

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN MIYI COUNTY

Women's Organisations and Their Functions

Since 1980, with the initiation of rural reforms based on the "Contract System", significant changes have taken place. Women are becoming an important force in rural development, and we have attempted to assess in this chapter their role and status before and after the introduction of the reforms. Women's activities are the concern of the All Chinese Women's Federation. At present, there is very little development by non-governmental organisations in the field of women's activities. Most services are provided by the All China Women's Federation and its branches. The organisational structure is given in Figure 3.1.

The Women's Federation in Miyi County has four staff members who have experience in primary development work and women's work. Twenty eight townships have full-time directors of women's federations who have received different types of training in rural development. One hundred and thirty-four villages also appoint deputies to the Women's Congress.

The Chinese Women's Congress has given the All China Women's Federation the function of safeguarding women's interests and promoting equality between men and women. The specific functions are outlined as follows:

- o Encouraging women to participate in reforms and economic reconstruction;
- o Educating women towards self-improvement and skill enhancement;
- o Representing the voices of women and children and safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests; and
- o Persuading the concerned departments to provide services and create conditions for women's development.

Before the Government carries out any economic reforms, the Women's Federation is charged with the responsibility of communicating the Party's general and specific policies to women's groups. It is also responsible for educating women concerning the legal ramifications and in safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests as well as those of children. Since the latest introduction of economic reforms, the Women's Federation at all levels has worked towards economic reconstruction.

From 1983 onwards, the Miyi County Women's Federation has been encouraging rural women to go into commodity production. After 1986, the focus became increasingly concentrated upon the development of rural women. The Federation mobilised rural women to participate in training programmes as a means to increasing both skills and income. It did so by:

- o sponsoring competitions for skills in animal husbandry;
- o providing services so that women could become productive both on the job and in other spheres;

Figure 3.1: Organisational Structure of the Women's Federation

Organisational Structure	Remarks
<pre> graph TD A[All-China Women's Federation] --> B[Provincial Women's Federation] B --> C[Municipal Women's Federation] B --> D[State Women's Federation] C --> E[County Women's Federation] D --> E E --> F[Township Women's Federation] F --> G[Rural Women's Congress] G --> H[Women's Branch Organisations] </pre>	<p data-bbox="760 624 1199 842">There are functional offices and departments for women's rights and interests, organizational work children's work, and propaganda. Various decentralised offices take care of urban and rural women's interests.</p> <p data-bbox="760 1194 1126 1224">There are no branch offices</p> <p data-bbox="760 1324 1126 1383">There is a Director and relevant working personnel.</p> <p data-bbox="760 1453 1075 1512">There is only a Director at this level</p> <p data-bbox="760 1582 1134 1642">Their establishment depends upon the local situations.</p>

- o by running joint classes with the scientific association, agricultural office, and animal husbandry bureau; by providing forage, fruit saplings, and improved seeds to rural women; and by helping women to sell their agricultural products at harvest time; and
- o providing more than \$ 2,700 in interest-free loans and \$ 540 in interest-tied loans to rural women; and
- o selecting model families through which it encourages commodity production.

Because of the activities of the Women's Federation, in line with the economic reforms, considerable changes have taken place in the role and status of women in Miyi County.

Observations from Selected Villages and Households

During the survey taken of the eight villages, attention was given to an understanding of the role of women, and the changes that had taken place in their economic, family, and social status after the introduction of reforms. The villages chosen are representative of Miyi County in terms of natural resources, social conditions, and economic conditions. Initially we conducted a general survey on the status of women throughout the eight villages, and this was followed by more detailed investigations based on responses from four to five households selected from each village. They gave information concerning age, education, occupation, income and expenditure, daily time schedule, marital status, number of children, and aspirations. This involved 38 families and when this part of the study was complete, we chose Yangjia as a sample village for the purpose of more detailed analysis. Based on all the information collected, a clear picture emerged concerning the changes in women's role and status pertaining to rural mountain development.

