test point” counties receive during pilot implementation of a single policy may only last for a few years, if certain types of counties are more likely to be selected as “test points” for one policy after another, these counties may receive substantially greater attention in the aggregate.

Are remoteness and ethnic diversity associated with later implementation of the New Cooperative Medical Scheme? If the answer to this question is yes, it indicates that counties with these qualities missed out on the intensive monitoring by higher-level officials that comes along with being an early policy adopter, at least in terms of adoption of one important new health policy.\textsuperscript{50} Note that, because of the way that “test points” are chosen, this is in effect an argument about selection: it tells us something about which counties higher-level officials choose to monitor closely.

Table 3.14 presents the results. The dependent variable is the year in which the New Cooperative Medical Scheme was first implemented in a given county. In Yunnan, initial implementation ranged from 2003–2007. This means that many of the variables used elsewhere in this chapter are not usable here, since they are measured after implementation of the NCMS began. I use distance, travel time, 2000 population, and the regional autonomy indicators as before (none of these changed during

\textsuperscript{49}A given policy is typically implemented in different ways in different counties to enable policymakers to compare alternative versions of the policy. In the case of the New Cooperative Medical Scheme, policymakers experimented with different formulas for paying health care providers for services and of reimbursing patients for medical expenses.

\textsuperscript{50}Evaluating the claim that counties selected as “test points” for one policy are more likely to be “test points” for other policies as well is beyond the scope of this dissertation, although it might be a useful extension to the project in the future.
Table 3.13: Initial Implementation of the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (2003–2007)

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*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01
Table 3.14: Initial Implementation of the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (2003–2007)

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*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01
the period of NCMS rollout). To measure ethnolinguistic fractionalization, I use a measure of ELF constructed from 1990 census data. Since my measure of county revenue is from 2006, it is not usable as a control variable here. To control for the county’s level of economic development, I therefore use a measure of the county’s electricity output from 1980 (an admittedly noisy measure, but one that is positively correlated with contemporary county revenue).

The results are consistent with my expectations. Counties that are farther from the prefectural government that supervises them, either in distance or in travel time, implemented the NCMS later than more proximate counties. Substantively, these effects are quite large: A two-hour increase in travel time between the county and the prefecture is associated with approximately a six-month delay in NCMS implementation, and a 100-kilometer increase in distance is associated with an implementation delay of four to twelve months, depending on the specification. The results for the ethnicity variables are less definitive. As expected, higher ELF, designation as an autonomous county, and being located in an autonomous prefecture are all associated with later implementation of the NCMS, and the magnitude of the effect is quite consistent across specifications. However, these results are only borderline significant in model (1).

3.9 Conclusion, Extensions and Future Research

Drawing on fieldwork in Southwestern China as well as an original dataset covering the 129 counties in Yunnan Province, this chapter has developed a two-pronged explanation for the generally poor quality of public services in ethnically diverse areas of China. Neither top-down supervision of officials by their superior in the Communist Party-state, nor bottom-up supervision of officials by citizens via social networks, effectively constrains officials in ethnically diverse communities. This problem is compounded by geography: both types of supervision are ineffective when travel between different administrative/geographic areas is difficult, or when an area is perceived as culturally remote by higher-level officials. As ethnically diverse areas are disproportionately clustered far from China’s political capitals, these areas are doubly disadvantaged. The quantitative analysis enables us to disaggregate different elements of public service provision in a way that would not be possible with only a small number of cases. I examine public service expenditures, uptake (citizens’ use of government services), and outcomes in turn. Especially in terms of citizens’ uptake of public services and public service outcomes, remoteness and ethnic diversity are associated with poor performance. The same is not true of public service expenditures, but that is itself an indication of the problems plaguing these areas: on a per-citizen basis, remote, ethnically diverse counties do less with more.

This chapter is intended as a first cut. It is encouraging that the quantitative
results presented here are broadly consistent with my qualitative findings. That said, some limitations of the data and methods used here mean that further analysis, and likely further data collection, are necessary. The rest of this section briefly describes some of the steps I hope to take during my postdoctoral fellowship as I revise and expand this section of the dissertation.

Exploring change over time. When I was collecting data for this project in Chinese libraries, I gathered information for as many county-years as I could, with the intention of constructing a panel dataset. Unfortunately information availability was quite inconsistent across county-years, and as a result there is so much missing data that it is essentially impossible to exploit the panel structure of the original dataset.

However, some key policy and personnel changes during the time period covered by my data may make it possible to study change over time in a couple of different ways. First, personnel changes within individual counties may result in changes in ethnic representation (a county with a Party secretary who is a member of the titular ethnic group in one time period might have a Han Party secretary in the next time period, for instance). Using a difference-in-differences approach to examine changes in public service quality before and after personnel changes like these might provide one way to better assess the causal effect of representation by a coethnic on local public services.

Assessing changes in public service outcomes as a result of an important policy shift—implementation of the public rural health insurance program known as the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (NCMS)—might be another useful way to evaluate change over time. In this chapter, I treat implementation of and participation in the NCMS as dependent variables, but I also hope to supplement the research presented here by assessing the effects of this major policy shift.51 Given the focus of this dissertation, I am especially interested in assessing whether those effects vary depending on an area’s ethnic and geographic characteristics. I anticipate doing this in two ways. First, I collected county-level data on infant mortality rate (IMR) from county government websites, and news and other sources for multiple years (where available). These data are not yet complete enough to use. However, after I collect additional information so that the missing data problem is less severe, these data will provide a useful way to assess the effects of NCMS implementation.52

51 There is already a sizable literature that does this in general terms, but I am not aware of any sources that evaluate the differential effects of this policy on citizens of different ethnic groups, or examine whether autonomous and non-autonomous areas have implemented the NCMS differently. On the effects of the NCMS more generally, see Babiarz et al. (2010), Liang et al. (2012), W. Yang (2013), and L. Zhang, Yi, and Rozelle (2010).

52 One interviewee suggested that IMR would be a useful measure in this regard, because it is much less “sticky” than many health outcomes. In contrast to something like heart disease, IMR should respond quite quickly to improvements in access to primary and prenatal care and decreases
Of course, the nature of my dataset means that this approach will only enable me to study these health effects in the aggregate (i.e., at the county level). The ecological inference problem presents real challenges to interpretation here. For instance, if implementation of the NCMS had a greater effect on the infant mortality rate in minority autonomous counties than in non-autonomous counties, that could be because the NCMS improved health care for minorities (who live disproportionately in autonomous counties), or because it had an unusually large effect on the IMR for Han residents of minority autonomous counties. I plan to address this concern by supplementing this analysis with analysis of several waves of the China Health and Nutrition Survey, an household-level survey that tracks health care participation, health outcomes, and a variety of socioeconomic indicators (and even toenail samples!) over time.\footnote{The CHNS consists of a stratified random sample of a large number of households within nine provinces. Four of these provinces have a sizeable minority population and/or contain minority autonomous areas.} I will again use a difference-in-differences approach to study the effects of NCMS participation on health care usage and health outcomes among Han vs. minority citizens.\footnote{The CHNS asks respondents an enormous number of questions, and there are lots of health outcome measures that I could potentially look at here; I need to read a bit more of the other literature that has used this study before I decide which measures to use.} Selection bias is a concern here (those who choose to participate in the NCMS may be systematically different in terms of health care usage and outcomes from those who do not), so I plan to instrument for individual participation with the NCMS participation rate of their village.

External validity: Moving beyond Yunnan. For the reasons described earlier in the chapter, Yunnan is the ideal province to use as an initial test of these hypotheses due to its substantial internal variation. But there are also a number of ways in which Yunnan is distinctive, calling into question the broader generalizability of these findings. Yunnan has both unusual funding sources and atypical health care needs due to its close geographic and commercial interconnection with Southeast Asia and its dependence on the local tobacco industry. Its ethnic profile is also distinctive: its combination of a large ethnic minority with few overt ethnic separatist movements makes it quite different, politically and socially, from higher-profile minority regions like Tibet and Xinjiang. Furthermore, Yunnan lacks substantial populations of China’s “model minority” groups (ethnic Koreans in particular outperform Han Chinese on many measures of educational and economic attainment). These qualities make it impossible to assess how well the arguments presented here travel to areas where ethnic minorities are either especially restive or especially high-achieving.

Making these data truly nationally representative would be difficult, as data availability varies substantially by location (this is especially true of data on the ethnicity in the cost (to the patient) of hospital birth. Interview with health economist, Beijing, 2011.)
of different county-level officials). However, I hope to expand the dataset to include a random sample of counties from several additional, purposively selected provinces in order to assess how well the hypotheses tested here travel to areas with a different ethnic makeup and different economic conditions.

Appendix: Description of Variables

Measuring Remoteness

As Section 3.2 describes in greater detail, distance has been measured in a number of different ways in existing research on rural China, typically with little conceptual justification for choosing one measure over another. This dissertation contends that the quality of local public services is not merely the result of the physical advantages or disadvantages that geography creates. Indeed, existing research shows that the relationship between physical geography and local public services is complex: public goods (especially infrastructural ones like roads) are more difficult to provide and maintain in mountainous terrain, but local governments also spend more on public goods in these areas to compensate (S. Guo et al., 2014). Rather, this dissertation argues that geography matters in a particular way in rural Chinese politics: officials’ perceptions of remoteness, both physical and cultural, affect the way they do their jobs. While qualitative interviews provide direct evidence of this, assessing perceptions of remoteness directly in a large-n context is difficult. In this chapter, I therefore use two geographical variables as measures of remoteness; my goal is to capture how officials experience the distance to the areas they supervise, rather than the physical qualities (like mountainousness) that present challenges to public service provision that have nothing to do with governance. Distance measures the road distance (in kilometers) between the main county government building and the prefectural government by which it is supervised. Travel Time measures the travel time (in minutes) between those same locations. In both cases, I use the shortest option (in terms of distance in the first case and time in the second) when multiple routes are available. The two variables are highly correlated ($r = .941$), and including one or the other in the regression results generally does not change those results in a meaningful way, so for most models I only report the results for Distance. Results for Travel Time are available on request.

55 Although obtaining a direct measure of officials’ perceptions of remoteness for many counties is almost certainly impossible, one potentially useful way to try to disaggregate the effects of perceived remoteness and physically disadvantageous geography would be to compare the results presented in this chapter to similar specifications using geographic measures less likely to affect officials’ perceptions of distance. I would expect, for instance, that the variables I use to measure remoteness here would be more strongly associated with my dependent variables that a more purely physical measure like average soil slope.
CHAPTER 3. THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION IN CHINA’S MINORITY AREAS

Measuring Ethnic Diversity

Because quantitative research on ethnicity in China is almost completely nonexistent, it is not immediately obvious which measure(s) of ethnic diversity are most appropriate in this context. Indeed, one of the central goals of this project is to fill in this gap, assessing the degree to which some of the interethnic dynamics that researchers have described in other contexts are relevant to the Chinese case. Because different measures embed different assumptions about the mechanisms by which ethnicity affects political outcomes, I test several different diversity measures:

**ELF.** Scholars of ethnic politics have commonly operationalized ethnic diversity as ethnic fractionalization, or ELF (for a detailed discussion of this measure, see Alesina, Devleeschauwer, et al., 2003). The measure is calculated using a Herfindahl index:

\[
ELF = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{N} s_i^2
\]

where \(s\) is the size of any given ethnic group as a proportion of the county population. Substantively, ELF represents the probability that two individuals drawn at random from the population belong to different ethnic groups. It ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater diversity (a community would receive a score of zero if all residents belonged to the same ethnic group, and a score of 1 if every resident belonged to a different group).56

Outside of China, ELF has been shown to negatively affect public goods provision because citizens have a “taste for discrimination” against other groups and prefer private investment to public goods in diverse contexts, because cooperation and communication across ethnic lines are difficult, and because it is easier to recognize and punish “free riders” in homogenous communities (see, for instance, Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly, 1999; Habyarimana et al., 2007; Miguel and Gugerty, 2005). The challenges presented by fractionalization, however, can be mitigated by a number of factors, among them nation-building efforts that transcend ethnic boundaries, informal institutions that build cross-cutting social ties, and a common language and history of cooperation shared across ethnic groups (Dunning and Harrison, 2010; Glennerster, Miguel, and Rothenberg, 2013; Miguel, 2004). Because the importance of fractionalization has not been studied in the Chinese context, the relevance of these challenges

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56Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005) propose an alternative measure, which emphasizes polarization—the degree to which a local population is divided among two groups rather than many. It is possible that for some parts of China this measure would more meaningfully capture the local interethnic dynamics, and this possibility is worth investigating when I extend this dataset to cover other parts of China (see Conclusion, Extensions, and Future Research). In Yunnan, however, my research suggests that both the population and local political power are shared across many groups, and that fractionalization is therefore a more relevant concept than polarization in this context.
(and their potential solutions) is an open question.

