

**Asymmetric Assimilation or Mutual Adaptation? Intermarriage and Ethnic Disparities in
Women's Full-Time Homemaking in China, 1982–2015**

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Abstract

Despite progress toward gender equality in China, recent decades have witnessed a resurgence of patriarchal values, reflected in a growing number of women leaving the labor force to become full-time homemakers. Using census data from 1982 to 2015, this study examines ethnic variations in this trend, with a particular focus on interethnic marriages. Results reveal an overall increase in homemaking that varies across ethnic groups: women from Manchu, Mongolian, and Muslim groups (Hui, Kazakh, Uyghur) are more likely to be full-time homemakers than Han majority women, whereas Korean, Tibetan, and Southern minority women exhibit lower probabilities. Analysis of intermarriage reveals asymmetric assimilation: Han women's homemaking rates remain relatively stable regardless of spousal ethnicity, while minority women's rates converge toward Han norms. Among groups whose traditional norms favor homemaking (e.g., Manchu, Mongolian, Muslim), higher education and greater prefecture-level Han presence amplify the declines in homemaking associated with intermarriage. Among groups with historically higher labor force participation (e.g., Korean, Tibetan), higher education mitigates increases in homemaking linked to intermarriage, while Han concentration exerts minimal impact. These findings suggest that asymmetric assimilation arises from a complex interplay of adaptation and resistance to Han cultural norms, offering insights into the social processes shaping gender and ethnic stratification in contemporary China.

Keywords: ethnicity, gender, interethnic marriage, assimilation, China

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Asymmetric Assimilation: Intermarriage and Ethnic Disparities in Women's Full-Time Homemaking in China

Inequalities between genders and across racial/ethnic groups remain among the most persistent challenges globally (Waters and Eschbach, 1995; Bianchi, 2000; Mills, 2003; England, 2010; Bianchi et al., 2012; Bloome, 2014; Fincher, 2014). Despite women's increasing engagement in the public sphere through education, employment, and political participation, they continue to trail men in earnings, labor force participation, and other labor market outcomes (England, 2010; Wu and Zhou, 2015; Ji et al., 2017). This disparity is largely driven by the disproportionate burden of housework and childcare responsibilities borne by women, which often leads to their withdrawal from the workforce into full-time homemaking (Goldin, 2006; England, 2010; Ji et al., 2017; Mu and Tian, 2022). The magnitude of these gender disparities, however, varies across racial and ethnic groups (Reimers, 1985; Scarborough et al., 2021). In the U.S., for instance, White women have historically been more likely to exit the labor force compared to women of color, a pattern not fully explained by socioeconomic differences within couples or across groups (Kane, 2000; Greenman and Xie, 2008; Kolpashnikova and Kan, 2020). Such cross-group variation suggests that full-time homemaking constitutes not merely a personal choice, but a decision shaped by entrenched sociocultural expectations surrounding gender roles.

Against this backdrop, the rising prevalence of intermarriage across racial/ethnic groups presents a new context for the negotiation of gender roles within families and society at large (Mare, 1991; Kalmijn, 1998; Qian and Lichter, 2007). Although intermarriage constitutes a critical site at which individuals encounter new cultural practices, values, and social networks, the adoption of these elements often mirrors broader structural inequalities and reproduces power asymmetries that privilege the majority group (Grossbard-Shechtman and Fu, 2002; Fu, 2008;

Hou and Myles, 2013; Choi and Goldberg, 2018; Xie and Dong, 2021). Despite well-established theoretical foundations, empirical understanding remains limited regarding how women's domestic roles and, by extension, employment decisions vary between intermarriage and endogamous unions. In particular, it is unclear whether minority women in intermarriages exhibit homemaking practices in line with those of the majority group, thereby reflecting asymmetric assimilation, or whether the majority group adopts practices similar to those of minorities, indicating mutual adaptation. Empirical investigation into these dynamics is essential for assessing the broader implications of intermarriage for social stratification—specifically, whether intermarriage helps mitigate racial and ethnic disparities or, depending on the direction and extent of shifts in women's homemaking roles, inadvertently reinforces gender inequalities.

This study shifts focus from Western contexts to China, a transitional society that provides a unique setting for examining these dynamics. Two key factors motivate this inquiry. First, China's transition from a socialist to a market-oriented economy has entailed a retrenchment of social welfare provisions, including state-sponsored childcare, alongside a revival of patriarchal values. Together, these changes have exacerbated gender disparities in labor force participation and reinforced normative expectations regarding women's domestic responsibilities, often to the detriment of their professional advancement (Shu and Bian, 2003; Fincher, 2014; Wu and Zhou, 2015; Ji et al., 2017; Luo and Chui, 2018; Mu and Tian, 2022; Wang, Wang, and Mu, 2025). Second, China's ethnically diverse population, comprising the Han majority and 55 officially recognized minority groups, offers a fertile context for analyzing the dynamics of assimilation, resistance, and hybridity in intergroup relations (Gladney, 2004; Ma, 2008; Mullaney, 2012; Zang, 2015; Du, 2016). The minority share of the total population has grown from 6.70% in 1982 to 8.89% in 2020, accompanied by a notable increase in interethnic

marriages, particularly between Han and minority individuals (Francis-Tan and Mu, 2022; Huang, Duan and Bi, 2022; Huang, Pan and Zhou, 2025; Wang and Mu, 2026). While some minority groups, such as the Manchu and Mongolian, have largely assimilated into Han culture, others—including Tibetans and various Muslim-identifying groups—retain distinct linguistic, religious, and cultural identities (Kolas and Thowsen, 2015; Mu, 2022, 2024). Examining variations in women’s homemaking patterns between intermarried and endogamous unions thus provides valuable insights into the processes of cultural adaptation. Rather than merely assessing whether social distance between groups diminishes, this study investigates how such distance is negotiated and reshaped—whether toward integration or resistance.

We address three research questions: First, how has the likelihood of women being full-time homemakers changed over time and varied across ethnic groups in China? Second, how is interethnic marriage associated with women’s homemaking patterns? Third, how does the relationship between intermarriage and homemaking vary by individual and contextual factors? To answer these questions, we draw on pooled data from China’s population censuses conducted between 1982 and 2015, yielding a sample of approximately 6 million women aged 25–50 in heterosexual marriages (cohabiting couples could not be identified due to data constraints). Because the data are cross-sectional, the associations we report should not be given a causal interpretation; we return to the implications of this limitation, including the possibility of selection into intermarriage, in the Discussion.

This study contributes to the literature on gender and racial/ethnic stratification in several ways. First, it extends the intersectionality framework by situating the interplay of gender and ethnicity within a non-Western context, highlighting the uneven influence of patriarchal norms across China’s diverse ethnic landscape. Second, it illuminates the complex processes through

which individuals in interethnic unions navigate distinct sociocultural expectations. We argue that at the core of asymmetric assimilation lies a process of strategic adaptation, whereby minority women selectively adopt or resist elements of Han culture by drawing on their socioeconomic resources and the opportunities afforded by their local contexts.

Theoretical Framework

Ethnic Disparities in Women's Full-Time Homemaking in China

Over the past few decades, women's labor force participation has risen steadily in many societies, even as women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities (Bianchi, 2000; England, 2010; Bianchi et al., 2012). This progress, however, is not uniform across racial/ethnic groups. Previous studies in the U.S. reveal that racial and ethnic disparities in women's labor force participation cannot be fully explained by socioeconomic differences. Rather, these disparities are embedded in enduring cultural norms that delineate gender roles both within and beyond the family (Reimers, 1985; Kane, 2000; Greenman and Xie, 2008; Kolpashnikova and Kan, 2020).