Labour Division According to Gender. Rural women do most of the housework as well as all kinds of work relating to agricultural production. However, after the introduction of the "Production Contract System" a number of changes have taken place. Table 3.1 shows labour division gender-wise for Yangjia Village in 1982.

This figure indicates that:

- o housework and livestock raising were solely the responsibility of women previously but are now shared by husbands and wives;
- o men are responsible for making preparations for production and for marketing;
- o women take part in sowing crops but their concentration is on kitchen gardens where they also produce some cash crops; and
- o there is reasonable division of labour in both forestry and fruit production; men being in charge of purchasing and developing waste land, planting trees, and applying fertiliser.

The type of work undertaken by women in Miyi County depends upon traditional work habits, practical considerations or needs, and their own initiatives. They are capable of all kinds of work and are capable of playing an important role. However, the kind of jobs they actually do are limited by traditional role perceptions.

Table 3.1: Division of Labour in Yangjia Village, Miyi County

Sector	Sub-Sector	Activities	Before 1984		After 1984	
			Female	Male	Female	Male
Housework		Cooking	+	-	+	-
		Washing	+	-	+	-
		Shopping	+	-	+	-
		Cleaning	+	-	+	-
		Feeding Babies	+	-	+	o
		Educating Children	+	+	+	+
Agriculture	Crop Production	Transplanting Rice	+	+	+	+
		Harvesting Rice	+	+	+	+
		Carrying/Threshing Rice	+	-	-	+
		Cutting/ Carrying Sugarcane	+	+	-	+
		Managing Farmland	+	+	+	+
		Drying Grains	-	-	-	-
	Tree/Fruit Production	Land Clearing & Planting Trees	-	-	+	+
		Looking After Trees	-	-	o	+
		Harvesting Fruits	-	-	-	-
	Raising Livestocks	Purchasing Fodder	-	+	-	+
		Managing Fishponds	-	+	+	+
		Feeding Ducks & Fish	-	+	+	+
		Raising Pigs/Chicken	+	-	+	o
		Cleaning Animal sheds and Ponds	o	+	+	+
Non Agriculture	Industrial Processing	Pressing sugarcane	-	+	+	+
		Carrying sugar	-	+	-	+
	Transportation		-	-	+	-
	Commerce		-	-	+	-
	State Employment		-	+	-	+
	Service trades (restaurants/hotels)		-	-	+	-
	Construction		-	+	-	+

Notes:

- + indicates positive involvement
- indicates no involvement
- o indicates occasional involvement only

Differences in Male/Female Income and Expenditure Patterns. Peasant households account for 98 per cent of the total in Miyi County and more than 80 per cent of them are crop farmers who concomitantly raise domestic livestock. Developments in crop farming have led to an all round increase in family income, including women's contributions. Before the economic reforms, a woman earned only eight work points a day whereas a man earned ten work points a day. Apart from raising one or two pigs for domestic purposes, farmers were not permitted to engage in sideline production. The amount of housework women had to do also meant that they were not very productive. Currently, income from sideline production accounts for 50 per cent of the total family income. A sample survey of 38 families showed that in 34 per cent of families, women contributed half of the family income, in 37 per cent of families, the husbands earned more than their wives, and in 29 per cent of families, wives earned more than husbands.

After the analysis of men and women's income, it could be seen that women's income had increased faster than men's (see Figure 3.2). Besides this, the income of peasant farmers are now higher than those of civil servants and this was certainly not so previously. A survey of eight households where husbands were employed by the State revealed that the income ratio between men and women was 30:70. However, in families where husbands engage in odd jobs, transport, lumbering, or construction work, husbands make much more than their wives. Wives engaged in catering, trading, crop planting, and livestock raising make more money than their husbands. Among families, with more than \$ 270 per capita income annually, wives make more money than their husbands. Generally, there are more Han women with incomes that surpass those of their husbands than women from minority ethnic groups (see Table 3.2).