Proportion Han. An alternate measure of ethnic diversity that may be relevant to the Chinese case is the proportion of the population that belongs to the Han majority ethnic group. Han Chinese may be easier to serve (because they are less reluctant to use public services), or officials may be more aware of or responsive to their needs. Proportion Han and ELF thus imply somewhat different causal mechanisms about the relationship between ethnic diversity and public goods provision, both of which I investigate in the rest of the chapter.

Autonomy. This dissertation also seeks to explore the effects of the political institutions created to manage ethnically diverse regions of China. Although the de jure meaning of these distinctions has been explored in detail (Potter, 2011; Sautman, 1999), very little is known about their implementation (especially below the province level). Geographic areas can be designated as minority autonomous regions at the township, county, prefecture, or province level (the last is not relevant to Yunnan, which is not designated as an autonomous region). Within minority autonomous areas, at least thirty percent of the population typically belongs to the titular ethnic group. Localities in which multiple ethnic groups make up substantial shares of the population may have more than one titular minority (in a particularly diverse area of Guangxi Province, two counties are even designated as “every-minority autonomous counties” (gezu zizhi xian)). When the population of an ethnic group is clustered within one part of a locality dominated by a different ethnic group, one autonomous region may be nested inside another one (for instance, a Hui autonomous county might be located within an Yi autonomous province). As a result, autonomy distinctions can overlap in numerous ways (an autonomous county could be nested within an autonomous prefecture within a non-autonomous province, for instance).

While it would be nice to be able to examine the effects of every possible combination of autonomy designations, some combinations are too rare to be able to study in the regression framework (there are only eight counties in Yunnan that are minority autonomous counties located within minority autonomous prefectures, for example). I therefore use an indicator for the lowest level at which a county is designated autonomous (0 = non-autonomous, 1 = autonomous at the county level, 2 = autonomous at the prefectural level).\footnote{For the sake of simplicity, the correlation matrix (Table 3.3) treats autonomy as an indicator measured 1 if a county is autonomous at either the county or prefecture level, and 0 otherwise.} Compared to an autonomy dummy variable, this coding has the advantage of making it possible to examine differences across different autonomy “types.” Existing work often treats autonomy as a single concept, in part because it is often assumed to be meaningless. As one scholar put it, “‘autonomous’ is a bad joke, since the ruling hand of the Chinese state is omnipresent, and nearly all positions of authority are held by Han or by collaborators” (Murphey, 2008). Chapter
Two of this dissertation calls the last part of this claim into question, but just how much of a “joke” autonomy is is difficult to say without more systematic evidence, which this chapter seeks to provide. Furthermore, comparing the descriptive statistics for the two autonomy types (Tables 3.5 and 3.6) points to meaningful differences between the types of counties—an argument for examining each autonomy type in isolation rather than using a dummy variable that does not distinguish between minority autonomous counties and counties located in minority autonomous provinces.  

**Measuring Public Service Quality**

*Health and Education Expenditures.* I measure *Health Expenditures* as the county government’s total 2006 health and medical expenditures (*yiliao weisheng zhichu*) divided by the total county population. Expenditure data are taken from the 2006 *National Financial Statistical Information for Localities, Cities, and Counties*. Population data come from the 2000 national census. I measure *Education Expenditures* as the county government’s total 2006 educational expenditures (*jiaoyu zhichu*) divided by the population of school-aged children (age 5-16) in the county. The data sources are the same as the ones used to construct *Health Expenditures*.

*Public Service Uptake.* Expenditures may be a problematic measure of public service quality, as county officials are often expert at redirecting funds away from their intended purposes (Liu et al., 2009). It is therefore important to supplement analysis of spending patterns with a look at the services that citizens actually receive. I divide this into two categories: public service uptake and public service outcomes. The former refers to the degree to which citizens use the services that county governments provide. To measure uptake of education services, I use the variable *Exam Takers*, the number of students who sit for the *gaokao*, the national college entrance exam, out of 100 people between the ages of 15 and 19 in the local population. Data on the number of exam takers come from county and prefecture yearbooks. Data on the

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58The relationship between autonomy and distance to the prefectural capital provides a useful example of the substantive importance of this distinction. The correlation matrix (Table 3.3) includes autonomy coded as a dummy variable; the correlation between autonomy and distance appears to be positive, but weak ($r = .10$). However, the descriptive statistics tables (Tables 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6) suggest that using a dummy variable for autonomy masks important variation between autonomous counties and counties located in autonomous prefectures: Whereas counties that are autonomous only at the prefecture level are roughly comparable to non-autonomous counties in terms of distance from the prefectural seat, autonomous counties are substantially more remote.

59Measuring *Exam Takers* in this manner is almost certainly an underestimate of the share of eligible citizens who seek to continue on to higher education, since most 15- and 16-year-olds will still be in high school (if they are in school at all). While this problem may make *Exam Takers* a slightly noisy measure of educational service uptake, I expect that it underestimates the share of exam takers to a consistent degree across different types of counties and have no reason to believe that it introduces systematic bias.
number of 15-to-19 year olds are taken from the 2000 census.

To measure uptake of health services, I use the percent of citizens who participate in the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (NCMS), the rural public health insurance program that the Chinese government began to roll out in 2003. While local governments have strongly encouraged citizens to participate in the NCMS, participation is ultimately voluntary, making NCMS participation a useful measure of citizens’ willingness to pay to participate in a government-run program. NCMS uses 2009 participation rates (or the nearest year available). The data are drawn primarily from county and prefecture yearbooks; when yearbooks did not report these data, I relied on county government websites, newspapers, blogs, and other online sources to fill in the gaps.\footnote{One possible threat to inference is that NCMS participation in each county typically increased quite dramatically each year for the first few years of its implementation before leveling out (by 2014, participation in many counties was nearly 100 percent). So we might worry that these participation rates are a product of the length of time between the initial rollout of the NCMS in a given county and 2009, rather than a meaningful indication of citizens’ willingness to participate in the NCMS. I test for this possibility by examining the correlation between the year of initial implementation and the 2009 participation rate. The two are positively correlated, but the correlation is fairly weak (r = .22). It is thus unlikely that this correlation is driving the results.}

Public Service Outcomes. Ultimately, the first two sets of measures are not very meaningful if they do not accompany improvements in health or education outcomes for citizens. As a measure of educational outcomes, I use the county pass rate on the national college entrance exam (gaokao). Data for the variable Exam Pass were collected from county and prefecture yearbooks. For reasons that I describe in the final section, “Conclusion, Extensions and Future Research,” I plan to supplement the research presented in this dissertation with a paper that uses household-level data from the China Health and Nutrition Survey to estimate the individual-level health effects of NCMS implementation, and to use data on change over time in county-level infant mortality rate (once I have more complete data on that variable) to assess county-level changes in response to the rollout of the NCMS.

Controls

In different specifications, I control for the size of the county population (logged), for county revenue (logged), and for health or education expenditures per citizen or per school-aged child, respectively (logged).\footnote{In some specifications, these expenditures are the public service outcome I seek to explain. In others, the outcome variables measure citizens’ use of public services, or the effectiveness of the services that county governments provide; in these cases, I include spending as a control in some specifications.} Population data come from the 2000 census (All China Data Center, 2015). Calculating local government revenue in China
CHAPTER 3. THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION IN CHINA’S MINORITY AREAS

is complex, because local governments rely on a mix of fiscal transfers, subsidized loans from higher levels of government, budgetary revenue (collected through taxes and fees), and extrabudgetary revenue (collected from a variety of sources including land sales and for-profit businesses run by government agencies).\textsuperscript{62} For the sake of simplicity, I measure revenue as budgetary revenue + extrabudgetary revenue (all from the year 2006), as these figures together make up the vast majority of available revenue for public spending in most counties.\textsuperscript{63}

One obvious problem with including revenue as a control variable is that a county’s revenue may be in part a product of the quality of local public services. A county with better education services, for instance, can likely attract higher-value-added businesses that require more educated workers. An instrumental variables approach can be useful to circumvent the issue of endogeneity here. I created a variable with information on rural electrical use by county in 1980 to instrument for 2006 county revenue (National Statistical Bureau, 1989). The two variables are positively correlated, but unfortunately the correlation is relatively weak and in a 2SLS specification fails the Wald test for weak instruments. I plan to think about some alternative ways to instrument for revenue as I revise this dissertation over the next year.

\textsuperscript{62}There is a large literature on the impact of these and other funding streams. See, for instance, Fock and C. Wong (2008), G. Guo (2008), Ong (2006), Shih (2008), and Shih, L. Q. Zhang, and Liu (2010).

\textsuperscript{63}Very poor counties rely more heavily on fiscal transfers from higher levels of government than do other types of counties; these fiscal transfers are not included in either budgetary or extrabudgetary revenue. Given that minority areas are typically poor and rely on different funding structures than wealthier counties, revenue may be a noisy measure of the resources available to these counties to spend on public goods and services. In the future I plan to explore whether my results are robust to changes in the way a county government’s financial resources are measured.
Chapter 4

Building the Fourth Wall: Nonstate Service Providers and the Local State in Multiethnic China

4.1 Introduction

In the earthquake-prone, mountainous minority areas across much of China’s southwest, basic infrastructure is difficult to build and expensive to maintain. Local populations, dispersed across wide swaths of rugged terrain, are difficult to serve at the best of times—and, in the event of an earthquake, are nearly impossible to reach. Across China, local governments have responded to these conditions by resettling communities to less remote locations and providing them with new housing and work opportunities—or so they claim. After being resettled from a mountainous area to a nearby valley, the residents of one cluster of Yi, Miao, and Lisu villages in Yunnan discovered that the local government had run out of money; they were being resettled to villages full of half-built new houses with only three walls. A foreign company with longstanding ties to the villagers—the village women sold handicrafts as part of the company’s corporate social responsibility program—stepped in and donated funds to finish the construction.¹

To many employees of NGOs and social enterprises, actions like the firm’s intervention seem like exactly the kind of help that non-state actors, be they NGOs or private firms, can and should provide to impoverished areas in the Chinese countryside. Local governments in these areas are genuinely strapped for cash, and outside help can improve local citizens’ quality of life in immediate, concrete ways. Indeed, as Chapter 3 suggests, local governments do a poor job of providing public services in remote and ethnically diverse areas of China. Given the increasing importance of non-state service providers throughout China (and in much of the developing world),

¹Interview with vice president of foreign firm, Yunnan, 2010.
one might assume that non-state service providers (including both NGOs and private firms) would step in to fill in the gaps in state services. To what extent do non-state actors supplement state services in ethnically diverse areas of China? What kinds of services do they provide? And when they provide services that the local government doesn’t, do they strengthen or weaken local state power?

Elsewhere in the dissertation, I have focused on the role that the local state—the primary provider of public goods and social services across China—plays in service provision in China’s minority areas. Recent research on Han areas suggests, however, that local governments are increasingly outsourcing provision of these services to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the so-called government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), private for-profit service providers, and other non-state actors (Jing, 2008; Jing and Savas, 2009; Mok and Lo, 2007; Teets, 2012; Thornton, 2013; M. Zhang and J. Sun, 2012). Is the same phenomenon occurring in minority areas as well? Put differently, how does the bargain between state and society change in minority areas, where the need for social services is especially dire and the government resources available to pay for those services especially limited, but where local officials are often conservative and reluctant to innovate? Two scenarios seem equally plausible. Perhaps the poverty in these areas makes an NGO presence, and the resources it typically brings, an especially valuable asset, and increases NGOs’ bargaining power with the local government. Alternately, because local officials in minority areas are especially fearful of social instability, for which they would pay a costly career penalty, they may be especially reluctant to allow nongovernmental groups to operate under their jurisdiction.