These dynamics are not exclusive to developed societies. In China, the legacy of socialist gender ideologies, the effects of market reforms, and complex ethnic dynamics create a multifaceted landscape in which values, norms, and practices concerning gender roles are continually negotiated (Bian and Logan, 1996; Shu and Bian, 2003; Zang, 2015). China's transition from a socialist to a market economy prioritizing productivity and efficiency has driven pronounced socioeconomic development but has also fostered a revival of patriarchal values (Wu and Zhou, 2015; Ji et al., 2017). Following the dissolution of state-owned work units, the state retreated from its role in mobilizing women for socialist construction and in providing

comprehensive welfare support. In place of this earlier commitment, market mechanisms and neoliberal discourses emphasizing gender essentialism supplanted the socialist ideal of gender equality (Fincher, 2014; He and Wu, 2017; He and Zhou, 2018; Ji et al., 2017). Women were disproportionately targeted for layoffs, discriminated in the workplace, and increasingly relegated to the domestic sphere (Mu and Tian, 2022; Yu and Cheng, 2025). Consequently, gender disparities in labor force participation widened, and the female-to-male earnings ratio declined from 80% in 1988 to 75% in 2004 and further to 68% in 2009 (Shu and Bian, 2003; Wu and Zhou, 2015). Within the household, cultural expectations intensified, pressuring women to shoulder the bulk of domestic responsibilities and, when necessary, to prioritize family obligations over professional aspirations by becoming full-time homemakers (Luo and Chui, 2018; Mu and Tian, 2022; Wang, Wang, and Mu, 2025).

Yet it remains unclear whether this gendered retrenchment from the workforce has unfolded uniformly across China's diverse ethnic landscape. In addition to the Han majority, China officially recognizes 55 ethnic minority groups, whose share of the total population has risen from 6.7% in 1982 to 8.89% in 2020 (Ma, 2008; Zang, 2015). Given the statistical constraints of analyzing small populations and the extensive heterogeneity across these groups, this study adopts an eight-category ethnic classification scheme based on Ma (2008), described in detail in the Data and Methods section. This typology provides a meaningful analytical framework for studying assimilation by aggregating groups based on shared cultural distance from the Han majority. It captures crucial dimensions of China's ethnic variation, including geographic concentration (from northeast to southwest), religious affiliation (e.g., Buddhism, Islam), linguistic families (e.g., Sino-Tibetan, Turkic), historical relations with the central state (from former ruling class to frontier populations), and transnational ties with neighboring nations

(e.g., Mongolia, Korea, Kazakhstan). Under this scheme, the minorities are classified into the Manchu, Mongolian, and Korean in the north and northeast (Rhoads, 2000; Jankowiak, 2024), the Hui, Kazakh, and Uyghur Muslims concentrated in the northwest (Lipman, 2014; Mu, 2022, 2024), the Tibetan residing in and around the Tibetan Plateau (Kolas and Thowsen, 2015), and southern minorities primarily located in the southwestern provinces (e.g., Yunnan, Guangxi, Guizhou) (Harrell, 2001).

Some scholars have characterized patriarchy in China as “Han patriarchy,” highlighting the varying degrees to which minority groups accept, adopt, or resist dominant Han cultural norms (Du and Watson, 2013; Du, 2016, p. 243). Rooted in Confucian ideology, this patriarchal system prescribes rigid gender roles that subordinate women to domestic and familial spheres. Some minority groups, such as the Manchu and Mongolian, have historically adopted Han cultural norms, in part due to high intermarriage rates, and exhibit gender role expectations closely aligned with those of the Han majority (Rhoads, 2000; Chen, Campbell and Dong, 2018; Jankowiak, 2024). Although their cultural frameworks differ from the Confucian model, Muslim minorities, including the Hui, Kazakh, and Uyghur, often maintain even more restrictive gender norms, reinforced by Islam-informed perspectives and geographic concentration (Lipman, 2014; Mu, 2022, 2024). These cultural frameworks tend to enforce strict gender divisions of labor and confine women to domestic roles.

Conversely, resistance to patriarchy persists, particularly among groups whose sociocultural traditions promote more egalitarian gender relations. Tibetan communities in and around the Tibetan Plateau, shaped by Buddhist influences and pastoral economies, exhibit greater flexibility in gender role arrangements (Kolas and Thowsen, 2015). Likewise, southern ethnic minorities, such as the Zhuang (China’s largest minority group) and Lahu, embrace

egalitarian household ideals epitomized by the cultural norm of “husbands and wives doing it together,” wherein domestic labor and childcare are shared equally (Du, 2016, p. 250). The Mosuo, a matrilineal society, further challenge patriarchal norms by assigning women central roles in both household decision-making and economic life (Harrell, 2001; Du and Watson, 2013; Du, 2016).

Despite a growing literature on ethnic disparities in education, income, and labor force participation in China (Hannum and Xie, 1998; Hannum, 2002; Gustafsson and Shi, 2003; Gustafsson and Sai, 2009; Wu and He, 2018; Wu and Song, 2014; Mu, 2024), research specifically addressing the intersection of gender and ethnicity in shaping homemaking patterns across diverse groups remains limited (Maurer-Fazio, Hughes and Zhang, 2007; Cherng, Hasmath and Ho, 2019). This study extends prior work by examining ethnic variations in women’s full-time homemaking across a broader time span, from 1982 to 2015, and through a theoretically informed ethnic typology. Based on the documented revival of patriarchal values during the market transition and the distinct cultural norms of China’s ethnic groups, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a (Temporal trends): The likelihood of women being full-time homemakers has increased over time.

Hypothesis 1b (Ethnic variations): The likelihood of women being full-time homemakers varies systematically across ethnic groups: highest among Muslim minorities (Hui, Kazakh, Uyghur), comparable to that of Han women among Manchu and Mongolian groups, and lowest among Tibetan and southern minorities.

Cultural Adaptation Through Intermarriage

In addition to examining ethnic variations in women's homemaking patterns, this study investigates interethnic marriage as an important context of cultural adaptation. By focusing on majority–minority unions, we conceptualize the observed variations in women's homemaking patterns as a reflection of acculturation, shaped by the interplay of pre-existing ethnic gender norms and intergroup power relations.

Intermarriage, whereby individuals cross ethnic boundaries and pool their social, economic, and cultural resources within intimate relationships, plays a pivotal role in social and cultural integration (Kalmijn, 1998; Qian and Lichter, 2007). Within these unions, individuals are exposed to new cultural practices, values, and social networks, which often are often associated with adaptations in attitudes and behaviors (Grossbard-Shechtman and Fu, 2002; Fu, 2008; Kalmijn, 2010; Choi and Goldberg, 2018; Qian and Lichter, 2021; Weden, Rendall, and Brown, 2025). As such, intermarriage is widely regarded as “the most sensitive index for measuring social distance across ethnic groups” (Gordon, 1988, p. 80) and “the inevitable accompaniment of [ethnic] social integration” (Simpson and Yinger, 1987, p. 296).

Classic assimilation theory conceptualizes intermarriage as the culmination of interpenetration and fusion between ethnic groups, wherein “persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Park and Burgess, 1921, p. 735). Yet this framework posits a trajectory of asymmetric assimilation: minorities are expected to assimilate into the dominant majority culture which is implicitly or explicitly perceived as normative and superior. In this view, minorities in intermarriage exhibit practices and lifestyles in line with those of the majority, while majority group members remain largely unchanged.

Scholars have critiqued classic assimilation theory for its ethnocentric perspective and its limited capacity to explain the persistence, and in some cases the strengthening, of group boundaries across various contexts (Qian and Lichter, 2007).

In contrast, the new assimilation theory proposed by Alba and Nee (2005) offers a more reciprocal and less deterministic model of cultural adaptation. According to this framework, ethnic boundaries can erode through mutual influence, as individuals from both majority and minority groups adopt elements of one another's cultural repertoire. From this perspective, intermarriage constitutes a critical site of mutual adaptation: both majority and minority spouses negotiate, adopt, and integrate aspects of each other's cultural norms and domestic practices, rather than following a unidirectional pathway of asymmetric assimilation.

Despite the theoretical significance of assimilation theories, empirical research on family-related values and behaviors among intermarried couples remains limited. Macpherson and Stewart (1992), for example, observed that the labor force participation rates of wives in White–Black intermarriages were intermediate between those in White and Black endogamous marriages, suggesting a process of mutual adaptation consistent with the new assimilation theory. Other studies that focused on fertility patterns in intermarriage reported multifaceted patterns across groups (Fu, 2008; Choi and Goldberg, 2018; Qian and Lichter, 2021; Weden, Rendall, and Brown, 2025). For instance, Qian and Lichter (2021) found that fertility patterns in intermarriages between White men and minority women resembled those of majority endogamous couples, reflecting asymmetric assimilation; however, unions involving minority men more closely resembled the fertility patterns of minority endogamous couples, underscoring the context-dependent nature of cultural adaptation within intermarriages.