With the rise in rural women's income, the rural rate of expenditure has characteristics that differ from the previous ones (see Table 3.2):

- o A housewife needs to spend money on clothes, shoes, and health care just like everyone else. In addition, she requires about \$ 3 per annum to buy necessities for her personal hygiene. A woman from a family earning a per capita income of more than \$ 270 annually buys high quality clothes etc.; one from a family with a per capita income of over \$ 16 annually spends more money on clothes and shoes than her husband and children; and one from a family earning less than \$ 16 annually spends the same amount on clothes and shoes as her husband and children.
- o A woman's total expenses are generally lower than those of her husband and children who have additional expenses which include school fees for children and wine and cigarettes for husbands.
- o Personal expenses for women under 30 are more than those for women in other age groups.

The above points serve to show that not only do rural women contribute a great deal to their families, but they also spend very little on themselves.

Family Relationships and Status. Before the introduction of the "Contract System", women had a lower status than their husbands because they earned much less and were steeped in traditional ideas. Therefore, all the decisions were made by the husband. However, since the rural economic reforms, women's income has risen and, consequently, so has their status.

- o The rise in economic status has improved family relationships. In Yangjia village, out of 318 families, five per cent of them used to quarrel frequently because there was not enough money. In 1988, the number was only one per cent of the total.

FIGURE 3. 2

INCOME PATTERNS, 1980 - 88.