Drawing on interviews with employees and founders of foreign and local NGOs, GONGOs, and foundations, this chapter seeks to answer these questions. In doing so, I expand on Anthony Spires’s concept of “contingent symbiosis” by specifying the range of roles that local officials and non-state organizations play in the complex negotiation over who should provide public services, what those services should entail, and to whom they should be available. Spires argues that, although each side is suspicious of the other, “local officials are willing to turn a blind eye to ostensibly illegal organizations as long as those organizations’ good works can by appropriated by officials and contribute positively to their annual performance reports” (Spires, 2011, p. 36). Nonstate organizations’ desire to provide social services may align nicely with officials’ desire to appear to provide social services without actually putting in the effort required to do so, creating space for even illegal organizations to survive.

By contrast, I argue that while local governments and non-state service providers in minority areas are indeed locked into relationships of mutual dependence, these

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2 Interview with ethnic politics expert, Beijing, 2009; interview with local employee of international NGO, Beijing, 2010; interview with head of local NGO, Sichuan, 2010.
relationships take varied forms and cannot necessarily be described as symbiotic. Specifically, I describe three different roles that non-state organizations play, as risk takers, equalizers, and distributable resources. Local officials similarly play multiple roles as partners, credit claimers, hindrances, and benign neglecters. These roles may shift over time and are not mutually exclusive. While some combinations may create state-society relationships that are genuinely symbiotic, in many cases non-state organizations’ goals are completely subsumed by their desire to forge good relationships with the local government, a dynamic more parasitic than symbiotic.3

This chapter also suggests that the existing literature’s emphasis on the relationship between social groups and “the local state”—as if that were a single entity—is misleading. That different levels of the Chinese Party-state may operate at cross-purposes has been well established (Edin, 2003; Liu et al., 2009; Michelson, 2007; O’Brien and L. Li, 1999, 2006). Yet existing work on non-state organizations in China tends to treat local governments as unitary actors. I show that each unit in the state’s geographic-administrative hierarchy is, to borrow from Kenneth Shepsle’s description of the U.S. Congress, “a ‘they,’ not an ‘it’ ” (Shepsle, 1992). Different offices within the local state may play different roles; the same is true of individuals within those offices. Specifying precisely what these different roles are will allow us to better understand the nuances of the state-society relationship in the countryside.

4.2 Disaggregating the State

The State as Credit Claimer

It is widely accepted that the cadre responsibility system incentivizes local officials to claim credit for accomplishments, both real and fabricated, that will impress their superiors and earn them both bonus pay and career advancement (Edin, 2003, 2003a; 

3It should be noted that the arguments presented here apply to not-for-profit service provision by NGOs, GONGOs (government-organized NGOs), foundations, and social enterprises (profit-making businesses with nonprofit service arm). I do not discuss private, for-profit service providers, which are increasingly important, especially but not exclusively in urban China. They typically provide services in one of two ways: on a contract basis (in other words, the local government outsources provision of a particular service, like garbage collection, to a private company) or on a fee-for-service model in which individual citizens foot the bill for the services they receive (private health clinics are a common example). Because the areas in which I did my fieldwork were generally quite poor, for-profit service companies played a minimal role (there was simply not very much money to be made off of citizens with a limited cash income). The one exception was in the county seat of Jade County, where there were several private walk-in health clinics. How these private, profit-oriented services interact with the local state is an important question, but one that I leave to other researchers to answer.
Indeed, officials sometimes go to absurd lengths to convince others of their diligence without actually putting in much work, as a series of embarrassing incidents in which officials have faked photos of their accomplishments suggests. This desire to claim credit for projects without actually putting in the effort necessary to carry them out explains why local officials sometimes tolerate non-state service providers, even those that may be technically illegal. For Spires, this is the key reason why officials sometimes tolerate NGOs: as long as NGOs allow officials to claim credit for their successes, officials are willing to allow them to operate even when they are unregistered (Spires, 2011).

In this regard, state-society relationships in minority areas are no exception. My research suggests that non-state service providers in these areas, like organizations elsewhere, allow officials to claim credit for work that the organizations provide virtually singlehandedly. The head of a Yunnan-based public health organization with programs in several minority autonomous areas argued, for instance, that local officials always “look up”: they take action only when doing something increases their performance score and their likelihood of promotion. This claim is, of course, consistent with research on the promotion incentives of local officials. However, while scholars often assume that economic growth and social stability are the primary goals that local officials seek to achieve, these officials’ superiors are now sufficiently interested in social service provision that “political achievements” like decreasing the local HIV infection and engaging volunteers to provide public services are worth their while as well. As a result, local officials may be willing to work with NGOs whose work promotes these goals.

The head of EdJustice, an educational NGO established by foreigners but with significant support from Chinese elites, described this type of relationship with a single official as the “hook in the wall” on which all of the organization’s programs and relationships hang. In an influential provincial-level position when the organization’s founders first met him, the official was later sent to the countryside (xiaxiang) to serve as Party Secretary of Bright Sun, a poor prefecture-level city. Given 3-5 years to “revolutionize” Bright Sun—a goal that, if he achieved it, would likely earn him a promotion—Party Secretary Yao sought to partner with the NGO to bring

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4While the Chinese promotion system exacerbates this behavior, it is hardly unique to the Chinese context. See, for instance, Mayhew (1974, pp. 52-61) on credit claiming by members of the U.S. Congress.


6Interview with head of local public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.

7Interview with local employee of international NGO, Beijing, 2010; interview with academic expert on civil society, Hong Kong, 2010.

8Interview with director of foreign education NGO, Beijing, 2011. Throughout the dissertation, out of respect for my interviewees’ wishes, I use pseudonyms and fictional place-names to refer to my interviewees, their organizations, and the individuals with whom they had close contact.
new resources and an innovative new approach to improving educational outcomes in Bright Sun.

Yao’s interest in the partnership was not purely about claiming credit for others’ work. According to my interviewee, Yao is one of a class of officials who are “ambitious, smart, interested in the welfare of the people they serve, and interested in new models.”\(^9\) At the same time, however, the logic of credit-claiming undoubtedly affected the ways in which the NGO implemented its programs. Like many non-state organizations operating in China, EdJustice explicitly sought to ameliorate the inequitable distribution of resources between rural and urban areas. Insofar as Bright Sun contains several poor counties with large minority populations and is located in one of China’s poorest provinces, the partnership with Secretary Yao has helped the organization to successfully pursue this goal. However, the logic of credit-claiming led prefectural officials to push the organization to operate programs close to (and even in) the prefectural capital—typically the wealthiest and most developed area of a prefecture. Doing so increased the NGO’s political value to Bright Sun officials (including Yao), but also meant that relatively well-off areas of the prefecture—those already privileged by geographic proximity to political elites—received a disproportionate share of the organization’s services.\(^10\)

What exactly do officials hope to claim credit for? Assisting with the innovative programs that social organizations may create as alternatives to traditional modes of state-led service provision is a useful way for local officials to stand out in a crowd, but doing so comes with risks. Because of their desire for promotion, career-oriented officials often display an ambivalent attitude toward innovation—an ambivalence that credit-claiming may neatly resolve. On the one hand, as the example of Secretary Yao suggests, successfully pursuing innovative new programs is an effective way for a careerist official to garner positive attention and rapidly ascend the bureaucratic hierarchy. As the head of a local GONGO told me, all officials want to do something “creative” to show off to higher-level officials in the hope of earning a promotion; implementing an innovative program—such as working with a non-state organization to provide services to citizens in a new way—is one way of doing this.\(^11\)

On the other hand, innovation carries risks that officials may be unwilling to bear. Overtly cooperating with a non-state organization carries a risk of political punishment should the organization later “cause trouble.” Even officials who might like to work with these organizations are reluctant to meet with their representatives dur-

\(^9\)Interview with director of foreign educational NGO, Beijing, 2011.
\(^10\)The logic behind this move is spelled out in more detail in Chapter 3. In brief, officials invest disproportionately in areas where their efforts are likely to be directly observed by their superiors, leading them to provide better services in the prefectural seat than in far-flung areas that provincial and national officials will likely never visit.
\(^11\)Interview with head of local GONGO, Yunnan, 2010.
ing work hours, as they fear being reported on by their coworkers.\textsuperscript{12} This may be an especially serious problem in minority areas, where officials are conservative and particularly fearful of non-state groups unless they are run by trusted local elites.\textsuperscript{13} By claiming credit for work that social organizations do without becoming directly involved in that work, officials may neatly sidestep this problem: when organizations’ programs are successful, officials can show the organizations’ efforts off to their superiors as evidence of their own competence. When these programs are unsuccessful, or when an organization’s relationship with the state turns fractious, the official’s record is not tarnished by direct partnership with the organization.\textsuperscript{14}

These examples affirm that, at least in some cases, officials’ career incentives create the impetus for credit claiming. However, promotion incentives are only one of several factors that motivate officials to claim credit for nonstate projects. Indeed, many local officials have little interest in promotion, either because the area they govern is more pleasant than the county or prefectural seat in which they would have to live if they were promoted or because their social network is tightly clustered around their current place of employment.\textsuperscript{15} Even when officials have little desire for promotion, however, they may still wish to claim credit for NGO projects. A second motivation for claiming credit lies in officials’ desire for status (or “face”), as the example of a foreign-run sustainable development organization in a Bai minority area shows. After the NGO built a cultural center in a Bai minority village to introduce tourists to Bai culture, preserve local architectural styles, and provide some free health and education services to members of the local population, officials from the county seat began to travel to the village to use the cultural center’s meeting room for professional and social gatherings. The village’s redevelopment—despite being almost entirely organized by foreign organizations—is a “showpiece” for county officials, one that they take pride in claiming as their own even though doing so is unlikely to directly benefit their careers.\textsuperscript{16} The village and its cultural center are a relaxing and beautiful oasis in an area where the local political-administrative capital is distinctly charmless, and officials are eager to imply their own connection to its development even though doing so does not earn them any points on their work performance assessment.

In addition, the ambiguity that credit claiming creates over a project’s ownership may help to resolve one of the key sources of conflict between the local state and non-state service providers. Non-state organizations are “socially legitimate” in a way that the local state often is not: They provide the services that local govern-

\textsuperscript{12}Interview with academic expert on civil society, Hong Kong, 2010.

\textsuperscript{13}Interview with local employee of international NGO, Beijing, 2010.

\textsuperscript{14}These dynamics help to explain why the role of social organizations as risk-takers is so central. I discuss this behavior on the part of social organizations in Section 4.3.

\textsuperscript{15}Interview with head of foreign NGO, Yunnan, 2010; interview with county official, Yunnan, 2011.

\textsuperscript{16}Interview with head of foreign NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
ments ought to provide but often don’t.\textsuperscript{17} As the head of one local organization put it, “we solve the problems [the government] hasn’t solved”—and the local government must support the organization’s projects, despite “conflict and contradiction” between the organization and the government, as a result.\textsuperscript{18} It is easy to imagine this “legitimacy gap” serving as yet another reason for the local state to be suspicious of non-state organizations, who pose an implicit challenge to the state by demonstrating that the poor public services the local government provides are not the only option. But instead, claiming credit for organizations’ programs makes the local government immune to this critique while still allowing nonstate service programs to improve citizens’ quality of life.

It is understandable, then, that non-state agents often willingly embrace the idea of credit-claiming. The idea of “contingent symbiosis” implies that allowing local officials to claim credit for NGO programs is a sacrifice, albeit one that organizations are willing to make in exchange for permission to operate. However, organizations may actively seek out opportunities for their programs to be “claimed” by the state; rather than representing a kind of tax that organizations have no choice but to pay, allowing officials to claim credit may be a strategy that they willingly pursue. One study of the Chinese NGO Project Hope argues, for instance, that NGO staff intentionally “blurred the distinction between their charitable organization and the state” (C. Hsu, 2008, p. 89). Because there was limited precedent for charitable giving to non-state organizations, and because citizens were familiar with state-organized fundraising drives for poverty alleviation and emergency management, Project Hope gained legitimacy with potential donors by deliberately allowing them to believe that the organization had closer ties to the state than it actually did. This strategy had its drawbacks: for some, ties to the state signal corruption, not legitimacy. Nonetheless, even when citizens associate the local state with corruption, they may be even more suspicious of non-state groups with which they have little personal experience. As a result, legitimacy (or at least familiarity) is one of the main things that local governments bring to their relationship with social groups, as the next section describes in greater detail.