Drawing on both classic and new assimilation theories, this study examines the extent to which intermarriage in China reflects patterns of asymmetric assimilation or mutual adaptation. Classic assimilation theory, when applied to the Chinese context, emphasizes the dominance of Han culture, underpinned by the Han's demographic majority and historical state power. These asymmetric power dynamics suggest that intermarriage is associated with unidirectional minority conformity to Han norms (Gladney, 2004). In contrast, the new assimilation theory allows for the possibility of reciprocal adaptation, positing that both Han and minority spouses in intermarriages may exhibit domestic practices that differ from those of their endogamous peers, reflecting a synthesis of both groups' norms. These competing perspectives inform the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a (Asymmetric assimilation): Intermarriage is associated with significant deviations from endogamous homemaking patterns for minority women toward Han norms, whereas intermarried Han women do not differ significantly, or differ negligibly, from their endogamous peers.

Hypothesis 2b (Mutual adaptation): Intermarriage is associated with significant deviations from endogamous homemaking patterns for both minority and Han women.

Heterogeneity by Resources and Contexts

Building on the preceding discussion, this subsection examines the conditions under which cultural adaptation in intermarriage is either facilitated or constrained. Specifically, we consider whether individual resources, in the form of educational attainment, equip minority women to resist normative pressures toward full-time homemaking in intermarriages. We also explore whether contextual factors, specifically the demographic dominance of the Han majority at the

local level, reinforce power asymmetries between majority and minority groups. Our objective is not only to identify patterns of women's homemaking but also to reveal the factors that shape the magnitude and direction of intermarriage's influence on these outcomes.

Among the various factors that reduce the likelihood of women's full-time homemaking, educational attainment is particularly salient (Grossbard-Shechtman and Fu, 2002; Wu and Zhou, 2015). Education enhances women's human capital, expands their economic opportunities, and enables them to exercise greater autonomy in their career decisions (Hannum, 2002). Research in China demonstrates that women with higher education are more likely to participate in the labor force and to hold egalitarian gender attitudes (Shu, 2004; Wu and Zhou, 2015). We therefore expect the relationship between intermarriage and women's homemaking to vary by education, with the direction contingent on the pre-existing gender norms of the ethnic groups involved:

Hypothesis 3 (Educational attainment): Educational attainment amplifies the lower likelihood of homemaking associated with intermarriage for women from groups with restrictive gender norms, while attenuating the higher likelihood of homemaking linked to intermarriage for women from groups with egalitarian gender traditions.

Beyond individual resources, contextual factors play a critical role in shaping the relationship between intermarriage and homemaking. In China, the geographic distribution of ethnic groups varies considerably across regions, producing differences in the degree of exposure to Han culture and in the power dynamics between majority and minority populations (Maurer-Fazio, Hughes and Zhang, 2007). Research suggests that a high concentration of co-ethnic residents can reinforce existing group norms and constrain the adoption of practices from outside the group, both within and beyond intermarriages (Mu, 2022, 2024).

Focusing on the proportion of Han residents at the prefecture level, we hypothesize that greater Han demographic presence reinforces prevailing majority norms. We acknowledge that this measure is correlated with other contextual characteristics, such as economic development and urbanization, whose independent effects cannot be fully disentangled in observational data. We therefore interpret it as a composite indicator of the normative and structural environment associated with Han demographic predominance rather than as an isolated cultural mechanism.

Hypothesis 4 (Ethnic concentration): The association between intermarriage with a Han spouse and minority women's homemaking patterns is amplified in prefectures with a high proportion of Han residents.

Data and Methods

Data and Sample

This study uses data from the National Population Censuses of China conducted in 1982, 1990, 2000, and 2010, alongside the 1% inter-census population surveys from 2005 and 2015. As the most comprehensive source of demographic information in China, census data provide the largest possible sample of ethnic minorities while minimizing the sampling biases often present in smaller surveys.

To identify married couples, we matched spouses residing in the same household based on their reported relationship to the household head, following standard procedures for constructing spousal pairs from census data (Ruggles et al., 2025). Eligible relationship pairings include head and spouse, parent and parent, parent-in-law and parent-in-law, grandparent and grandparent, and child and child-in-law. When multiple potential pairs within the same

relationship category were present in a household, we used age and the year of first marriage (when available) as the primary matching criteria.

We performed stepwise sample restrictions, as detailed in Supplementary Table 1. First, we restricted the initial sample to women, reducing the sample size by 51.25%. We then excluded respondents living in group quarters (e.g., nursing homes, college dormitories), whose domestic work patterns are likely to differ systematically from those in private households; this step reduced the sample by an additional 2.12%. Next, we restricted the sample to respondents aged 25 to 50, the prime age range for labor force participation, further reducing the sample by 61.76%. Finally, we retained only married women with complete information on their own and their spouse's ethnicity, labor force status, and other key characteristics, resulting in an additional 19.05% reduction. Due to data limitations, cohabiting couples could not be identified. The final analytic sample comprises 5,994,601 married women.

Measures

Full-Time Homemaking Status. The dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator of whether the respondent was a full-time homemaker. It is constructed based on the census question regarding the respondent's primary reason for not working in the past week. Respondents who reported "performing housework" were coded as 1, while those who were employed or outside the labor force for other reasons (e.g., education, disability, retirement) were coded as 0. We focus on full-time homemaking rather than general labor force nonparticipation because it explicitly captures the domestic role specialization associated with traditional gender norms.

Ethnic Group Classification and Marriage Patterns. To ensure both ethnic diversity and adequate sample sizes, we adopted Ma's (2008) approach of grouping the 55 officially recognized minority ethnicities into eight broader categories. This classification scheme captures key dimensions of China's ethnic landscape, including geographic concentration, religious affiliation, linguistic families, historical relations with the central state, and transnational ties (e.g., Mongolia, Korea, Kazakhstan). The eight categories, ordered by expected gender role orientation from restrictive to egalitarian, are defined as follows:

- Hui: Hui, Salar, Dongxiang, Baoan
- Kazakh: Kazakh, Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Tatars, Russian
- Uyghur: Uyghur
- Manchu: Manchu, Hezhen, Xibe
- Mongolian: Mongolian, Oroqen, Ewenki, Daur
- Korean: Korean
- Tibetan: Tibetan, Yugur, Menba (Monba), Lhoba, Tu
- Southern minorities: Other ethnic minorities (e.g., Lahu, Mosuo, Zhuang) concentrated in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi provinces

Based on this classification, we constructed marriage pattern variables distinguishing among three types: (1) endogamous unions for each ethnic group (e.g., Han–Han, Hui–Hui, Manchu–Manchu); (2) intermarriages with Han for each minority group (e.g., Hui–Han, Manchu–Han); and (3) intermarriages between different minority groups (treated as a single category due to small sample sizes).

Covariates. We controlled for a range of potential confounders at both the individual/couple and prefecture levels that may shape the relationships among women's homemaking status, ethnicity, and marriage patterns. At the individual and couple level, we included women's age and spousal age gap, both standardized for comparability. Educational attainment was categorized into three levels: primary school or below, middle school, and high school or above. We also accounted for educational sorting within couples by distinguishing among educational homogamy, hypergamy (wife's education lower than husband's), and hypogamy (wife's education higher than husband's). Migration status captured whether neither, one, or both spouses were migrants. Additional controls included household size (top-coded at six members) and number of children (top-coded at three).

At the prefecture level, we incorporated contextual measures to capture structural and cultural environments. The proportion of Han residents served as a proxy for Han cultural dominance, and ethnic diversity was measured using a normalized entropy index ranging from 0 to 1. Educational access was proxied by the proportion of 20- to 25-year-olds who had completed high school. We also included the overall labor force participation rate and the gender gap in labor force participation. To address skewness, all prefecture-level covariates except the gender gap in labor force participation were logit-transformed and mean-centered. Dummy variables for census years were included to account for temporal changes in women's homemaking patterns.