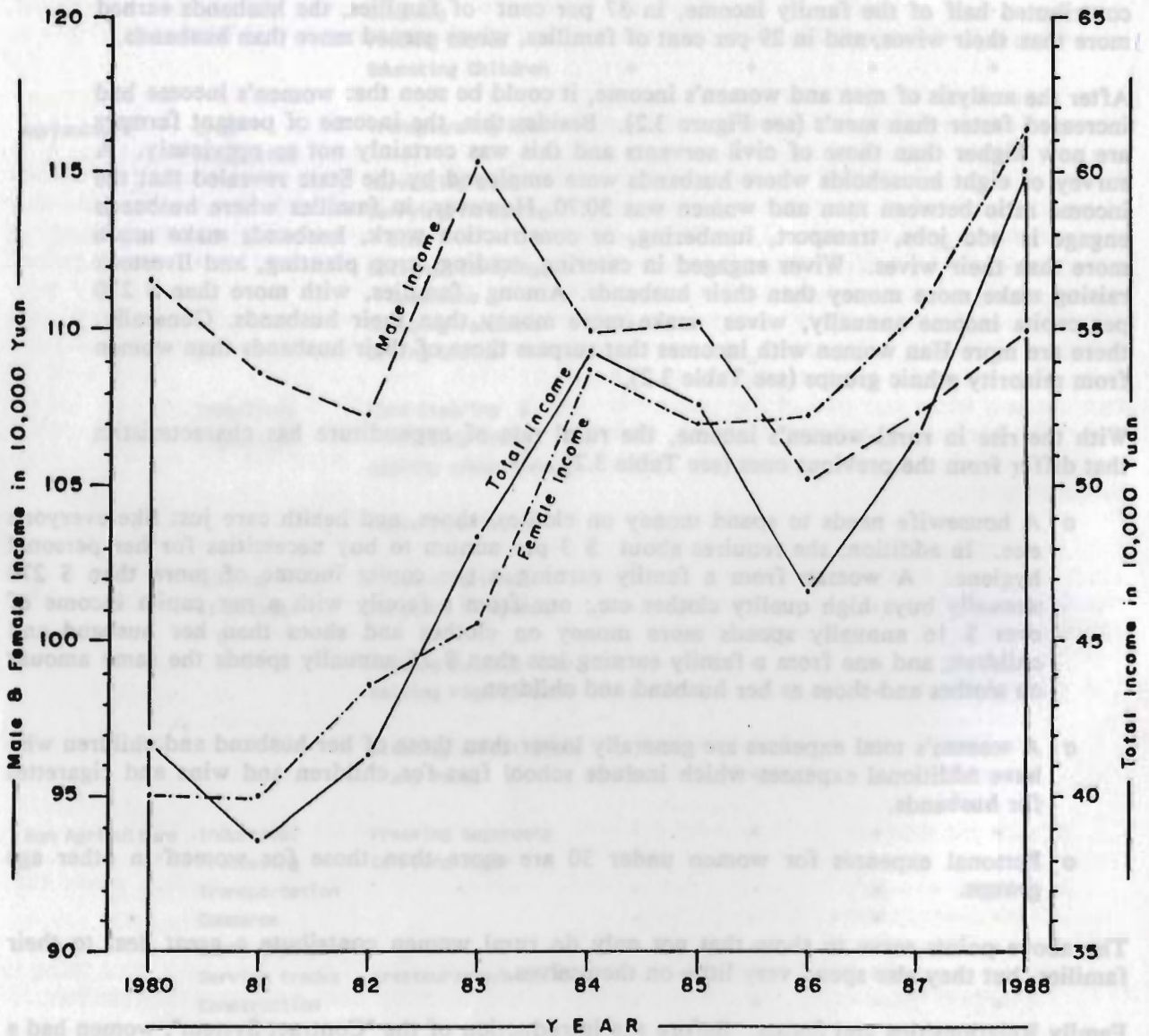


Table 3.2: Income Characteristics in Miyi County

	Average Family Income (\$)	Income Ratio (Husband:Wife)	Wife's Personal Expenses Compared to Family Income (Per Cent)	Husband's Personal Expenses Compared to Family Income (Per Cent)
Production Sector				
Crop Production	1,350	36:64	3.5	3.0
Raising Livestocks	1,770	33:67	1.9	2.5
Forest & Fruit trees	960	61:39	1.6	3
Trading	5,900	10:90	2.1	1.5
Categories by Per Capita Income (\$)				
<50	220	65:35	-	5.0
50-150	730	68:32	3.5	5.0
150-250	1,130	52:48	2.7	4.0
>250	1,840	45:55	1.8	3.0
Nationality				
Han	1,500	40:60	2.8	4.2
Others	1,140	50:50	2.5	3.0

- o Differentials between husband and wife in terms of time spent on productive labour as opposed to maintenance labor (household work) are decreasing. However, wives still do more housework than their husbands as a survey of 38 families showed.

Year	Labour Differentials between Husband and Wife (hrs/day)	Time Spent on Housework by Husband and Wife (hrs/day)
1983	10 : 14	0.5 : 5
1988	11 : 13.5	1:5 : 4.5