The State As Partner

Given the existing literature’s focus on officials as credit claimers, the degree to which officials act in genuine partnership with non-state organizations may come as a surprise. Existing literature often suggests that the state’s main positive contribution (when it makes one at all) is to leave non-state actors alone. As Spires puts it in his work on contingent symbiosis, “inaction on the part of government agencies is matched by action on the part of grassroots groups” (Spires, 2011, p. 25). Over and

\textsuperscript{17}Interview with academic expert on civil society, Hong Kong, 2010.

\textsuperscript{18}Interview with head of local NGO, Sichuan, 2010.
over, however, my interviewees pointed to different ways in which the state provided material support and valuable connections to organizations, enabling them to implement new programs or to extend the reach of successful, small-scale ones.

As the previous section mentions, legitimacy is often the most important resource that the state can provide. The value of non-state service providers often lies in their ability or willingness to reach out to populations that the state has difficulty reaching because these populations engage in illegal behavior or have a tense relationship with the local state.\(^\text{19}\) It is ironic, then, that the target populations still feel more comfortable cooperating with a non-state organization once the local government has signaled its approval of the organization and its programs. This is especially true in minority areas, perhaps because citizens are especially fearful of retaliation by the local government.\(^\text{20}\) For example, one organization that runs sustainable development programs in several minority areas chose to invite an official from the women’s federation (fulian) to give a speech at the organization’s training programs, and found that villagers had greater confidence in the organization’s programs when they knew the government was involved.\(^\text{21}\)

A second, equally valuable resource that the state can provide is information. For grassroots NGOs with close ties to local communities and personal connections to members of the groups they seek to serve, this function of the local state is largely irrelevant. For others, however, local knowledge is absolutely essential for the success of their programs, and is something that the local government can provide relatively costlessly. Several of my interviewees described using a similar method to select the sites where their organizations provided services: the organization created a general program model, then asked the government to recommend sites in which the program should be implemented on the basis of local officials’ knowledge of the areas they governed. The organization would then either implement programs directly in these areas, or choose a subset of the areas that the local government had suggested.

Both GONGOs and foreign NGOs used this method to decide where to operate. In one county, for instance, the association of industry and commerce (gongshanglian), a GONGO, organized a program to donate funding and supplies to poor students who passed the national college entrance examination and planned to attend university. Because funds for the program were limited, the gongshanglian asked township governments to conduct an evaluation of the eligible students and decide which students were most in need of help. The gongshanglian then arranged for participating local

\(^{19}\)Interview with foreign employee of international public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
\(^{20}\)Interview with local employee of international NGO, Beijing, 2010.
\(^{21}\)Interview with foreign employee of foreign foundation, Beijing, 2011. The women’s federation sits in a kind of gray area between state- and non-state actors: scholarship that mentions the fulian often describes it as a GONGO, but my interviewees clearly thought of it as an arm of the state and described its employees as cadres (ganbu).
companies to fund individual students on the basis of the township governments’ recommendations.\textsuperscript{22}

EdJustice used a similar method to choose schools in the city of Bright Sun in which to operate their programs. The Bright Sun city government decided which counties in Bright Sun would benefit from the programs, with some input from the organization. Each selected county then made recommendations about which schools within the county the organization should serve.\textsuperscript{23} Given the large number of schools within Bright Sun and the organization’s limited knowledge of the city—although the organization has a large Chinese staff, it is primarily comprised of coastal elites with limited personal experience in the areas the organization serves—the counties’ recommendations made it possible for the organization to serve schools that were consistent with their mission.

Using local governments as sources of information comes with a clear cost, however. As Chapter 4 details, local officials have greater social and informational ties to some of the groups they govern than to others. When these patterns of knowledge serve as the basis for decisions about where and to whom non-state organizations should provide services, non-state service providers risk reinforcing existing inequalities in state provision of public services. I discuss this problem in greater detail in Section 4.3, Service Providers as Distributable Resources.

A third resource that the state can provide when it serves as an active partner for non-state social service providers is access. While organizations’ ties to the state are often contingent and personalistic, based on a friendship or a serendipitous meeting with a single official,\textsuperscript{24} officials are embedded in horizontal, place-based networks as well as vertical, issue-area based ones (the tiao/kuai system).\textsuperscript{25} By providing access to both types of networks, officials who serve as active partners to non-state service providers can enable organizations to work in a broader set of locations, and to make their programs more ambitious, than would otherwise be possible.

One Sichuan-based NGO provides a useful example of the ways in which the active partnership of a single bureau can spawn a broader network of ties to different levels of government and to offices organized around different issue areas, and ultimately improve an organization’s efficacy. The organization, the Center for Community Empowerment (CCE), runs a variety of education, health, and economic development programs in several minority autonomous counties, many of which are also among the poorest counties in the province. CCE’s programs place special emphasis on gen-

\textsuperscript{22}Interview with head of county association of industry and commerce, Yunnan, 2011.

\textsuperscript{23}Interview with director of foreign educational NGO, Beijing, 2011.

\textsuperscript{24}Interview with director of an international education NGO, Beijing, 2011; interview with head of foreign NGO, Yunnan, 2010.

\textsuperscript{25}For more on the evolving tiao/kuai system, see Mertha (2005).
der equality, as illiteracy and workplace exploitation are especially severe problems among women in the ethnic group the NGO serves. Because of its emphasis on helping women and girls, the organization’s strongest ties are to the women’s federation (fulian) at the prefectural level. The vertical hierarchy of the fulian has given the organization access to partners at the county level, and has assured the organization assistance from townships and villages officials because the county fulian maintains close ties to female cadres at these levels.  

Without access to this vertical network, CCE would have difficulty implementing their programs. During the time I spent with the organization, for instance, CCE brought together groups of female village officials for day-long training programs as part of an HIV prevention program. The officials were tasked with conducting trainings for the women in their villages and with distributing boxes of condoms, provided by CCE, to female villagers. While some officials were more committed to these tasks than others, this network enabled the NGO to carry out its programs in a much larger number of villages than direct implementation by CCE’s small staff would have allowed. This was especially valuable because, in the remote area in which CCE operates, significant linguistic differences exist between villages; although the NGO’s employees were nearly all from the same prefecture, they had difficulty communicating with the women in many of the villages they served. In addition, the fact that the female officials affiliated with the fulian were familiar faces in the villages helped the organization overcome the local population’s distrust of outsiders. The fulian helped the organization recruit girls to participate in the organization’s work training program, for instance, whereas the organization’s attempts to directly recruit survey participants or otherwise engage local women without the help of local female officials were hampered by distrust and fear.

The fulian’s horizontal linkages to other issue-based offices at the same geographic level in the administrative hierarchy were also a valuable resource for CCE. Most importantly, the prefectural women’s federation introduced CCE to officials from the prefectural labor bureau. The labor bureau introduced girls who had graduated from CCE’s work training program to prospective employers both within Sichuan (primarily hotels, restaurants, and tourism companies) and outside the province (primarily factories in coastal cities). This was a mutually beneficial arrangement. As the organization initially struggled to convince “impatient” girls to complete the extensive training program, the promise of reliable work opportunities provided an incentive for program participants to complete the program, which helped the organization

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26 Interview with local employee of local NGO, Sichuan, 2010.

27 This phenomenon is not limited to CCE. The head of a local NGO in Yunnan also described these vertical networks as essential because without them, organizations would need to build new relationships at each level of government. This would be much less efficient than building ties with one bureau at the provincial or prefectural level and having that partner require its lower-level offices to cooperate with the NGO. Interview with director of local NGO, Yunnan, 2010.

28 Interview with local employee of international NGO, Beijing, 2010; participant observation of CCE programs, Sichuan, 2010.
accomplish its goals and made it a more attractive candidate for foreign foundation funding. And for the labor bureau, tasked in part with providing workers to employers in coastal cities, the CCE program provided a steady stream of relatively well-prepared potential workers in an area where most residents’ poor Mandarin and limited education inhibited their ability to succeed outside their villages.²⁹

The various advantages that an active government partner can confer make this type of relationship an extremely valuable asset for a non-state service provider. Indeed, this resource is so essential that it often guides social organizations’ decisions about where to operate.³⁰ Nonetheless, there are limitations to the state’s ability or willingness to act as a partner that explain why this role has been downplayed in the existing literature.

First, some issue areas lend themselves to state-society partnerships better than others. When an organization’s goals and that of the local state are aligned—as is the case with CCE’s work readiness program and the local labor bureau—the state may be particularly willing to serve as an active partner for a social organization. Similarly, Hildebrandt (2013) argues that environmental protection organizations enjoy relatively broad “political opportunities” because their work “meshes with state goals of improving the country’s ecological health,” whereas gay and lesbian organizations provide fewer benefits to the state and receive more limited political support as a result. Whether an issue lends itself to state-society partnership may vary depending on the local context. In Yunnan, where the AIDS epidemic is seen as the product of unlucky geography (Yunnan’s proximity to the Southeast Asian drug trade has caused the HIV infection rate to rise rapidly there), officials are eager to partner with non-state service providers to extend their HIV prevention and testing efforts. By contrast, in Henan, where many cases of HIV/AIDS can be blamed on poor government decisionmaking, officials are generally unwilling to partner with social organizations to address the epidemic.³¹

Second, while partnerships with high- and mid-level officials may be especially useful because of the access and status they confer upon partner organizations, their usefulness can be undermined by the principal-agent problems that recalcitrant lower-level officials cause. For several reasons, relatively highly placed officials may be more willing to cooperate with non-state service providers than are local-level officials. Their work portfolios are more expansive, and as a result they have less to fear from cooperating with a non-state organization, one tiny piece of their overall performance—especially because they can easily shift blame for the organization’s

²⁹Interview with local employee of international NGO, Beijing, 2010.
³⁰Interview with head of local GONGO, Yunnan, 2010; interview with local employee of international sustainable development NGO, Yunnan, 2010; interview with director of foreign educational NGO, Beijing, 2011.
³¹Interview with director of local NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
CHAPTER 4. BUILDING THE FOURTH WALL: NONSTATE SERVICE PROVIDERS AND THE LOCAL STATE IN MULTIETHNIC CHINA

errors onto a lower-level official. Higher-level offices may also be more accustomed to cooperating with non-state actors; some, like the national office for poverty alleviation (fupinban), even have an office for international collaboration that directly approaches foreign foundations and NGOs to propose partnerships.

However, these officials are limited in their ability to force lower-level officials to do more than pay lipservice to state-society partnerships. EdJustice’s experience in Peace County, located in a Bai minority area of Yunnan, provides a useful example. The governor of Peace County pushed the partnership through “by sheer force of personality.” However, while the idea of being an innovator appealed to the promotion-minded governor, it made lower-level officials in the education bureau extremely nervous, and their support for the organization was limited. Indeed, there was little incentive for them to act otherwise; because innovative programs typically require officials to devote time to efforts that are not part of their annual performance evaluation, the incentives of lower- and higher-level officials are often misaligned. For instance, EdJustice established a relationship with the international office of the Yunnan Education Department, and brought an official from that department to Peace County to encourage teachers to incorporate more creative methods for teaching oral English into their classrooms. Because teachers were evaluated on the basis of their students’ test scores rather than on their spoken English, however, neither the official nor EdJustice could successfully convince local teachers to make oral English a priority. The same was true of CCE’s relationship with the women’s bureau. While the prefectural women’s bureau could direct female officials at the county, township, and village levels to cooperate with CCE, it could not guarantee enthusiastic cooperation. Some local officials were enthusiastic supporters of CCE’s programs, but CCE employees expressed frustration at other officials who attended the required trainings but did little to pass on education or resources to women in their home village.