Analytical Strategy

The nesting of respondents within prefectures and provinces renders ordinary least squares (OLS) models unsuitable. We therefore employed multilevel logistic regressions in which

individuals were nested within prefectures and provinces, and both individual- and prefecture-level characteristics were included (Hox, 2010). These models are specified as follows:

$$\eta_{ijk} = \log\left(\frac{\phi_{ijk}}{1 - \phi_{ijk}}\right) = \beta_0 + \gamma_1 E_{ijk} + \gamma_2 M_{ijk} + \sum \beta_1 X_{1ijk} + \sum \beta_2 X_{2jk} + \sum \beta_3 Y_t + u_k + v_{jk} + e_{ijk} \quad (1)$$

where η_{ijk} represents the log-odds of being a full-time homemaker for respondent i in prefecture j and province k . The fixed effects part of the equation includes an intercept β_0 , ethnic group membership E_{ijk} , ethnic marriage pattern M_{ijk} , individual- and couple-level covariates X_1 , prefecture-level characteristics X_2 , and year dummies Y_t . The model accounts for the hierarchical structure through nested random effects which are assumed to be normally distributed: u_k captures variations across provinces, v_{jk} addresses prefecture-level variations within provinces, and e_{ijk} is the individual-level error term.

The analysis proceeds in four stages. First, we present sample characteristics and document trends in women's full-time homemaking across ethnic groups over time. Second, we employ multilevel logistic models on the pooled sample of all ethnic groups to establish baseline ethnic disparities in homemaking. In this stage, we focus on comparing homemaking rates across endogamous unions (e.g., Han–Han vs. Hui–Hui) to establish the gender norms characteristic of each ethnic group. Third, to investigate the association between intermarriage and homemaking, we stratify the sample by ethnicity into Han and minority populations. For the Han sample, we compare Han women in endogamous unions with those in intermarriages with each of the eight minority groups. For the minority sample, we examine the interaction between a woman's specific ethnic group and her marriage type (endogamous vs. intermarried with Han) to assess whether intermarriage is associated with significant deviations from in-group norms. Finally, we

test how these associations are moderated by individual educational attainment and prefecture-level Han concentration.

Auxiliary Analyses

We conducted two sets of auxiliary analyses to provide further insight into the dynamics of intermarriage. First, to further assess the degree of alignment between intermarried women and their spouse's ethnic norms, we re-stratified the sample by specific ethnic dyads. For each minority group (e.g., Hui), we constructed a subsample comprising four union types: (1) endogamous Han unions, (2) endogamous minority (e.g., Hui) unions, (3) minority women married to Han husbands, and (4) Han women married to minority husbands. This approach complements the main analysis by allowing us to compare the homemaking patterns of intermarried women against the baselines of both their own and their spouse's ethnic group.

Second, we explored the broader societal implications of intermarriage for gender disparities in full-time homemaking by incorporating men's homemaking patterns. Specifically, we employed a decomposition method to assess the extent to which the increasing prevalence of intermarriage contributed to widening gender gaps in full-time homemaking from 1982 to 2015. We first decomposed the gender gap in homemaking into two components: the relative proportions of endogamous and interethnic marriages (π) and the gender gap in homemaking within each marriage type (G). We then constructed counterfactual scenarios by holding one component constant at time t_1 while varying the other to time t_2 . The four resulting outcomes are calculated as follows:

$$G_{t_1, t_1} = \pi_{intra, t_1} \times G_{intra, t_1} + \pi_{inter, t_1} \times G_{inter, t_1}$$

$$G_{t_1, t_2} = \pi_{intra, t_1} \times G_{intra, t_2} + \pi_{inter, t_1} \times G_{inter, t_2}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
G_{t_2,t_1} &= \pi_{intra,t_2} \times G_{intra,t_1} + \pi_{inter,t_2} \times G_{inter,t_1} \\
G_{t_2,t_2} &= \pi_{intra,t_2} \times G_{intra,t_2} + \pi_{inter,t_2} \times G_{inter,t_2}
\end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Thus, the total change in gender disparities in full-time homemaking (Δ) between t_1 and t_2 can also be decomposed into two components: the first reflects how much change stems from shifts in marriage composition, and the second reflects how much change arises from shifts in the gender gap within each marriage type. This is presented in Equation (3):

$$\Delta = \underbrace{\frac{1}{2} \times (G_{t_2,t_2} - G_{t_1,t_2} + G_{t_2,t_1} - G_{t_1,t_1})}_{\text{Marriage composition}} + \underbrace{\frac{1}{2} \times (G_{t_1,t_2} - G_{t_1,t_1} + G_{t_2,t_2} - G_{t_2,t_1})}_{\text{Gender gap within marriage types}} \tag{3}$$

We bootstrapped the sample and repeated this decomposition analysis for each ethnic group separately.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

[Insert Figure 1 here]

We begin by documenting women's changing patterns of homemaking across census years and ethnic groups, as visualized in Figure 1. Following an initial decline between 1982 and 1990, the proportion of women engaged in full-time homemaking more than doubled, rising from 10.58% in 1990 to 21.75% in 2015. During this period, the corresponding proportion among male spouses, though increasing, remained far lower (from 1.52% in 1990 to 5.02% in 2015), consistent with a gendered retreat from the workforce and the resurgence of patriarchal values documented in prior research (Shu and Bian, 2003; Wu and Zhou, 2015; Ji et al., 2017).

These patterns varied substantially by ethnicity. Pooled across all census years, the Kazakh (35.02%), Mongolian (25.86%), and Manchu (24.55%) populations recorded the highest

rates of full-time homemaking, followed by the Korean (17.17%), Uyghur (15.31%), and Han (13.07%). The Hui (12.81%), Tibetan (11.52%), and Southern minorities (4.23%) had notably lower proportions. Over time, in addition to the Han, several minority groups exhibited upward trends, with Southern minorities and Hui populations experiencing the most substantial increases: from 2.44% to 14.65% for the former and from 8.17% to 27.89% for the latter between 1982 and 2015. Only the Manchu and Mongolian populations showed declining trends during this period.

Supplementary Table 2 presents sample characteristics across ethnic groups. Nationally, endogamous marriages predominated, comprising 97.33% of all marriages. Inter marriages between minorities and Han accounted for 2.62%, whereas unions between different minority groups were rare (0.05%). Inter marriage was most prevalent among the Manchu (47.16%) and Mongolian (40.45%) populations, followed by Southern minorities (17.33%), Hui (11.86%), Koreans (8.96%), and Tibetans (8.85%). By contrast, the Kazakh (3.34%), Han (1.33%), and Uyghur (0.93%) populations exhibited the most rigid boundaries.

On average, respondents were 36.31 years old ($SD = 7.31$) and 2.22 years younger than their spouses. The spousal age gap was largest among the Kazakh and Uyghur populations and narrowest among the Manchu and Mongolian populations. Educational attainment varied considerably: Koreans had the highest levels, with 31.25% having completed high school, well above the national average of 12.92%. In contrast, Tibetans had substantially lower educational attainment, with over 90% having completed only primary school or less. Except for Koreans, Manchus, and Mongolians, minority groups had larger household sizes and more children relative to the Han majority.

Ethnic Disparities in Women's Full-Time Homemaking

Prior to the formal analysis, we estimated an unconditional (null) model incorporating the hierarchical structure of individuals nested within prefectures and provinces. The intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) indicated that approximately 7% and 8% of the total variance in women's full-time homemaking status resided across prefectures and provinces, respectively. These non-negligible clustering effects justify the use of multilevel regression models (Hox, 2010).