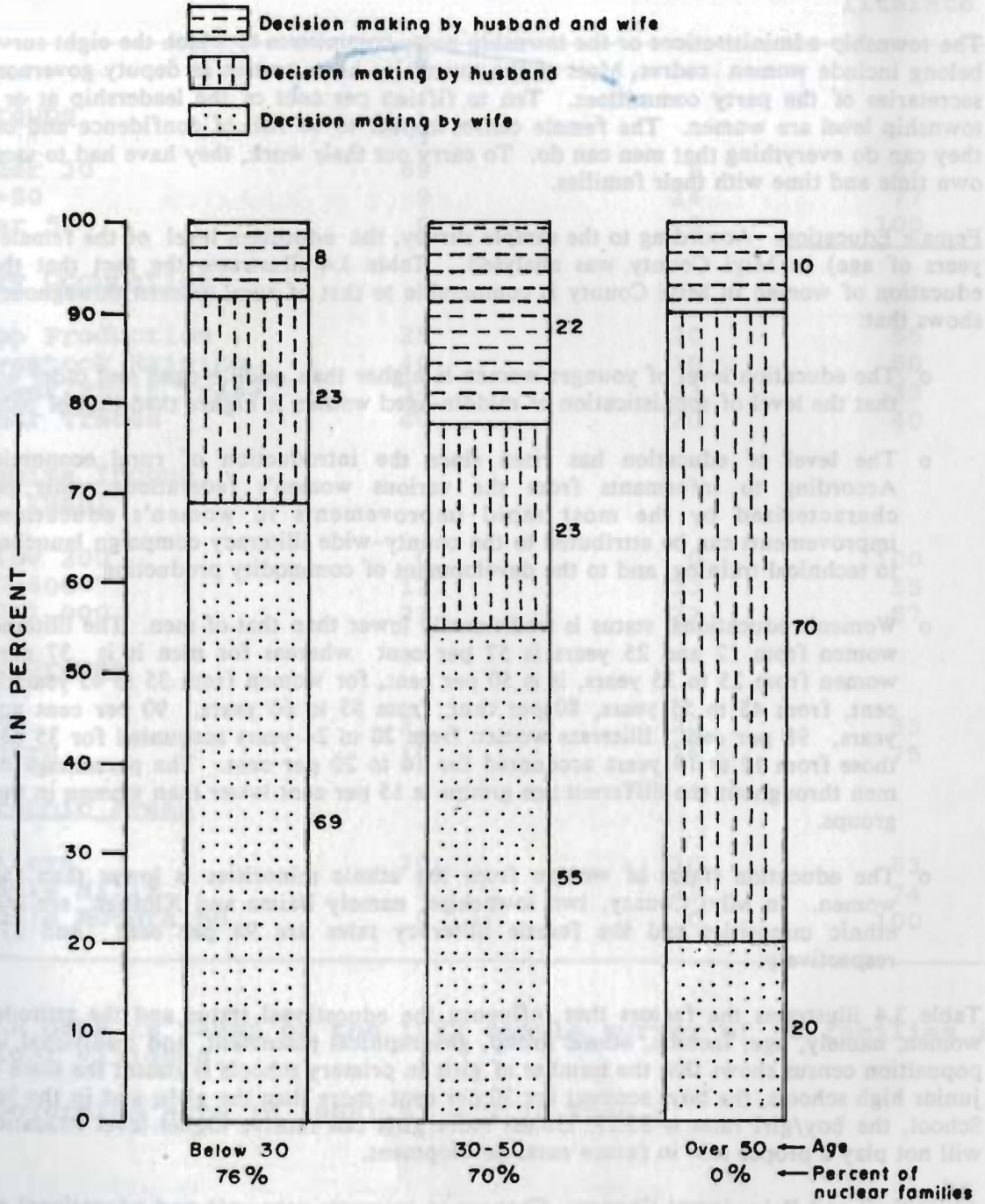
- o Husbands no longer make all the decisions. This is apparent from Table 3.3, which is based on a survey of 38 households in eight villages. In small families, the relationship between husbands and wives is more balanced (Figure 3.3).

Women's Social Activities and Status. Any rise in rural women's economic and family status must result in an increase in their participation in social activities and a consequent rise in social status. Since 1985, the County Women's Federation has run technical classes for over 14,000 students and in 1987 it sponsored a women's farming competition in which 26 per cent of the women farmers

Table 3.3: Decision Making among 38 Households in Eight Villages

Village Name	Decided by Husband and Wife (per cent of households)		Decided by Husband only (per cent of households)		Decided by Wife only (per cent of households)	
	1983	1987	1983	1987	1983	1987
Qingpi	37	45	42	33	20	21
Kelang	20	50	60	10	20	40
Zhongzi Farm	30	33	40	33	30	33
Qinggang	20	30	20	20	60	50
Yangjia	80	80	15	5	5	15
Dushu	25	30	35	20	40	50
Xiaodong	10	33	80	33	10	33
Average of 8 Villages	32	43	42	22	26	35
Average of 38 families		58		21		21

FIGURE 3.3
PATTERNS OF DECISION MAKING BY AGE GROUP



in the county (8,120 women from 4,060 households) took part. Altogether 6,120 women from 3,080 families attained the required standard and this was 76 per cent of the total participants. Two-hundred-and-two women were commended for their skills in raising pigs, ducks, and silkworms. Through participation, in a number of different activities, women have improved their farming skills, and through social participation, they have acquired an increased sense of social responsibility.

