

# KEXIN ZHANG

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## EDUCATION

Ph.D., Economics, Boston University, Boston MA, May 2022 (expected)

Dissertation Title: *Three Essays in Development Economics*

Main advisor: Samuel Bazzi

M.A., Political Economy, Boston University, Boston, MA, 2020

B.A., Economics with *high honors*, and B.S., Mathematics (*magna cum laude*), New York University, NY, 2016

## FIELDS OF INTEREST

Development Economics, Applied Microeconomics

## REFEREED PUBLICATIONS

“[User-Centered Counseling in Contraceptive Decision Making: Protocol for a Randomized Controlled Trial](#),”  
(with Mahesh Karra), *JMIR Research Protocols* 10(4): e24884. DOI: 10.2196/24884

## WORKING PAPERS

“[The Long Run Impact of Higher Education: Evidence from the Gaokao \(NCEE\) Reinstatement in China](#),”  
September 2021. Job Market paper.

“[Exploring User-Centered Counseling in Contraceptive Decision Making: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Urban Malawi](#),” (w. Mahesh Karra), 2021.

“[The Construction Effect of Transport Infrastructure: Evidence from the Chinese High-Speed Railway System](#),”  
2021. *Submitted*.

“[How to Correct for Sampling Bias in Poverty Projections Using Phone Surveys?](#)” (w. Nobuo Yoshida), 2021.

## WORK IN PROGRESS

“The Chinese High-Speed Railway System and Innovation,” (w. Ying Wang), 2021.

## PRESENTATIONS

Northeast University Development Conference (NEUDC) 2021, Boston University, Boston (Virtual)	2021
15th North American Meeting of the Urban Economics Association (Virtual)	2021
Economics Department Virtual Seminar Series, National Technological University, Singapore	2021
92nd International Atlantic Economic Society Conference (via Zoom), IAES	2021
Applied Young Economist Webinar (AYEW), Monash University and University of Warwick	2021
International Health Economics Association (iHEA) Congress (Poster)	2021
Population Association of America Virtual Annual Meeting (Poster)	2021
IFPRI Brown Bag Seminar, IFPRI, Lilongwe, Malawi	2021
IUSSP Panel Meeting on Couples and Reproductive Health (via Zoom)	2020
Human Capital Initiative Talk Series, Global Development Policy Center, BU	2019

## POLICY BRIEFS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS

“[The Socio-Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Saint Lucia: Findings from the Saint Lucia COVID-19 High Frequency Phone Surveys](#),” (w. Xiaomeng Chen, Freeha Fatima, Nobuo Yoshida), World Bank Group and Central Statistical Office of Saint Lucia, 2020

“Understanding Women’s Preferences for and Use of Family Planning in Urban Malawi,” (with Mahesh Karra), Innovation for Poverty Action Malawi, 2020

“[The Currency Exchange Rate between the U.S. and China](#),” (w. Shun Li and Yipeng Han), *Michigan Journal of Business*, (2015)

## FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

EFI VPU Award for Adaptation of Data for Operational Impact Tools to COVID-19, World Bank Group	2021
<a href="#">Hariri Institute Graduate Student Fellowship</a> , Boston University	2019-2022
Human Capital Initiative Research Fellow, BU Global Development Policy Center	2019-2022
Manuel Abdala Gift Research Grant, Boston University	2019
Institute for Economic Development (IED) Research Grant, Boston University	2019
Dean's Fellowship, Boston University	2016-2021
Founders' Day Award (University Honors Scholar), New York University	2016

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Consultant, World Bank Group, Washington DC	2020-2021
Research Associate, Innovation for Poverty Action, Lilongwe, Malawi	2019
Research Assistant to Professor Mahesh Karra, Boston University, Boston	2019-2021
Economics Research Intern, Development Research Center of the China State Council, Beijing	Summer 2018
Economics Research Intern, Tsinghua University Education Foundation (TUEF) Asset Management Company, Beijing	Summer 2017

## REFeree EXPERIENCE

*Journal of Medical Internet Research (JMIR); JMIR Public Health and Surveillance (JPH)*

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Department of Economics, Boston University	
Teaching Fellow, Introductory Macroeconomic Analysis	Spring 2020
Teaching Fellow, Introductory Microeconomic Analysis	Fall 2017- Spring 2019
Teaching Assistant, The Economics in Less Developed Regions	Spring 2021
Teaching Assistant, International Finance	Spring 2021
Teaching Assistant, International Macroeconomics	Spring 2021
Teaching Assistant, International Trade	Fall 2018, Fall 2020
Teaching Assistant, Urban Economics	Fall 2020
Teaching Assistant, Intermediate Macroeconomics	Spring 2020
Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences, New York University	
Math Tutor, Calculus I, II, III, Linear Algebra	Spring 2016
Math Grader, Discrete Mathematics	Fall 2015