Third, the partnership between the state and social organizations is rarely equal. As one employee of a public health organization described it, officials’ efforts are often less ambitious and smaller in scope that those that are initiated by the organization. In general, the organization approaches local governments about possible partnerships; when a government bureau (in her organization’s case, typically the local Center for Disease Control) takes the initiative, they do so around relatively small-bore issues like extending an existing program to an additional clinic, leaving more ambitious, long-range planning to the NGO. And because officials often want to preserve “plausible deniability” in the event that an organization gets into trouble,

32 Interview with director of foreign educational NGO, Beijing, 2011.
33 Interview with foreign employee of foreign foundation, Beijing, 2011.
34 Interview with director of foreign educational NGO, Beijing, 2011.
35 Interview with local employee of local NGO, Sichuan, 2010.
36 Interview with foreign employee of foreign public health NGO, 2010.
they will often help only behind the scenes.\textsuperscript{37}

The State as Benign Neglecter

Although an active partner in the local state can be a tremendous asset to non-state service providers, many organizations fail to secure active partners because the organization is too small or politically sensitive, or because local officials are too risk-averse. In these situations, the best organizations can hope for is to be left alone. As the previous section described, non-state service providers often choose to work in a particular geographical area because an official or a bureau in that area is a willing partner. However, the converse is also true: organizations often decide where not to operate by identifying the places where the prospect of repression is highest. After the devastating 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, for instance, many NGOs were eager to work in affected areas. However, when a number of organizations ran into problems—they were kicked out completely, or NGO employees were arrested or detained—they quickly learned which areas were receptive to an NGO presence and which were not, and gravitated to the areas where they could operate relatively free from government interference.\textsuperscript{38}

Benign neglect often results when the state and social organizations agree about an end result, but disagree about the appropriate methods for achieving that goal or about its urgency. For example, Southwest Craft, a foreign company with a commitment to corporate social responsibility, provides a variety of services in several Yi, Lisu, and Miao minority areas of Yunnan (areas where the company also creates work opportunities in the tea and handicraft industries for local people). These services include training village doctors, paying book fees for students, donating meat to schools to make students’ meals more nutritious, and building a clean water drinking system in one village. According to the company’s vice president, the local government agrees that these are all worthy goals, but does not regard them as urgent: “They think these services can be provided ten years from now, but the need exists now.”\textsuperscript{39} The local government does not prevent the firm from spending its own resources on its public service programs, but does not actively aid the organization either. Of course, the fact that the firm is willing to expend resources on these services means that the local government has little incentive to treat the community’s needs with greater urgency, since citizens’ needs are being met on someone else’s dime.

Even when the local government and non-state agents agree on particular goals and their importance, the state may be less effective than a social organization at

\textsuperscript{37}Interview with academic expert on civil society, Hong Kong, 2010.
\textsuperscript{38}Interview with academic expert on civil society, Hong Kong, 2010.
\textsuperscript{39}Interview with vice president of foreign firm, Yunnan, 2010.
achieving these goals. Familiar with a long history of local government mismanage-
ment of public projects, citizens may be unwilling to invest time or money in
government-organized projects, even when these projects are sorely needed (Xueguang
Zhou, 2012). Put slightly differently, when public projects typically require not only
funds but also the ability to motivate villagers to work together, collective action prob-
lems can be severe, and the local government’s ability to overcome these problems
minimal. When this is the case, the local government may most effectively achieve
its goals by taking a back seat and allowing non-state service providers to lead. One
foreign foundation that runs a program to trains rural women in organizing and man-
aging collaborative projects provides a useful example of this phenomenon. In one
village, villagers were frustrated with the poor quality of the main road. The village
government tried to organize efforts to fix the road, but could not convince villagers to
participate. After the foundation trained local women in collaborative public service
program management, the women participating in the program decided to pave the
village road and build a bridge. Because the program was organized by community
members and did not raise concerns about a corrupt local government skimming off
project resources, the project was more successful than government efforts to address
the same problem had been.  

When the relationship between the local government and the target population an
NGO hopes to serve is adversarial, benign neglect may actually be preferable to di-
rect government involvement. According to an employee of a public health NGO with
programs throughout southwestern China, one key roadblock to effective HIV/AIDS
prevention work was convincing populations that have long been treated as criminals
(IV drug users and prostitutes in particular) that the police wouldn’t simply wait
outside the NGO’s offices and arrest anyone who stepped out. Securing a promise
from the local Public Security Bureau (gonganju) that they would not interfere in the
organization’s work was a necessary prerequisite to effective service provision—and
did more to help the organization achieve its goals than direct involvement of the
state would have done.

Benign neglect by the state places the onus for service provision—in terms of both
funding and effort—squarely on the shoulders of nonstate service providers. Some ser-
vice providers resent these unequal terms, although they know that they are in no
position to bargain for more favorable ones. As the same employee of a public health
NGO put it, NGOs are “paying for their own programs and paying the government for
the privilege of being able to implement them.” Although this situation is far from
ideal from the perspective of NGOs—many of which hope to pass on responsibility
for maintaining the programs they create to the local government but dispair of ever

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40 Interview with foreign employee of foreign foundation, Beijing, 2011.
41 Interview with foreign employee of foreign public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
42 Interview with foreign employee of foreign public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
being able to do so—it is still preferable to the alternative of an overtly antagonistic relationship with the local state.

The state’s role as “benign neglecter”—and the fact that, for many NGO employees, this is the most they can hope for from the state—flies in the face of a body of recent research on the Chinese countryside that paints local governments in, I would argue, an unrealistically rosy light (Ahlers and Schubert, 2009, 2015; Heberer and Schubert, 2012). These scholars focus on the connections between officials at different levels of government that, they claim, enable remarkably effective implementation of policies such as the “Building a New Socialist Countryside” rural development policies. This may well be the case in some areas of China. It is possible that benign neglect, seemingly extremely prevent in poor and ethnically diverse areas, is a less common strategy in wealthier areas where local governments have more resources, or in places where the relationships between citizens and the local state are more amicable. The competent and technocratic local governments that Schubert and his coauthors describe, however, seem worlds away from the ones that my NGO contacts must navigate.

The State as Hindrance

In the U.S., media depictions of the relationship between the local state and social organizations in China tend to focus on the ways in which the state hinders these organizations, using methods ranging from violent repression to endless red tape. As the previous sections have suggested, the local state can serve useful purposes for non-state organizations. Nonetheless, it is certainly true that many organizations confront a hostile (or at least conservative and fearful) local state that tries to undermine them at every turn.

Many organizations see officials as “useless” and “conservative,” and do everything they can to simply avoid interactions with the local state: “If you don’t tell the government what you’re doing, they can’t tell you not to do it.” However, this avoidance strategy can backfire. For example, two environmental protection and sustainable development NGOs in northwest Yunnan tried to operate quite independently from the local government. Both worked in a Tibetan area for 4-5 years, but then were abruptly kicked out due to their poor relationship with the local government. Even before the government went so far as to kick the organizations out, their attempts to avoid the government took a toll on their image in the eyes of the communities they were trying to serve. Whereas struggling organizations can close or move to another area, struggling citizens often cannot. These citizens must avoid jeopardizing their ongoing relationships with the local government, and are reluctant.

44Interview with academic expert on civil society, Hong Kong, 2010.
to engage with organizations that are routinely harassed by the local government, as was the case for these two organizations.\footnote{Interview with head of local NGO, Yunnan, 2010.}

Indeed, overt repression of non-state organizations may be a particularly serious issue for organizations in minority areas, although I limited my direct contact with especially “sensitive” organizations in order to maintain my ability to safely do research. In Tibetan areas, for instance, while organizations can often run education programs without fear of retaliation from the government, anything that builds social organization or touches on religion is extremely sensitive.\footnote{Interview with head of local NGO, Yunnan, 2010.} While no other areas are as sensitive as Tibetan areas, the fear of repression may create a higher bar for non-state organizations to form in other minority areas as well; one NGO employee familiar with the CCE believed that the organization was only able to effectively function in a minority area of Sichuan because the head of the NGO, a member of the local minority group who had become a well-connected academic in Beijing, had significant status and a large local \textit{guanxi} network.\footnote{Interview with local employee of foreign NGO, Beijing, 2010.}

Sometimes the local state is not opposed to an organization’s presence \textit{per se}, but still hinders the organization because the goals of the organization and the local state are not aligned. In the case of Southwest Craft, the firm with corporate social responsibility ventures in several minority areas in Yunnan, the overall relationship between the firm and the local government was generally positive, even though the local government had reason to be suspicious of “outsider” groups operating in the area.\footnote{The organization’s vice president spoke extremely angrily of the NGOs that operated there, several of which were South Korean evangelical organizations that used public service projects as a cover for proselytizing (which is illegal in China). These organizations set up programs in the area, then left abruptly, leaving Southwest Craft to face the consequences (the local government sometimes assumed, incorrectly, that Southwest Craft was connected in some way to these NGOs.)} However, this amicable relationship did not guarantee that the organization’s priorities and the local government’s were the same. Sometimes (as the previous section discussed) these conflicting priorities led to benign neglect on the part of the local government, and Southwest Craft was able to pursue its goals relatively unimpeded, albeit with less help from the local government than its leaders would have liked. In other cases, however, the local state’s political priorities came into direct conflict with the firm’s goals. For example, one of the firm’s projects involved helping several minority areas to develop a sustainably farmed tea industry. Because of the financial crisis, the company advised the tea factory in 2009 not to invest in infrastructure and instead to focus on sales. However, the government unsurprisingly advocated infrastructure investment, a position in line with the rural stimulus plan enacted across China to cushion the blow of the financial crisis (Michelson, 2012). Used to following the local government’s edicts—or, perhaps, fearful of the potential conse-
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quences of siding with Southwest Craft over the local government—the tea factory chose to make unwise infrastructure investments.\(^\text{49}\) Southwest Craft’s goal—to teach local tea farmers sound business principles so that the tea factory could ultimately become profitable and self-sustaining—conflicted with the local government’s desire to maximize employment and build visible symbols of their competence that might earn them career advancement.

4.3 Disaggregating Non-State Service Providers

Just as representatives of the local state play multiple roles in their relationships with non-state service providers, NGOs and other social groups have heterogeneous identities. As Timothy Hildebrandt notes, Western scholarship on NGOs in China has often idealized the leaders of these organizations and has assumed them to be “altruistic, high-minded, enlightened, and idealistic” (Hildebrandt, 2013, p. 4). As a corrective to this vision, Hildebrandt argues that NGO leaders are rational actors who respond to the opportunity structure they face, and can be as “fallible” and “selfish” as anyone else (4). While I agree with this assessment, in this section I focus on the varied roles that nonstate organizations—rather than their individual leaders—play in providing public services in rural minority areas. Like Hildebrandt’s leaders, these organizations must often balance competing goals—among them staying true to their organizational mission, meeting the needs of the population(s) they hope to serve, and maintaining a good relationship with the local government. The process of doing so sometimes leads organizations to sacrifice one goal in the service of another, or to take on roles that are at odds with the organization’s central mission.

Service Providers as Risk Takers

Across the minority areas I traveled to in the course of this project—areas that varied tremendously in terms of wealth, ethnic makeup, and location—perhaps the greatest commonality was the deep conservatism of local officials. Fear of change—or, more accurately, fear of the potentially negative career repercussions of change—led officials to assume a bunker mentality, keeping foreigners, NGOs, journalists, and other potentially “dangerous” actors out of their areas unless forced by a superior to do otherwise (and then only with significant foot-dragging). However, the very real and immediate needs of minority areas—disproportionately represented among China’s most impoverished—mean that simply continuing with “business as usual” is not enough. The populations of these areas are in dire need of improved opportunities, and this fact may motivate some genuinely public-minded officials to push for change.\(^\text{50}\) And, as Section 4.2 on credit claiming makes clear, it is also sometimes

\(^{49}\) Interview with vice president of foreign firm, Yunnan, 2010.

\(^{50}\) The business-savvy, innovative head of a vocational school that disproportionately served minority students in Jade County provided one useful example of this. The school head seemed to have
in the interest of ambitious officials to try something new, as successful innovation may earn them a promotion (or at least positive attention from their superiors). This tension within the local state—between fear of change on the one hand and strong reasons for change on the other—creates an important opening for non-state service providers: they can make themselves valuable to local officials by taking risks on their behalf, while shielding officials from some of the potentially negative repercussions of risk taking.