To establish baseline ethnic norms, we estimated models on the pooled sample, comparing women's homemaking patterns across endogamous unions. These models were estimated sequentially, as summarized in Supplementary Table 3: Model 1 includes marriage patterns and year fixed effects; Model 2 adds individual- and couple-level covariates; and Model 3 incorporates prefecture-level characteristics. Each step yielded a significant improvement in model fit; however, the coefficients for endogamous unions remained largely stable across specifications. Notably, the inclusion of contextual characteristics explained nearly all between-context variance, reducing the ICCs at both the prefecture and province levels to negligible values.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Figure 2 presents the predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking for endogamous unions by ethnic groups, derived from Model 3. The results reveal distinct ethnic disparities. Women in endogamous Manchu (14.18%), Mongolian (11.06%), and Muslim unions (Hui at 11.01%, Kazakh at 21.60%, Uyghur at 13.54%) were more likely to be full-time homemakers than Han women (9.82%). In contrast, Korean (5.19%), Southern (5.24%), and Tibetan (6.05%) women exhibited significantly lower probabilities.

To investigate temporal dynamics in these ethnic norms, we interacted marriage patterns with year fixed effects. Results are presented as odds ratios (ORs) in Supplementary Table 4. Building on the pooled comparisons above, we first examine how ethnic disparities relative to the Han evolved over time. The Kazakh and Uyghur populations maintained the highest odds of homemaking relative to the Han throughout the study period. Kazakh odds ranged from approximately 2.5 to 3.6 times those of the Han, while the Uyghur gap widened steadily from an OR of 1.32 in 1982 to 2.27 in 2015. The Manchu and Mongolian populations, which in 1982 had substantially higher odds than the Han (ORs of 2.01 and 1.26, respectively), converged toward and eventually fell below Han levels by 2015 (ORs of 0.86 and 0.72, respectively). The Hui shifted from below-Han odds in 1982 (OR = 0.84) to above-Han odds from 2000 onward (OR = 1.42), and the Korean population, too, moved from well below the Han in 1982 (OR = 0.32) to above them by 2015 (OR = 1.74). The Tibetan and Southern minority populations remained consistently below the Han, though the gap narrowed over time.

We next examine temporal trends within each ethnic group using 1982 as the reference year. The Han exhibited a consistent decline in homemaking odds, reaching an OR of 0.76 by 2015. Declines were considerably steeper for the Manchu (OR = 0.33) and Mongolian (OR = 0.43), and the Kazakh, despite partial recovery through 2010, fell well below their 1982 baseline by 2015 (OR = 0.53). In contrast, the Korean population showed the most pronounced increase, with odds rising to 4.08 times their 1982 level by 2015. Tibetan women exhibited a sustained increase (ORs = 2.5), and the Hui showed moderate growth peaking in 2000 (OR = 1.56). Uyghur women's odds remained stable through 2010 before rising significantly in 2015 (OR = 1.31).

Among the covariates, the likelihood of full-time homemaking was positively associated with age, spousal age gap, female hypogamy, migration status, household size, and having three or more children, and negatively associated with women's educational attainment and female hypergamy. At the prefecture level, women's full-time homemaking was less prevalent in areas with higher proportions of Han residents, likely reflecting the correlation between Han demographic presence and greater regional economic development. It was also negatively associated with educational access and overall labor force participation but positively associated with the gender gap in labor force participation.

These findings provide partial support for Hypothesis 1a. Although the descriptive statistics documented a substantial aggregate increase in full-time homemaking from 10.58% in 1990 to 21.75% in 2015, the adjusted models revealed that this trend masks divergent group-specific trajectories once socioeconomic and contextual confounders are accounted for. The Han, Manchu, Mongolian, and Kazakh populations exhibited declines in homemaking odds relative to 1982, suggesting that the raw increases observed for these groups were largely attributable to compositional shifts rather than a net normative change. In contrast, significant increases persisted for the Korean, Tibetan, Hui, and Uyghur populations, while Southern minorities exhibited no significant temporal change.

The results strongly support Hypothesis 1b, confirming systematic ethnic variations. As predicted, the Kazakh and Uyghur populations maintained the highest odds relative to the Han, reflecting more restrictive gender scripts. The Manchu and Mongolian populations exhibited homemaking rates comparable to the Han in earlier years but converged below Han levels by 2015, in line with their documented assimilation into Han culture. Korean, Tibetan, and Southern minorities showed the lowest odds relative to the Han, consistent with the characterization of

these groups as maintaining more egalitarian gender norms. However, two departures from predicted patterns warrant attention: the Korean crossover from well below to above Han levels by 2015, and the Hui shift from below-Han to above-Han odds from 2000 onward, suggesting that ethnic hierarchies in homemaking changed over time.

Intermarriage and Full-Time Homemaking: Asymmetric Assimilation or Mutual Adaptation?

How is majority–minority intermarriage associated with women’s homemaking patterns? To answer this question, we stratified the sample by ethnicity into Han and minority populations and estimated multilevel models accordingly. For the Han sample, the variable for marriage patterns comprised nine categories, distinguishing endogamous Han unions from intermarriages with spouses from each of the eight minority groups. For the minority sample, the variable included three categories: endogamous marriages, intermarriages with Han, and intermarriage with other minority groups. We interacted this variable with the respondent’s specific ethnic group and calculated average marginal effects (AMEs) to assess group-specific associations. Unlike the preceding analysis, we did not interact marriage patterns with year fixed effects. This decision reflected our primary focus on the direction and symmetry of intermarriage associations, as well as the limited number of intermarried couples within specific ethnic groups in individual census years.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Figure 3 presents the predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking for Han women married to spouses from different ethnic groups (see Supplementary Table 5 for full model results). The results indicate that the likelihood of full-time homemaking was negatively

associated with intermarriage with Hui and Southern minority spouses but positively associated with intermarriage with Manchu spouses. However, as shown in the figure, the magnitude of these differences was small: compared to endogamous Han women, the probability of full-time homemaking was only 1.07 percentage points lower for those married to Hui men, 0.50 percentage points lower for those married to Southern minority men, and 0.53 percentage points higher for those married to Manchu men. Intermarriage with spouses from the remaining minority groups was not significantly associated with Han women's homemaking patterns.

[Insert Figure 4 here]

Figure 4 visualizes the predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking for minority women, comparing those in intermarriages with Han spouses to those in endogamous unions (see Supplementary Table 6 for full model results and Supplementary Figure 1 for AMEs). In contrast to the patterns observed for Han women, intermarriage was associated with significant shifts in minority women's homemaking patterns toward Han norms. Specifically, intermarriage with a Han spouse increased the probabilities of homemaking for minority women from groups that, as shown in Figure 2, exhibited lower baseline rates than the Han. This increase was substantial: Korean women in intermarriages with Han men had a predicted probability of homemaking 8.4 percentage points higher than their endogamous counterparts, a relative increase of 72.60%; similarly, Southern minority and Tibetan women showed increases of 2.0 percentage points (58.82%) and 3.8 percentage points (43.36%), respectively.

Conversely, for minority women from groups with higher baseline rates of full-time homemaking than the Han, intermarriage was associated with a significantly lower likelihood of homemaking. This negative association was most pronounced for Kazakh women (AME = 18.4 percentage points), followed by the Manchu (AME = 3.6 percentage points), Hui (AME = 2.6

percentage points), and Mongolian (AME = 1.9 percentage points) populations. Notably, Uyghur women were the only group for whom intermarriage was not associated with a significant difference in homemaking probabilities.

These findings provide strong support for Hypothesis 2a (asymmetric assimilation) over Hypothesis 2b (mutual adaptation). In majority–minority intermarriages, Han women’s homemaking patterns remained largely indistinguishable from, or only negligibly different from, those of their endogamous peers. In contrast, minority women exhibited substantial deviations from their in-group norms. The direction of this deviation, whether associated with a higher or lower likelihood of homemaking, was contingent on the minority group’s baseline probability relative to that of the Han.

Heterogeneity by Education and Ethnic Concentration

In subsequent models, we restricted the analysis to minority populations to examine whether the intermarriage-associated deviation from in-group norms was moderated by educational attainment and prefecture-level Han concentration. Specifically, we hypothesized that higher educational attainment would reduce the likelihood of full-time homemaking among minority women, independent of intermarriage. We expected educational attainment to attenuate the positive association between intermarriage and homemaking and to amplify the negative association (Hypothesis 3). Additionally, we expected a higher proportion of Han residents at the prefecture level to reinforce prevailing majority norms, thereby amplifying the association between intermarriage and gravitation toward Han homemaking patterns (Hypothesis 4).