**LANGUAGES:** Mandarin (native), English (fluent)

**COMPUTER SKILLS:** STATA, ArcGIS, CommCare, LaTeX, R, Python

## CERTIFICATIONS

SAS Certified Specialist: Base Programming Using SAS 9.4 on SAS	2020
Deep Learning Specialization on Coursera (5-course sequence)	2020

**CITIZENSHIP/VISA STATUS:** China/F1

## REFERENCES

### Professor Samuel Bazzi

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University of California, San Diego  
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### Professor Mahesh Karra

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October 2021

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## **The Long-Run Impact of Higher Education: Evidence from the Gaokao (NCEE) Reinstatement in China (Job Market Paper)**

Whereas there is a large literature evaluating the impacts of education, most of the focus until recently has been on getting to universal primary enrollment and understanding the returns to basic education; but it misses the major shifts towards higher education in many fast-growing parts of the developing world over the last 20 years. To fill this gap, I use the reinstatement of the National College Entrance Examination in 1977 following the end of the Cultural Revolution as a natural experiment, to investigate the causal impacts of higher education on later life outcomes and well-being. I use two most recent censuses (1990 and 2000) to investigate discontinuous changes in the likelihood of completing high school and going to college around the cutoff birth date. Through a combination of regression discontinuity and difference-in-difference methods, I find that cohorts that were more likely to complete high school and obtain a college education as a result of the reform were more likely to have a high-socioeconomic (SES) occupation in their early 30s and 40s; less likely to be married in their early 40s, but not by as much in their 30s. Interestingly, the more educated cohorts tend to marry later, which is mainly driven by women. Higher education leads to fewer co-resident children in their 30s, but not in their 40s. Cohorts with higher education migrate more in their early 30s, and more so in their early 40s plausibly due to the richer opportunities of migrating towards the more-educated. This paper provides novel evidence on the value of the advanced education on personal development, and provides an empirical foundation for policies aimed to promote higher-level education, which can be extended to other developing contexts.

## **Exploring User-Centered Counseling in Contraceptive Decision Making: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Urban Malawi (with Mahesh Karra)**

As a means to achieve full, free, and informed choice and promote reproductive autonomy, family planning programs have increasingly begun to adopt user-centered approaches to counseling and service provision. These approaches have stressed the role of the individual client as the focal point of interaction and the key decision-maker. However, little is known about how user-centered approaches in family planning may shape women's and couple's preferences and choices. In this study, we implement a multifactorial randomized controlled trial to test how a woman-centered, preference-based approach to counseling may help women realize their family planning preferences (Sample Size: 782). Our findings show that women who received targeted counseling were 16.8 percent less likely to be using their stated ideal method at follow-up and were 19.0 percent more likely to be discordant with their method at follow-up, plausibly due to their inaction about preferences. On the other hand, women who were encouraged to invite their husbands to the counseling session were 14.5 percent less likely to change their ideal method from counseling to follow-up, 26.0 percent more likely to switch methods between counseling and follow-up, and 17.1 percent more likely to be using their stated ideal method at follow-up. Women assigned to husband invitation group were no more concordant with their current method at follow-up. While both approaches aim to achieve the goal of "helping women make informed choices on family planning", neither seems to yield strictly preferred outcomes for women.

## **The Construction Effect of Transport Infrastructure: Evidence from the High-Speed Railway System in China**

This paper investigates three earliest high-speed railway (HSR) lines located in mid-southern China, and evaluates how the construction of these HSR lines affects the local economic activity. By formulating a set of counterfactual railway lines following the HSR planbook (MLTRP) issued by the central government, and by utilizing nighttime light data from 1992 to 2013, we implement an event-study analysis to quantify how HSR construction transforms the local economic activity as is proxied by the nighttime luminosity. Furthermore, we employ county-level data on economic indicators to pin down the channels at work underlying the positive effects. The results we obtain are summarized as follows: 1) the grid-level nighttime luminosity significantly increased compared to the counterfactual regions one year after the HSR construction, but there is no significant impact following the operation of the HSR lines; 2) the positive construction impacts can be explained by the provisions of associated local amenities, temporary clearing of households, as well as structural transformation from agricultural towards non-agricultural sectors.