The township administrations or the township party committees to which the eight survey villages belong include women cadres. Most of the townships have women as deputy governors or vice-secretaries of the party committees. Ten to fifteen per cent of the leadership at or above the township level are women. The female cadres appear to be full of confidence and believe that they can do everything that men can do. To carry out their work, they have had to sacrifice their own time and time with their families.

Female Education. According to the sample survey, the education level of the female (above 16 years of age) in Miyi County was analysed. Table 3.4 illustrates the fact that the level of education of women in Miyi County is comparable to that of rural women throughout China. It shows that:

- o The education level of younger women is higher than middle-aged and older women, and that the level of sophistication of middle-aged women is higher than that of older women;
- o The level of education has risen since the introduction of rural economic reforms. According to informants from the various women's federations, this period was characterised by the most rapid improvements in women's education. These improvements can be attributed to the county-wide illiteracy campaign launched in 1984, to technical training, and to the development of commodity production.
- o Women's educational status is traditionally lower than that of men. The illiteracy rate for women from 12 and 25 years is 57 per cent whereas for men it is 37 per cent; for women from 25 to 35 years, it is 50 per cent, for women from 35 to 45 years it is 60 per cent, from 45 to 55 years, 80 per cent; from 55 to 60 years, 90 per cent and over 60 years, 98 per cent. Illiterate women from 20 to 24 years accounted for 35 per cent and those from 12 to 19 years accounted for 16 to 20 per cent. The percentage of illiterate men throughout the different age groups is 15 per cent lower than women in the same age groups.
- o The education status of women from the ethnic minorities is lower than that of Han women. In Miyi County, two townships, namely Baima and Xinshan, are inhabited by ethnic minorities and the female illiteracy rates are 94 per cent and 97 per cent respectively.

Table 3.4 illustrates the factors that influence the educational status and the attitudes of rural women: namely, age, income, ethnic group, geographical placement, and traditional ideas. The population census shows that the number of girls in primary schools is almost the same as boys; in junior high schools, the boys account for 30 per cent more than the girls; and in the Senior High School, the boy/girl ratio is 85:15. Unless more girls can receive higher level education, women will not play a proper role in future rural development.

Attitudinal and Behavioural Changes. Changes in women's economic and educational status have led to changes in outlook and behaviour.

Table 3.4: Level of Women's Education (in Per Cent)¹




Categories	Middle School & Higher	Primary School	Illiterate and Semi- literate
<u>Age Groups</u>			
under 30	69	8	27
30-50	9	14	77
over 50	0	0	100
<u>Primary Occupation</u>			
Crop Production	25	20	55
Livestock Raising	40	10	50
Forest/Fruit Trees	34	33	33
Other Trades	40	20	40
<u>Per capita Income Group (Yuan)²</u>			
Below 200	0	0	100
200-600	12	33	55
600-1,000	21	22	57
<u>Ethnic Groups</u>			
Han	27	20	53
Others	10	15	75
<u>Topographic Areas</u>			
Valleys	20	30	53
Middle Hills	5	21	74
Middle Mountains	0	0	100

Note:

1. The data is based on the 1988 sample survey of 38 families in eight villages.
2. Conversion Rate in 1988: \$1 = 3.70 Yuan

Marriage Customs: Figure 3.4 indicates that the number of people choosing their own marriage partners decreases as age increases and increases with educational status. There are also more people from the Han who choose their own partners than from other ethnic groups. Marriage customs are directly related to the educational and economic status of women.