[Insert Figure 5 here]

Figure 5 presents the predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking for minority women in intermarriages with Han spouses compared to those in endogamous unions, across educational levels (see Supplementary Table 6 for full model results and Supplementary Figure 2 for AMEs). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, educational attainment amplified the negative association between intermarriage and homemaking for women from groups with restrictive gender norms, such as the Manchu and Muslim minorities. For instance, among Hui women, the reduction in homemaking probability associated with intermarriage grew from 0.40 percentage points (AME) for those with primary school or less to 2.60 percentage points for middle school, and further to 3.40 percentage points for high school or above. Similarly, for Manchu women, the magnitude of the reduction increased with education (2.10, 2.90, and 3.40 percentage points, respectively). For Kazakh and Uyghur women, the reduction in homemaking probabilities associated with intermarriage was also more pronounced among those with middle school or higher education than among those with primary school or less. Tests of second differences confirmed that the magnitude of the intermarriage effect differed significantly across educational levels for these groups.

The results also supported the second component of Hypothesis 3: educational attainment attenuated the positive association between intermarriage and homemaking for women from groups with egalitarian gender traditions. For Korean women, the increased likelihood of homemaking associated with intermarriage declined from 17.80 percentage points for those with primary school or less to 6.20 for middle school, and to 0.80 for high school or above. For Southern minorities, intermarriage was associated with significantly higher homemaking rates only among those with primary school or less, with no significant difference observed for those with high school or above. The Tibetan group was a notable exception: it was the only group for

which higher education strengthened the positive association between intermarriage and homemaking (differences of 2.80, 4.80, and 5.70 percentage points for primary school or less, middle school, and high school or above, respectively).

[Insert Figure 6 here]

Figure 6 presents the predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking for minority women across varying levels of prefecture-level Han concentration (see Supplementary Table 6 for full model results and Supplementary Figure 3 for AMEs). A high proportion of Han residents generally amplified the negative association between intermarriage and homemaking for groups with restrictive gender norms. For example, among Kazakh women, the reduction in homemaking probability associated with intermarriage grew from 10.50 percentage points in prefectures with a low proportion of Han residents to 20.70 and 28.00 percentage points in prefectures with medium and high proportions, respectively. Similar patterns were observed for Hui (1.00, 1.50, 1.70), Manchu (0.90, 3.40, 5.50), and Uyghur (3.10, 11.10, 16.10) women, all of whom exhibited significantly larger deviations from endogamous norms in prefectures with high proportions of Han residents. Tests of second differences confirmed the statistical significance of these variations.

However, for groups among which intermarriage was associated with increased homemaking probabilities (e.g., Korean, Southern, and Tibetan minorities), the moderating effects of prefecture-level Han concentration were limited. In the case of Southern minorities, the effects were unexpectedly attenuating: the increase in homemaking probability associated with intermarriage was largest in prefectures with a low proportion of Han residents (2.10 percentage points) and diminished in prefectures with medium (1.20) and high (0.70) proportions.

These findings provide strong support for Hypothesis 3, confirming that educational attainment reduces the likelihood of full-time homemaking among minority women, beyond the main effects of intermarriage. The results also partially support Hypothesis 4: the amplifying effect of Han demographic presence was evident for groups with restrictive gender norms. However, for groups with egalitarian gender traditions (e.g., Korean, Southern, Tibetan), Han concentration exhibited limited or counterintuitive moderating effects. This divergence suggests that these groups may possess cultural scripts concerning gender roles that resist assimilation toward Han norms, even in contexts where the Han constitute a demographic majority.

Auxiliary analyses

To further assess the findings on asymmetric assimilation, we conducted auxiliary analyses comparing minority women's homemaking patterns in intermarriages against the baselines of both their own and their spouse's ethnic group. Supplementary Figure 4 presents the predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking for these dyads. The results were largely consistent with the asymmetric assimilation hypothesis. For the Hui, Kazakh, Korean, Manchu, Southern, and Tibetan populations, minority women married to Han spouses exhibited homemaking patterns that converged more closely with the baseline of endogamous Han women than with that of their own ethnic group. The Mongolian and Uyghur populations were exceptions, as the intermarriage-associated deviations were insufficient to produce clear deviation from endogamous patterns.

To explore the broader implications of intermarriage for gender disparities in full-time homemaking, we assessed the extent to which its rising prevalence contributed to widening gender gaps from 1982 to 2015. The decomposition results, summarized in Supplementary Table

7, showed that shifts in marriage composition (i.e., the rise of intermarriage) had a negligible effect on the aggregate gender gap across all ethnic groups. Even where the contribution was statistically significant (e.g., Manchu and Southern minorities), this component accounted for less than 6% of the total change; the remainder was attributable to shifts in the gender gap within each marriage type. These results do not diminish the individual-level significance of intermarriage but underscore that, despite substantial relative growth, intermarriage remains demographically rare in China, thereby limiting its aggregate impact on gender disparities in homemaking.

Discussion

This study focuses on China, a multiethnic society in which patriarchal values have experienced a notable resurgence in recent decades (He and Zhou, 2018; Ji et al. 2017). Drawing on pooled census data from 1982 to 2015, we document temporal trends and ethnic variations in women's likelihood of being full-time homemakers, examine how intermarriage between majority and minority groups is associated with women's homemaking patterns, and explore the conditions under which this association is either amplified or attenuated. These questions are increasingly important as intermarriage becomes more prevalent and reshapes how gender roles are negotiated within families and across society. Our findings yield three main insights with implications for understanding gender and ethnic stratification.

First, we found an overall increase in the proportion of women engaged in full-time homemaking, yet with significant variations across ethnic groups. These disparities persisted even after controlling for socioeconomic characteristics at the individual-, couple-, and prefecture levels and appear to stem from distinct cultural scripts concerning gender roles.

Restrictive norms were most pronounced among Muslim, Manchu, and Mongolian groups, followed by the Han, and weakest among Korean, Tibetan, and Southern minorities, with temporal variations. These findings extend Maurer-Fazio et al.'s (2007) earlier analysis of labor force participation (1990–2000) among Han, Hui, Korean, Uyghur, and Zhuang (the largest group among Southern minorities) to a broader ethnic spectrum and a longer time span (1982–2015), contributing to a growing body of literature on ethnic disparities in education, income, and labor force participation in China (Hannum and Xie, 1998; Hannum, 2002; Gustafsson and Shi, 2003; Gustafsson and Sai, 2009; Wu and He, 2018; Wu and Song, 2014; Cherng, Hasmath and Ho, 2019; Mu, 2024).

Second, we observed patterns of asymmetric assimilation rather than mutual adaptation in majority–minority intermarriages, reflecting entrenched Han cultural predominance in China. Although Han women's homemaking patterns in intermarriages remained largely stable, those of minority women deviated significantly from their in-group norms toward Han norms, with the direction contingent on how their group's baseline homemaking rates compared with those of the Han. This finding contrasts with patterns observed in Western contexts, where both partners often adjust to each other's cultural norms (Reimers, 1985; Qian and Lichter, 2021).

Third, our findings reveal that asymmetric assimilation is not an entirely passive or unidirectional process. Minority women demonstrated agency in selectively adopting or resisting elements of Han culture. When intermarriage with a Han spouse was associated with a lower likelihood of full-time homemaking, minority women were more likely to capitalize on this association, particularly if they had higher educational attainment or resided in prefectures with higher proportions of Han residents. Conversely, when Han cultural norms encouraged homemaking, women with higher education were better positioned to resist those expectations,

even in prefectures where Han residents constituted a demographic majority. These patterns suggest that asymmetric assimilation in the Chinese context operates not merely as a process of cultural conformity but also as one of strategic adaptation: although assimilation occurred, minority women exercised agency in navigating their choices. It is important to note, however, that interethnic marriage, despite substantial relative growth, remains demographically rare in China, thereby limiting its capacity to produce broader shifts in gender disparities in homemaking and labor force participation (Huang, Duan and Bi, 2022).