Employees of foreign NGOs, domestic NGOs, and GONGOs all frequently describe their primary contribution as an ability to experiment with new approaches to public service provision. Because these organizations are often small and their resources limited (even more so than those of local governments in impoverished areas), running experimental pilot programs is often all they can afford to do; they have to simply hope that if a pilot program is successful, the local government will take over the program and implement it on a larger scale.\textsuperscript{51} Indeed, government adoption of an experimental program is the best evidence, for one local GONGO, that a program has been successful.\textsuperscript{52} Whereas local officials are often risk-averse, unwilling to try new approaches unless their success is virtually guaranteed, non-state service providers are willing to try new things, even knowing that they may fail. And they often do so with the tacit support of the local government, who wants to see whether new approaches to public service provision will work but doesn’t want to assume responsibility for these experiments.\textsuperscript{53} In addition, allowing an NGO to first start a program as an experiment may make it more successful when the government ultimately takes over. As I discuss in 4.3, NGOs are often better than the local state at reaching out to marginalized groups, but once an NGO has established a successful program these groups may continue to participate even once the government assumes responsibility for the program.\textsuperscript{54}

The organizations that most successfully manage their relationships with the local government know, however, that the risks they take must be carefully bounded. Despite strong ties to the women’s bureau (\textit{fulian}) and to the local Party school (\textit{dangxiao}), one local GONGO is “afraid of trouble” (\textit{pa mafan}), and is careful to provide advance notice of their programs to any government bureau that has even a tangential connection to the organization’s work.\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{itemize}
  \item little interest in a promotion that would take him out of the county, but rather was concerned with elevating his own social standing within the community of Jade County’s political elite by building a regional and even national reputation for the vocational school. Interview with head of county vocational school, Yunnan, 2011.
  \item Interview with head of local NGO, Sichuan, 2010.
  \item Interview with head of local GONGO, Yunnan, 2010.
  \item Interview with head of local public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
  \item Interview with head of local public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
  \item Interviews with head and vice-head of local GONGO, Yunnan, 2010.
\end{itemize}
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Service Providers as Distributable Resources

It is hardly surprising that NGOs bring material resources—cash, opportunities, expertise, and so on—to the areas they serve. Many minority areas in Yunnan—long the “darling[s] of the international community” because of their natural beauty, poverty, and remoteness—clearly lack some of the basic infrastructure and human capital of more centrally located Han areas (even relatively poor ones), and both domestic and foreign organizations are eager to help fill in some of these gaps. What these organizations sometimes do not account for, however, is the degree to which the resources they provide become another form of pork for local officials to distribute to favored constituents. As much as non-state organizations may seek to control the distribution of whatever resources they provide, they often face a choice between relinquishing distributional decisions to local officials and retreating entirely from the areas they hope to serve.

The resources that non-state service providers bring to the table can be grouped into three broad categories: infrastructure, ideas, and access. Non-state service providers often like to make tangible contributions, and thus are often eager to build facilities (schools, village medical clinics, water treatment technology, and so on); in this regard, they are ironically quite similar to local governments. They also provide human resources like volunteers, sometimes highly skilled ones, that local governments might have difficulty recruiting independently. Non-state service providers can also make important contributions by bringing new ideas to remote areas. In minority areas, these include ways to turn traditional culture into a profit-making venture, approaches to tourism development that ensure that profits stay in local hands, and new methods of preserving local languages in the face of pressure to use Mandarin in more and more contexts. Finally, non-state organizations can provide access by bringing coastal political and business elites with personal ties to the organization to remote areas, by giving service recipients access to elite guanxi networks, and by helping to connect local producers with international markets.

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56 Interview with academic expert on civil society, Hong Kong, 2010.
57 The dynamics described in this section are not all unique to China. Brass (2010)’s discussion of the role of NGOs in increasing state capacity makes some similar arguments in the context of Kenya.
58 Interview with head of foreign NGO, Yunnan, 2010; interview with school principal, Yunnan, 2011.
59 Interview with head of foreign educational NGO, Beijing, 2011.
60 Interview with local employee of international environmental organization, Yunnan, 2010; interview with head of foreign NGO, Yunnan, 2010; interview with head of local NGO, Sichuan, 2010.
61 Hsu (2008); interview with head of minority supplier development organization, Beijing, 2010; interview with vice president of foreign firm, Yunnan, 2010; interview with head of foreign educational organization, Beijing, 2011; interview with local employee of international environmental organization, Yunnan, 2010.
These various resources would be valuable to any community, but are especially so in minority areas, which are particularly isolated from national and global business networks. In some cases—when the leaders of nonstate organizations have a strong support base, relative independence from the local government, and deep local knowledge—organizations can decide for themselves how these resources should be allocated. More often, however, nonstate organizations must partly relinquish the power to decide how these resources are distributed to the local state. As Section 4.2 described, local governments often determine the areas within their jurisdiction where non-state service providers may operate, or provide organizations with a “short list” of candidate locations from which they must choose. Just as government-funded public service projects are often used as “pork” to be distributed to favored constituents in exchange for political support or on the basis of personal connections, projects organized by non-state service providers are often shunted to the areas where they will yield the greatest political payoff to particular local officials (Luo et al., 2010). Employees of non-state organizations sometimes see this as evidence of their usefulness, although whether they see themselves as useful to the community or to the officials that govern it is sometimes unclear. As one employee of a foreign foundation and with programs across several minority areas put it: “The best way to help the Chinese government is to go where the government says the need is greatest.” With few local ties of their own, the foundation had little choice but to take the local government’s recommendations at face value. As I discuss elsewhere in the dissertation, however, local officials have personal ties—and personal prejudices—that can distort their perceptions of local needs.

Service Providers as Equalizers

It is well known that inequality has grown rapidly in reform-era China, and has caused such intense public ire that it represents one of the most salient potential threats to CCP rule (Pei, 2013; Xie and Xiang Zhou, 2014). Ameliorating rural-urban inequality was a key concern of the Hu-Wen administration, but policies intended to reduce inter-household and inter-region inequality—among them the progressive income tax, the minimum wage law, the Develop the West (xibu da kaifa) program, the minimum living guarantee (dibao), and regionally targeted poverty alleviation programs—have had only a minimal effect on inequality (S. Li and Sicular, 2014). This is not a new problem. The bias toward “betting on the strong” in Chinese policymaking has long meant that even funds explicitly intended to help the least well off go instead to the relatively advantaged poor (Rosenberg, 2015; Unger and Xiong, 1990). Unsurprisingly, nonstate organizations often see ameliorating these inequalities as one of their primary functions, and as an area where they have a distinct advantage over the local state.

62Interview with foreign employee of foreign foundation, Beijing, 2011.
Non-state service providers often critique local government service provision for its personalistic bent, which tends to benefit the local elite rather than the most needy. The lack of competition from private service providers means that public services provide rent-seeking opportunities for the local government, who can charge high prices for services and turn away those who cannot afford these services or lack personal connections. And even when services provided by the local government are nominally open to all, local officials and other elites can use their status to get special treatment—for example, by having their children transferred to classes taught by the most experienced teachers in a given school, creating a ban made up almost entirely of children of the local elite. Public services provided by the local state can thus exacerbate existing inequalities in wealth and status.

By contrast, many non-state service providers have an explicit mandate to aid the most vulnerable. As Chapter 3 discusses in greater detail, the poorest of the poor are disproportionately clustered in remote areas far from the local political capital. NGOs are typically more flexible than local governments, and more willing than local state service providers to go to these remote areas to provide services. Other kinds of hard-to-reach communities—those that purposefully avoid contact with the state, like drug users and sex workers—can also be easier for NGOs to access; although these groups’ distance from the local government is more metaphorical than geographic, it is also a distance that non-state service providers may be more willing and able to travel. As one foreign public health NGO employee noted, NGO employees often enter the public health field precisely because they hope to serve these hard-to-reach populations. By contrast, local health bureau and CDC officials do not necessarily have any particular interest or expertise in health care; their positions are political appointments, and officeholders are often selected on the basis of “political loyalty,” corrupt practices (such as the selling of positions), or the Party’s desire to strategically manage unemployment (Burns and Xiaoqi Wang, 2010; Xueguang Zhou, 2001, p. 1038).

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63Interview with head of local NGO, Sichuan, 2010; interview with vice president of foreign firm, Yunnan, 2010.
64Interview with local employee of local NGO, Sichuan, 2010. This situation is most severe in very poor areas (including many minority areas), as private, for-profit medical providers are opening across rural China and competing with public medical services. Interview with Jade County official, Yunnan, 2011.
65Interview with foreign employee of foreign education NGO, Yunnan, 2011.
66Interview with head of local public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010. According to this interviewee, recent regulations subjecting NGOs to increased scrutiny and stricter oversight have undermined NGOs’ ability to go wherever they wanted to provide services and thus may be limiting these organizations’ ability to counteract some of the inequalities that local state service providers create.
67Interview with foreign employee of foreign public health organization, Yunnan, 2010; Hildebrandt, 2013, 18.
68Interview with foreign employee of foreign public health organization, Yunnan, 2010.
Chinese policymakers often challenge the notion that state provision of public services contributes to inequality on the grounds that these services are open to all and that recent reforms—including the abolition of school fees and the creation of the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (xinxing nongcun hezuo yiliao)—have eliminated financial barriers to access (Lou and Ross, 2008; W. Yang, 2013). However, many nonstate service providers are critical of the notion that sameness implies equality. According to the founder of the Sichuan-based CCE, the same developmental model has been applied across China, but minority populations are poorly positioned to take advantage of it and have fallen farther and farther behind. Ethnic minorities make up under ten percent of the Chinese population, but 52 percent of the poor population. Rural-to-urban migration has not benefited the minority population of areas like Stone Gorge Prefecture, where CCE operates, because the residents speak poor Mandarin and are often functionally illiterate, and are thus vulnerable to exploitation when they move to the cities to work.\(^{69}\) Nationwide programs designed to improve the quality of education services, like the decision to close village schools and centralize education in county-run schools, may have a negative impact on minority communities that are reluctant to send children (especially girls) to live away from home. And programs that look like modernization to some (for instance, incentivizing minority women to give birth in hospitals rather than at home) may seem to others like attempts to undermine cherished cultural traditions.\(^{70}\)

Because their programs are flexible and can be more easily adapted to local conditions, non-state service providers may be better able than state service providers to create programs that seek to equalize *outcomes* across groups rather than implementing programs that are superficially identical but have disparate effects. For example, nonstate service providers have the freedom to run programs that selectively target particular subsets of the local population. In an Yi area where women and girls receive minimal education and bear the brunt of both childcare and work responsibilities, for instance, the CCE has created education and health programs that primarily target girls. As an Yi autonomous prefecture, Stone Gorge guarantees cultural autonomy to the local Yi population, and the local government might therefore be reluctant to run programs that seem to challenge local cultural practices; resolving the unequal effects of public services in Stone Gorge requires changing how these services are *used*, not just how they are *provided*. Because the CCE has deep local ties—the founder and nearly the entire staff are from Stone Gorge—the organization has an advantage over the local government both in its ability to devise culturally appropriate ways to address some of the area’s problems and in the the perceived legitimacy of these programs.

Non-state service providers’ focus on equity reflects the influence of international

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\(^{69}\) Interview with head of local NGO, Sichuan, 2010.

\(^{70}\) Interview with head of local public health NGO, Yunnan, 2010.
donors and NGOs as sources of “soft support” (Stern, 2013). As the director of one local public health NGO put it, “fresh air from the international community” can bring new ideas to China and help to convince Chinese policymakers of their importance. Especially in remote, minority areas, NGO leaders often have more substantially more international contact than other elites; nearly all of my interviewees had received funding from at least one foreign foundation, had travelled abroad on a study tour for civil society leaders, or had had other formal contact with Western NGOs or foundations. These Western groups increasingly emphasize equity in basic public services, an emphasis that has shaped local groups’ approaches to public service provision in China. And although foreign funding and contact with foreign organizations sometimes earn non-state organizations increased surveillance by the local state, they also give these organizations an important tool when they try to combat inequities in service provision by the state: the ability to credibly claim that equity in public service provision is an international norm. This claim is one that local officials are reluctant to ignore; whatever the reality, they hope to appear to provide services in ways that are consistent with international standards.71

Seeing themselves as equalizers working within the constraints of a fundamentally unequal system is central to the self-identity of many non-state service providers. However, this role often comes into conflict with their role as distributable resources. When non-state service providers act as resources for the local state to allocate, they may unwillingly contribute to the same inequalities they hope to eliminate. When—as is often the case—organizations depend on the local state for access and information about the communities they hope to serve, and allow the local government to determine where they operate, they wind up serving the same communities that are already relatively well-served by the local government, exacerbating the public service gap between those communities and the ones left behind by traditional service providers.