FIGURE 3.4
MARRIAGE PATTERNS AMONG WOMEN

-  Mutual decision by bride and groom
-  Use of the go between
-  Arranged by parents

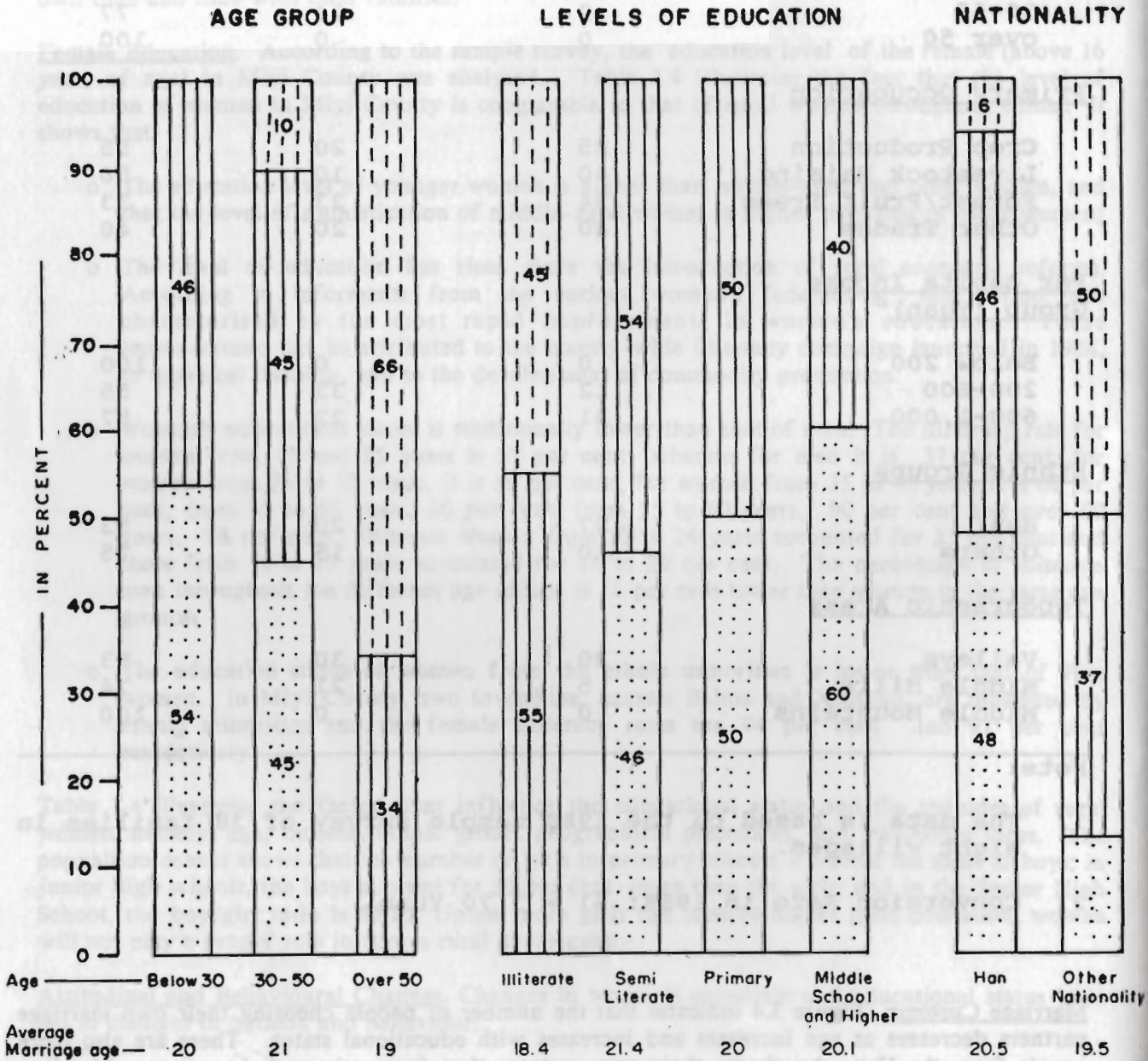


Table 3.5: Child Bearing Patterns of Women¹

Categories	Average Number of Children	Average Age When First Child Born	Average Age When Last Child Born
Age Groups			
Under 30	1.3	23.0	23.3
30 - 50	3.0	21.9	29.4
Over 50	4.0	21.1	40.0
Education Level			
Illiterate	4.4	21.0	38.8
Semi-literate	1.5	21.7	25.7
Primary School	1.5	21.2	26.5
Middle School & Higher	1.4	23.4	23.7
Nationalities			
Han	2.2	22.2	27.6
Others	3.8	21.7	29.0

Note:

1. The data is based on the 1988 sample survey of 38 families in eight villages.
 - o Since the 1970s, family planning policies have been introduced and these have brought about a number of changes in child-bearing patterns (see Table 3.5).
 - o Fifty per cent of the women in the 38 peasant families surveyed wished their children to receive higher education. They had already started to save money for that purpose. They stated that whenever their children remained academically successful they would support them, otherwise they would be welcome to come home to work.

Main Findings

Several conclusions can be derived regarding the differentials in rural women's roles and status as affected by area, profession, education, ethnic group, and family background.

1. Younger age groups are characterised by their preference for nuclear families, fewer children, better education, and greater engagement of both the husband and the wife in income-earning activities.
2. Compared to women in the middle hill areas and valleys, women in the mountains have bigger families, spend more time on housework, bear children longer, earn less income, and take fewer contraceptive measures. The parameters affecting them include

environmental conditions, productivity structure, percentage belonging to ethnic minorities, cultural traditions, and birth control policies. As cultivation has been extended on to new land only recently, there has been little return on investment as yet (for example, most fruit trees have not yet born fruit). Families in the middle hill areas have lower incomes and higher expenditure than those in the valleys.