This study is not without limitations. First, due to the cross-sectional nature of the census data, we could not establish causal relationships between intermarriage and full-time homemaking. The observed associations may partly reflect selection: women whose unobserved characteristics predispose them toward (or away from) homemaking may also be more likely to intermarry. Our analysis, however, provides evidence inconsistent with a pure selection mechanism. If selection were the primary driver, we would expect the strongest associations in prefectures with low proportions of Han residents, where intermarriage is rare and thus highly selective on unobserved traits. Instead, we found that the association between intermarriage and homemaking was either amplified or remained stable in prefectures with high proportions of Han residents, where intermarriage is more common and less selective. This pattern is more consistent with cultural adaptation than with selection alone, although we cannot definitively rule out the latter.

Second, the composition of China's officially registered minority population changed over the study period due to ethnic reclassification (Francis-Tan and Mu, 2019; Mu and Francis-Tan, 2026). During the 1980s and 1990s, relaxed enforcement of the One-Child Policy for ethnic minorities, along with other preferential policies, created incentives for individuals of partial

minority ancestry to change their registered ethnicity from Han to a minority group. This process was likely more common for certain groups and geographical regions (e.g., the Manchus in northeast China) than among groups subject to social discrimination, such as the Uyghur. As a result, some couples recorded as intermarried in later censuses may have been endogamous Han couples in earlier periods. To the extent that reclassified individuals retained Han cultural practices, our estimates of ethnic disparities in homemaking may be attenuated, and the intermarriage associations for certain groups should be interpreted with this caveat in mind.

Third, due to data constraints, we could not identify couples in cohabiting relationships, although this likely has limited impact given that the proportion of long-term cohabitation has remained low in China (Yu and Xie, 2015). We also note that arranged cohabitation is a common practice among young members of Muslim-identifying minorities who seek to enter de facto marriages before reaching the legal age of marriage. However, these unions typically transition into legal marriages once the couple reaches the legal age, which minimizes the potential impact on our findings (Mu, Lai and Xie, 2024).

Finally, although we used the proportion of Han residents at the prefecture level as a proxy for Han cultural predominance, this measure may also capture other factors such as economic development, employment opportunities, and urbanization. It should therefore be interpreted as one of several contextual factors influencing majority–minority dynamics.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a foundation for future research on ethnic and gender stratification, and on the role of intermarriage, in China and beyond. Full-time homemaking offers a valuable lens through which to examine how ethnic dynamics and gender roles intersect, complementing research on other relevant outcomes such as fertility, living arrangements, and health. We also call for qualitative research to explore how gender roles are

negotiated when distinct cultural scripts encounter one another in intimate relationships. These are questions of negotiation and imposition, adaptation and resistance, and ultimately, of social integration for better or worse.