4.4 Conclusion: Moving Beyond Autonomy

Do civil society organizations in China represent an autonomous sphere independent from the state—and as a result, a nascent source of democratic opposition to CCP rule? Much of the literature on non-state organizations in China has focused on this question (See, for instance, Foster, 2001; J. Hsu and Hasmath, 2014; Read, 2003; Teets, 2013; Tomba, 2005; Unger, 2008; Xin Zhang and Baum, 2004). However, other work has questioned the wisdom of doing so, arguing that its focus on the autonomy

71 Interview with head of local public health organization, Yunnan, 2010. Spires (2012) argues that Chinese NGOs have often adopted the language and practices advocated by international donors because “whoever has money rules,” and not necessarily because the concerns of international donors are relevant to Chinese grassroots NGOs (131). Equity is a genuinely shared concern of both funders and service providers on the ground, however.
question makes existing research on Chinese civil society excessively narrow in scope, that a fully autonomous civil society is a standard that even liberal democracies fail to reach, and that it would be more appropriate to look for analogs within China’s own history than to import foreign models of state-society relations (Perry, 1994; Salmenkari, 2013; Tenzin, 2014). Indeed, autonomy may not even be a desirable goal for Chinese social organizations (Salmenkari, 2014), as it may come at the cost of influence (as O’Brien and Luehrmann (1998) argue in the context of local people’s congresses). And while autonomy is a central concern of Western research on civil society organizations in China, the subjects of this research see autonomy as far less important than efficacy and “organizational viability” (C. Hsu, 2010, p. 267).

This chapter suggests that instead of seeking to place non-state organizations on a spectrum ranging from fully autonomous to fully under state control, researchers should recognize that full autonomy from the state essentially does not exist in China—nor do the leaders of non-state organizations want it to. Rather than asking whether organizations are autonomous, we should ask how they behave in the face of the restrictions that are inevitably placed on them. Do some types of organizations fall more easily into some categories of behavior than others? What determines, for instance, which nonstate organizations serve as equalizers, and which as distributable resources—a role that may exacerbate existing inequalities if non-state services are distributed to the same groups that receive a disproportionate share of traditional services?

Furthermore, organizational behavior does not exist in a vacuum; it shapes and is shaped by organizations’ interactions with the local state. It is therefore useful to think about the state-organization dyad rather than ignoring one half of the equation. Under what conditions are organizations able to foster greater positive involvement on the part of the local state by, for instance, encouraging local officials to change their role from benign neglect to active partnership? Are particular combinations of state-society roles especially tightly coupled? How do organizations react when they confront a multifaceted local state (that is, one in which different officials or offices play different roles)? While this chapter has sought to describe the different roles that organizations and the local state play in relation to each other in the context of poor, minority areas, answering these questions will require attention to a broader range of cases in order to identify broader patterns of interaction between organizations and the local state.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to accomplish several goals. First, there are significant bodies of work on ethnic cultural practices in China (Blum, 2000; Bovingdon, 2002; Gladney, 1996; Harrell, 2001; Kaup, 2000; Litzinger, 2000; Schein, 2000; Z. Wang, 1997) and on the laws governing ethnic autonomy on paper (Potter, 2011; Sautman, 1999, 2012). However, there is very little empirical research about how politics actually work within ethnically diverse areas, and quantitative work that enables systematic comparison across counties is virtually nonexistent. This dissertation seeks to fill in this gap by systematically assessing who governs ethnically diverse areas of China, and what officials in these areas actually do. Do politics work differently in officially designated “minority autonomous areas” than in non-autonomous ones? This dissertation seeks to provide preliminary answers to these questions, using a combination of county case studies and quantitative analysis of patterns of ethnic representation. As minority autonomous areas make up two thirds of China’s landmass and are located along geopolitically significant borders, the findings of this dissertation have important implications for students of both Chinese domestic and international politics.

A second purpose of this dissertation is to assess how these patterns affect county-level governance, and in particular to better understand why public services in ethnically diverse areas tend to be so poor. In-depth interviews with officials, citizens, NGO employees, and public service providers, as well as statistical analysis of an original dataset on county-level ethnic diversity and public services, support the conclusion that supervision is lower in remote and ethnically diverse areas, and that these areas suffer from poor-quality health and education services. These conclusions improve our understanding of local governance and public goods provision in rural China, as existing literature on the topic has focused nearly exclusively on ethnically homogenous areas. I also hope to bring China into a broader comparative conversa-

\[1\text{The work that does the best job of this, China’s Forty Millions, is now of historical value only (Dreyer, 1976). Other exceptions include Distelhorst and Hou (2014), Xia (2009) and M. Brown (2002), although these studies tell us much more about what officials in minority areas do than about how these actions ultimately affect citizens.} \]
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tion on ethnic diversity, local governance, and public goods provision. In the pages that follow, I briefly recap the dissertation’s main arguments and describe some of their implications (for the study of public goods and services in China, and for the study of ethnic politics more broadly).

5.1 Findings

Why are public services provided so poorly in ethnically diverse areas of China? This dissertation makes three main claims. First, I argue that supervision by higher-level officials—a core element of the Chinese Communist Party-state’s apparatus for holding local officials to account—breaks down in areas that officials perceive as geographically or culturally remote. “Study tours” to poor and out-of-the-way places are hardly luxury travel. Higher-level officials, responsible for overseeing the administrative units below them in the geographic hierarchy of the Party-state but allowed some discretion about which areas they actually visit themselves, often choose to visit more convenient (and more comfortably appointed) areas instead. This problem is relevant to all remote areas, regardless of the ethnic makeup of the population. But areas with large ethnic minority populations face an additional obstacle to strong, direct supervision by higher-level officials: the perceived cultural distance between these areas and the people responsible for supervising them. Higher-level, mostly Han officials are doubly reluctant to visit ethnically diverse areas, which they often perceive as “backward” (luohou), dirty, and dangerous.

In a political system in which promotion depends on pleasing one’s superiors rather than pleasing the electorate, this lack of supervision has serious consequences for local politics. Unlike to be rewarded for hard work that one’s superiors will prob-

2I am intentionally vague about the level of government here. One of the important implications of this dissertation, discussed in more detail below, is that the dynamics I describe here are relevant to supervisor-supervisee dyads up and down China’s geographic-administrative hierarchy. In other words, these dynamics affect the way in which county-level officials supervise townships within the county, and also impact prefectural officials’ supervision of officials at the county level. This is a useful piece of evidence in support of the claim that how officials perceive distance, and not only the physical reality of this distance, is driving my results. In reality, even the most far-flung townships are not very far from the county seat (there are some exceptions to this claim, but they are mostly limited to border regions and the sparsely populated Tibetan Plateau). But the language that county officials in Jade County used to describe the tremendous inconvenience of traveling to Yi minority townships was quite similar to my interviewees’ descriptions of prefectural and provincial officials’ attitudes toward supervising minority autonomous counties. Furthermore, contact between these townships and the county government was minimal, just as was the case for South Mountain County and the prefectural government responsible for overseeing it.

3At the prefectural level and above, the distinction between Han and minority supervisory officials may not be very important. The two may have similarly negative perceptions of minority areas, as the rare ethnic minorities who make it to these relatively high-ranking and influential positions are often extremely assimilated and have spent very little time in the underdeveloped rural areas where most minority populations are concentrated.
ably never observe, local officials skate by, spending local funds on cosmetic projects that do little to improve the living standards of the local population. In this regard, remote, minority areas display a more extreme version of a problem that occurs across rural China: wasteful overinvestment in large construction and infrastructure projects. Because the populations of minority areas are often in especially dire need of high-quality services, these wasted resources seem even more costly in minority areas than they do in the rest of China. And the fact that minority areas continue to fall farther and farther behind Han areas, even as the central government targets special funds toward their development, suggests that these problems are especially severe there.

Of course, agents across the globe are remarkably skilled at circumventing the mandates of the principals they serve. If higher-level monitoring were the only mechanism holding local officials accountable, it is unlikely that very much would get done anywhere in rural China. And it is certainly true that corruption, mismanagement, and deliberate ignorance of higher-level mandates are national problems and are not limited to areas where ethnic minorities reside (Lu, 2000; Mei and Pearson, 2014; G. Smith, 2009). Yet a large and growing body of work suggests that, in some areas of China at least, local governments do accomplish many of the goals with which they are tasked (Ahlers and Schubert, 2015; Heberer and Schubert, 2012; Landry, 2008; Looney, 2015 (forthcoming); D. L. Yang, 2004). This implies that there must be some additional mechanism that can hold officials accountable even when formal monitoring and promotion mechanisms fail to do so.

A number of scholars have argued that social ties between officials and citizens serve precisely this purpose. At the village level, when officials and citizens participate in the same social organizations, citizens may use moral suasion to hold officials accountable (J. Chen and Huhe, 2013; Tsai, 2007a,b). Other scholars, skeptical of the notion that these social networks enable informal accountability, still find that they may improve local governance by enabling officials convince citizens to cooperate with government mandates (Xu and Yao, 2015). My dissertation finds that social networks between officials and citizens are an essential tool of effective governance at the county level, too—but that they, like formal accountability to higher-level officials, break down in ethnically diverse areas. Because social networks tend to be structured along ethnic lines, citizens can most effectively appeal to their coethnics in government for assistance, and officials have the most detailed information about the needs and preferences of members of their own ethnic group. However, the structure of the local government in minority autonomous areas (where ethnic minority populations are clustered) prevents citizens from using social networks to access a critical mass.

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4Since corruption is also unlikely to be observed—unless it is so egregious that it causes local residents to protest en masse—cosmetic infrastructure projects also provide opportunities for local officials to divert funds for their own purposes.
of officials. The ethnically fragmented nature of officialdom in minority autonomous areas also means that, even when high-ranking local officials do understand the needs of their coethnics and wish to meet these needs, they are often blocked from doing so by the difficulty of building a multiethnic coalition.

The third central finding of this dissertation concerns nonstate service provision. In recent years, local governments in China and beyond have increasingly outsourced public service provision to private companies and nonprofit organizations (Cammett and MacLean, 2014; Jing and Savas, 2009; Simon and Teets, 2012; S. Smith and Liptsky, 1995; Teets, 2012; M. Zhang and J. Sun, 2012). One might expect these changes to fix some of the problems that my dissertation identifies. Driven by market logic (in the case of for-profit service providers) or by a religious or philanthropic mission (in the case of nonprofit organizations and social enterprises), nonstate service provision need not follow the same distributional patterns as state-led service delivery. Indeed, since many NGOs explicitly seek to reach the neediest citizens and to ameliorate existing inequalities in public service delivery and access,\(^5\) we might expect that the public service gap between Han and minority areas would begin to shrink as nonstate service providers take on a greater role.

However, my research suggests that non-state service providers are often deeply intertwined with, and dependent on, the local government. The relationships between local governments and the NGOs, GONGOs, and social enterprises that provide local public services in minority areas can take a variety of forms, ranging from a genuine partnership to a cat-and-mouse game in which nonstate actors try to avoid an actively repressive state. In virtually all of these forms, however, nonstate service providers serve at the whim of the local government. Existing in a “gray zone”—neither completely legal nor completely forbidden, and often left guessing about where exactly the boundaries of the permissible lie\(^6\)—nonstate service providers must often choose between allowing the local government substantial control over their activities and abandoning those activities altogether. In addition, even when the local government is not particularly popular, the government’s imprimatur is often a prerequisite for effective nonstate service provision, as citizens are often reluctant to use non-state services if they believe that doing so may be politically risky. Taken together, these facts have a somewhat surprising result: despite the seemingly different interests of local governments and non-state actors, the same distributional logic guides public service provision by both entities. Innovative programs—most often designed, run, and paid for by non-state actors, often with virtually no support from the local government—become another accomplishment for local officials to show off to their superiors in the hope of earning a promotion. As is so often the case with state-run programs, however, this induces local officials to place these programs in

\(^{5}\)See Chapter 4 for more on this point.

\(^{6}\)On the use of uncertainty as a control tactic in China, see Stern and Hassid (2012).
convenient locations that higher-level officials are relatively likely to observe. Even when non-state service providers set out with the explicit goal of reaching underserved communities, then, they often have no choice but to replicate existing spatial inequalities in public service provision—or to withdraw from the area completely.