3. The economic and social development of the mountain areas, inhabited by minority ethnic groups, are behind the Han areas. Transport facilities in the mountains are poor; there is less water and heating facilities; and deep-rooted cultural traditions influence the attitudes of the women. It is extremely important that the county develop these areas to keep pace with other areas so that minority women can enjoy the same economic, social, and family status as the Han women. This means that the involved departments will have to create new jobs and emphasise education, especially that of girls, so that they will be able to play a better role in rural development. This, in its turn, ensures that an increased income contributes to an improvement in the all round quality of life.
4. The economic concept of rural commodities has influenced the role of rural women in production. As yet, it is in the initial stages. However, women's jobs are still limited to agricultural and traditional subsidiary occupations. In 1987, only 58.1 per cent of agricultural products were processed. Agricultural industries, commerce, and services are still in the developmental stages. Though the county has made some progress, it is far behind the advanced rural areas. Women's concepts of their role in the economic structure need to be strengthened. In the valleys, development has been more rapid and women have begun to play prominent roles in productive life. In the mountains, however, progress has been slow and the status of women needs to be improved.
5. Since 1984, due to the implementation of economic reforms, the economic status of the county has risen rapidly compared to the past and to the rate of development in neighbouring countries and in the Province of Sichuan as a whole. The Women's Federation in the county, in cooperation with the relevant functional departments, has mobilised, trained, and assisted rural women to develop production. Many women have prospered through these efforts. For example, among the women taking part in these activities, 1,415 families increased their income by \$ 11 per capita; 756 families by \$ 17 per capita, and 909 families by more than \$ 23 per capita.
6. Rural women have played an important role in the development of mountainous areas. They have, through their own efforts, moved towards the attainment of equal status in the economic, social, and family spheres. However, due to their work loads and domestic chores, rural women feel physically and psychologically oppressed. Such heavy responsibilities are not conducive to improvements in their independence and spirit of enterprise. Methods must be found to ameliorate this situation.