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Figures

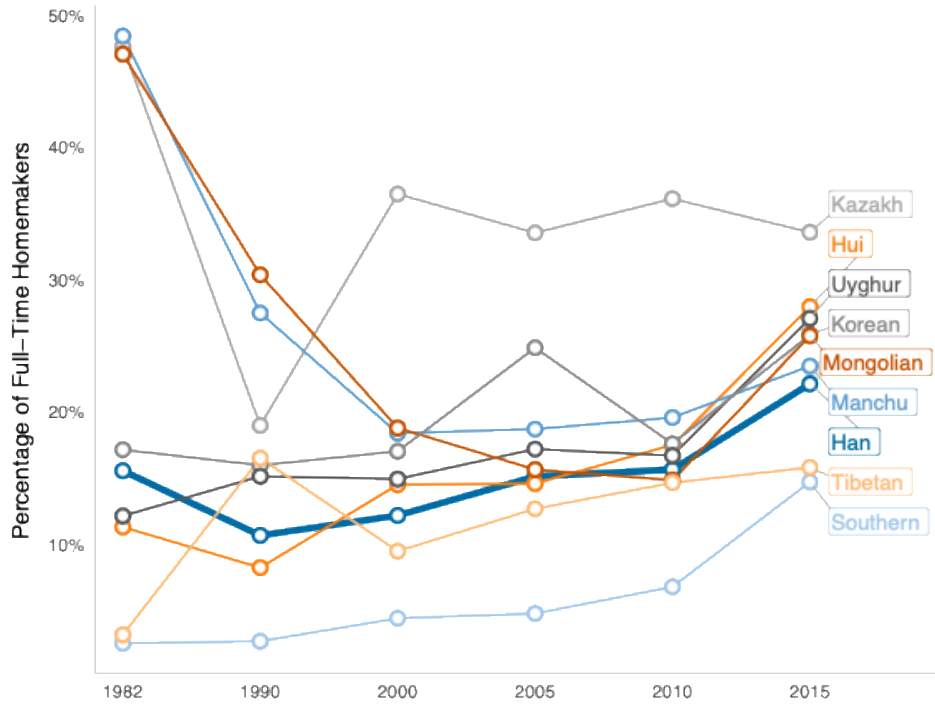


Figure 1. Proportion of women as full-time homemakers across ethnic groups

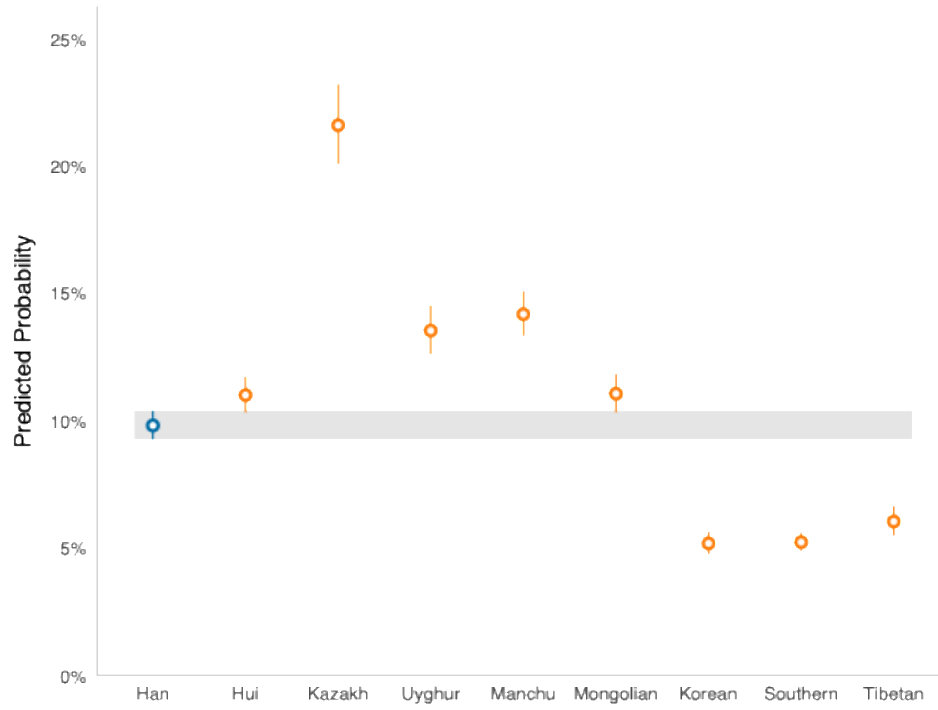


Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking across ethnic groups

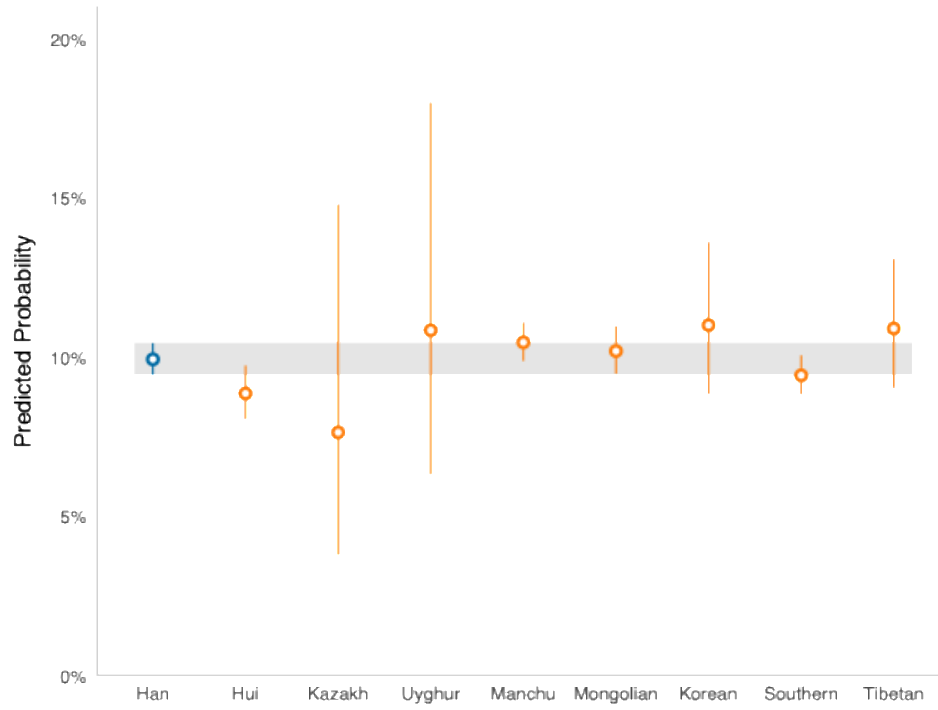


Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking for Han women by spousal ethnicity

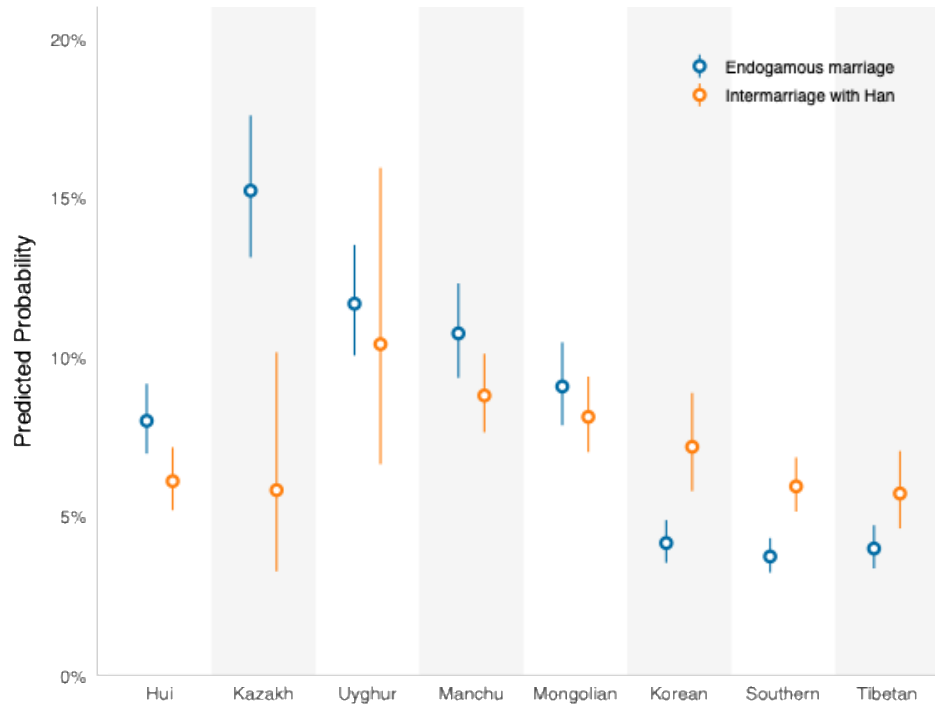


Figure 4. Predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking for minority women in endogamy vs. intermarriage with Han spouse

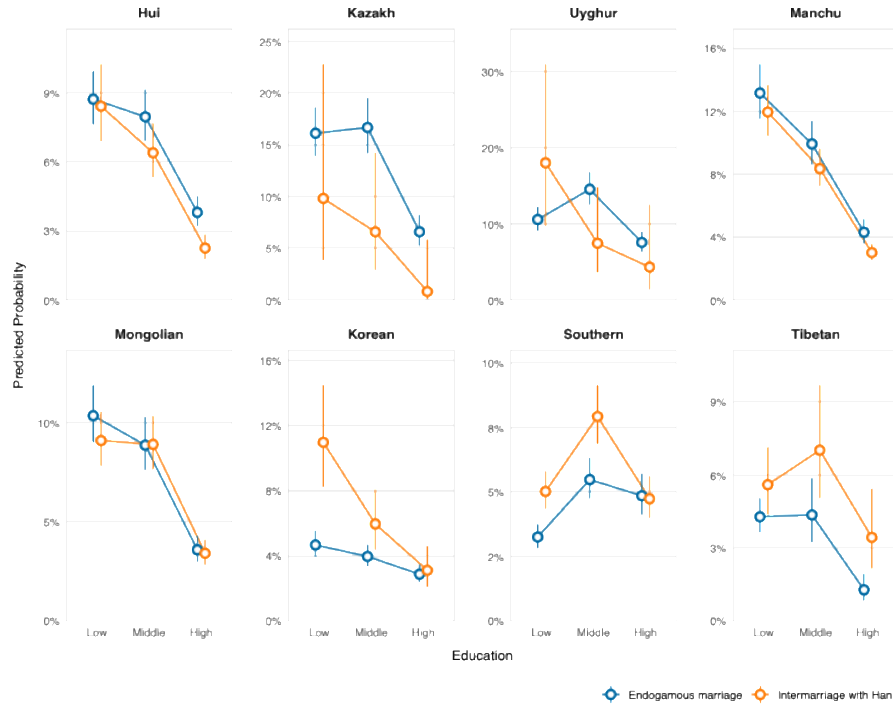


Figure 5. Predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking for minority women in endogamy vs. intermarriage with Han spouse, across educational levels

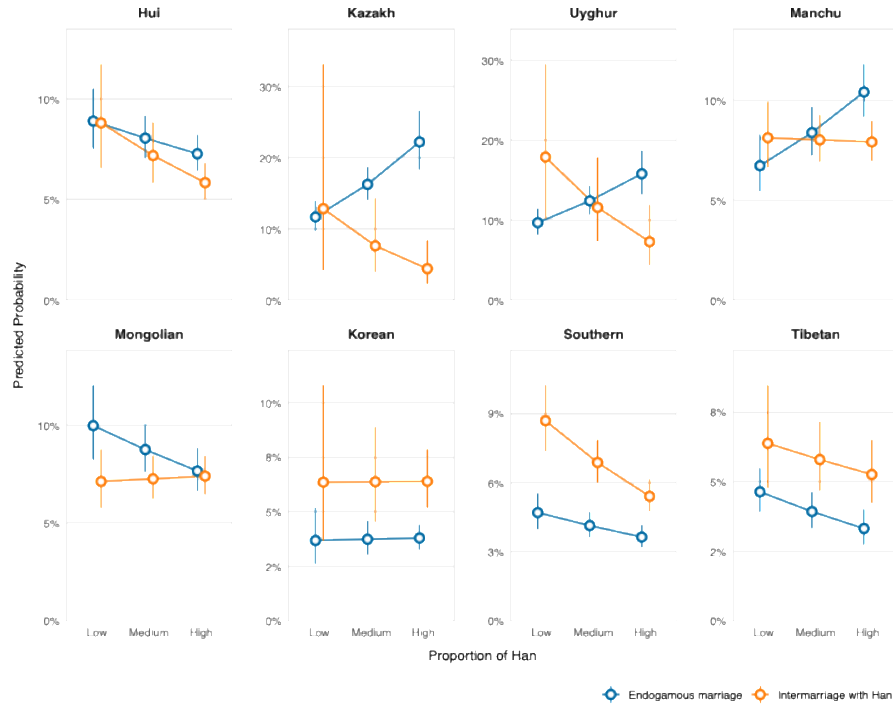


Figure 6. Predicted probabilities of full-time homemaking for minority women in endogamy vs. intermarriage with Han spouse, across different levels of prefecture-level Han ethnic concentration