5.2 Implications

County Officials: Rational Actors, Social Worlds

How do these findings contribute to the study of public goods and services in China more broadly? First, despite a decade-long process of political and economic re-centralization at the county level (yi xian wei zhu), we know relatively little about county-level governance. This is partly for practical reasons: high-level county officials are busy people and have little time for researchers; gaining research access to counties can be more politically sensitive than doing research in villages; doing large-n comparative work across a large number of counties can be prohibitively expensive; the infrastructure for conducting village-level surveys is already well developed. Allowing these concerns to guide the research agenda on rural politics is a mistake, however. Given that counties have closed village schools and assumed responsibility for provision of education services, redeveloped township health centers, and generally taken over from the township and village as the primary provider of public goods and services, the dearth of research on politics at the county level is surprising and problematic. Villages do continue to raise their own funds for ultralocal public works projects, but these now represent a small fraction of rural public spending.

If politics are about “who gets what, when, and how,” understanding why county officials—largely responsible for policy implementation and resource distribution—serve some citizens at the expense of others is essential for understanding rural politics in China (Lasswell, 1936). This dissertation begins to fill that gap by providing a more nuanced and complete picture of the motivations of county-level officials. Existing research has often assumed village officials to exist within a dense web of social and professional ties (J. Chen and Huhe, 2013; Manion, 2006; Tsai, 2007a,b; Xu and Yao, 2015), but has treated officials at the township level and above as rather bloodless, interchangeable rational actors who seek only to maximize their own career prospects (Edin, 2003; Landry, 2008; Whiting, 2000). This dissertation complicates that picture.

Although it is true that counties are substantially larger units than villages and afford a degree of anonymity that is not possible in small villages, county officials

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7There are, of course, exceptions, including G. Smith (2009), G. Smith (2010), Oi et al. (2012), and Liu et al. (2009). Work on county-level politics that predates the recent recentralization of political and economic power includes Blecher and Shue (1996).
nonetheless have longstanding social ties—to citizens and to each other—that shape their motivations and their ability to govern effectively. While the county Party secretary is subject to the “rotation in office” policy and may spend only a few years in a given county, in my fieldwork sites the vast majority of county officials were born and raised in or near the county. They had grown up with fellow officials and with many of the county’s citizens. They socialized with other officials in restaurants owned by citizens they had known for decades. They celebrated holidays such as the “killing the pig dinner” (sha zhu fan) that precedes Chinese New Year with former students who still lived in rural villages, and had done so yearly for decades. Many county officials had worked as teachers in local schools before moving into the county government, and maintained social ties to their former students and to teachers and administrators in the schools. In Jade County, officials and citizens alike made frequent use of a large and well-maintained public park in the county seat; as I walked around the park one evening with a county official whom I had gotten to know quite well, she stopped frequently to chat with former students and friends. In her spare time, the same official (a former middle school teacher) taught English classes to local kids in an empty apartment in the county-owned building where she lived, and chatted with parents as they dropped off their children for the class. I spent an evening singing karaoke in the hotel owned by the Jade County Party branch with various cadres, the principal and vice-principal of the local vocational school, and their friends (both in government and outside it); in a county where there was not very much to do, the karaoke bar served an important social function, at least for middle-aged bureaucrats with a penchant for the Mandarin version of “My Heart Will Go On.”

Individually, these examples may seem trivial. A dinner with one citizen, a rousing rendition of a Chinese pop song with another—surely these do not produce substantial improvements in public services. But this dissertation argues that, when these interactions involve large numbers of officials and citizens and are sustained over time, they create important mechanisms by which county officials may be held accountable. Social ties give officials information about citizens’ needs and about sources of discontent—a rare and valuable commodity in a place where censorship of the traditional media prevents journalists from effectively playing this role.⁸ They also create a sense of obligation on the part of local officials; the vague exhortation to “serve the people” (wei renmin fuwu) becomes a bit more meaningful when the people in question are one’s friends, students, and former coworkers.

County officials involved in administration or direct provision of public services are thus not atomized individuals concerned only with enhancing their own career prospects to the greatest degree possible. Indeed, although the system of monitoring

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⁸Some have argued that, although the media environment in China is generally quite repressive, the CCP does intentionally allow some meaningful reporting precisely so that officials can learn about potential threats to regime stability (Lorentzen, 2014; Newland and Lorentzen, 2015).
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and promotion certainly motivates some officials, others evince no interest in moving away from their families for a “better” job in the prefectural capital.\footnote{Interview with county people’s congress office employee, Yunnan, 2011.} Instead, many officials were motivated by less instrumental concerns, including a sense of pride in their work and a sense of obligation to their friends and family.

Social ties thus play an important role in inducing county-level officials to provide public services. In a country where the state almost completely withdrew from public service provision less then thirty years ago, this is no small feat. But an important implication of this argument—and one that would make a useful corrective to existing research on village-level politics as well—is that the influence of social ties on public service provision does not improve public service quality for \textit{all} citizens, and in fact may benefit some citizens at the expense of others. Indeed, in some cases the line between good public services and patronage politics is extremely blurry—an argument for carefully specifying how and to whom services are provided, and not just how much those services cost the government to provide.\footnote{As I discuss in greater detail elsewhere, this is important not only at the county level, but even within small units like villages. Even at the village level, something that is nominally a public good (like a paved road) may in fact benefit only some village residents, and the money spent on services to some residents fewer resources are available to others (Newland, 2015).}

In this respect, the dynamics of county-level public service provision in China are not so different from what Lipsky (1980) termed “street-level bureaucracy” in the U.S. context.\footnote{More recently, Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) have expanded upon the “street-level bureaucracy” framework with more recent interviews with American service providers, and have found similar patterns of bureaucratic discretion creating better services for some but bias against others.} Focusing on the places where citizens most directly encounter the state—the police station, the DMV, the welfare office, and so on—Lipsky argued that “the decisions of street-level bureaucrats tend to be redistributive as well as allocative” (Lipsky, 1980, p. 8). Because they are responsible for determining who meets the various criteria for services, street-level bureaucrats are \textit{de facto} policy-makers even if their legally prescribed role is simply to implement the distributional rules that lawmakers have set. In the Chinese context—where rule of law is weaker and bureaucratic discretion broader than it is in the U.S.—the potential for officials’ personal relationships and biases to affect the services they provide to citizens, in both positive and negative ways, is substantial.

Public Service Quality is a Two-Way Street

A second important implication of this dissertation for the study of public services is that the existing literature’s singleminded focus on what local governments \textit{do} is misplaced. Much of the literature treats the actions of local governments (how much money they spend, how many roads they build, and so on) as the central challenge
to high-quality public goods and services in China; if only governments did more, the argument goes, the quality of public services would be better. There is, of course, some truth to this argument; much of this dissertation has focused on just how little local governments actually do for their citizens in remote and ethnically diverse areas.

But an equally important component of the quality of public goods and services—and one that is largely missing from the existing literature on rural China—has to do with how citizens use these services. As I discuss in detail elsewhere, a key challenge to high-quality public goods in other contexts is overuse, since those who do not contribute to the upkeep of public goods benefit from them anyway. Yet existing research on rural China has given only limited attention to this issue, focusing instead on expenditures by local governments (Newland, 2015). My interviews suggest that, in some policy areas at least, overuse has not undermined the quality of public goods in the way that one might expect. For example, when a rural health insurance program that was open to all for a nominal participation fee of 10 yuan was first implemented, policymakers worried that citizens would overuse basic health services as a result, but that did not come to pass. How China avoided the free rider problem in the case of NCMS implementation, and whether this is also true of other public goods, warrants further study.

In fact, underuse seems to be a bigger impediment than overuse to the ability of public services to positively impact citizens’ lives, at least in minority areas. Both quantitative results and in-depth interviews suggest that public service uptake is lower in ethnically diverse areas, as officials struggle to convince suspicious citizens to use the services they provide. This phenomenon raises serious questions about the way that public goods and services in rural China have been both provided and studied. Both have generally assumed that increased investment translates into better services for citizens, but if citizens are reluctant to use these services for reasons that are largely unrelated to their quality, there is little reason to think that a fancier hospital or a new school will improve health and education outcomes among the citizens with the greatest needs.

Implications for the Study of Ethnic Politics

Moving beyond China, what are some of the implications of this dissertation for the study of ethnic politics in comparative context? First, this dissertation builds on existing research on the importance of what Singh and Lieberman call “institutionalized ethnicity” (Lieberman and Singh, 2012a). It is not especially surprising that states may strengthen the salience of ethnic categories by instantiating these categories through an ethnic census, quotas for ethnic representation in government, and other procedures (Lieberman and Singh, 2009, 2012b). China represents a “hard case” for arguments like Lieberman and Singh’s, however, because many of the eth-
nic categories that the CCP Party-state recognizes began as creations of the CCP-led ethnic classification process about sixty years ago, and have little basis in Chinese history or culture. Indeed, some argue that ethnic minorities in China remain attached to their ethnic identities or to the institutions for governing ethnic minority areas for purely instrumental reasons. Minority citizens receive material benefits (like a lower bar for passing the national college entrance exam) that are attached to their minority status while facing substantial practical pressure to assimilate by speaking Mandarin and dressing in “modern” clothing, and officials in minority areas benefit more than anyone else from the special fiscal transfers and subsidized loans to these areas, and resist policy changes as a result. The future of ethnic identity in China, one scholar argued, is “fifty-six ethnic groups, all exactly the same.”

However, my research suggests that these categories have come to play an important role in organizing social and political life in multiethnic areas of China. Social ties are largely organized along ethnic lines; because these ties provide useful information to officials and create a sense of social obligation to citizens, the ethnic groups that lack social ties to county officials face a considerable disadvantage in terms of public services. Indeed, one of the significant implications of this research is that many of the same dynamics that have been studied elsewhere in the world—for instance, the negative association between ethnolinguistic fractionalization and a variety of political and economic outcomes—hold true in China as well. This is the case even though the mechanisms hypothesized to connect these two factors are largely irrelevant to China. In most of the areas I discuss in this dissertation, citizens are not choosing private provision of group-specific services over public services that benefit all; citizens in these areas are so poor that the choice is not between public and private services, but rather between public services and nothing at all. Citizens also have substantially less input into the policy process in China than in most democracies, so the idea that citizens have a “taste for discrimination” that affects policymakers’ decisions does not seem relevant here (although it is certainly true that stereotyping and dislike of ethnic groups other than one’s own are prevalent in China).

Instead, this dissertation points to a different set of explanations for underprovision of public services in ethnically diverse contexts; these may be relevant outside of China as well. First, whereas much of the literature on public goods in ethnically

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12The most nuanced discussion of the minzu shibie, the process that produced these categories, is Mullaney (2011). Earlier sources depicted the ethnic classification as a rushed and chaotic process in which cadres with little knowledge of the ethnic groups of the southwest created a set of fairly incoherent ethnic categories in an attempt to follow the Stalinist race model. By contrast, Mullaney shows that although the process was certainly rushed and incomplete, it drew more on linguistically based notions of ethnic difference developed by 19th century British colonial administrators in Southeast China than on Soviet ethnic classifications.


14Lecture by Thomas Mullaney, UC–Berkeley.
diverse contexts has focused on the relationships between citizens or between citizens and officials, this project suggests that ethnic diversity has important implications for the relationships between officials at different levels of government. This may be especially relevant to politically centralized autocracies. The dynamics of interethnic coalition formation, and their potential threat to democratic electoral politics, have been well established (Arriola, 2013; Chandra, 2005; Lijphart, 1977; Posner, 2005; Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972). but whether and how these dynamics matter in autocracies has not really been explored. Since much of the literature on ethnic politics focuses on democracies (albeit often imperfect ones), and assumes that citizens’ policy preferences and voting behavior constrain officials, a better understanding of the dynamics of ethnic representation in authoritarian regimes would be a useful addition to the existing literature. My research suggests that ethnic difference may affect how well lower-level officials or bureaucrats are supervised by their principals. Although China’s monitoring and promotion system makes direct supervision especially important there, and induces spatial biases that may not exist in the same form elsewhere, it certainly seems plausible that similar dynamics would apply to other places as well; these dynamics warrant further exploration.
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