

Discussion of

Social Norms and Fertility

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Discussion Outline

The discussion contains three parts:

- 1 A brief summary of the paper.
- 2 Discussion on some general questions related to the issue studied.
- 3 Suggestions to the paper along the lines of the discussion.

Paper Overview

- Three stylized facts about marriage and fertility in East Asian societies:
 - ① The marriage rates are among the highest in the world, but the total fertility rates are among the lowest.
 - ② Although the total fertility rates are among the lowest, almost all married women have at least one child.
 - ③ The childlessness rate for single women (97.9% around 2000) are substantially higher than the US, UK, Canada (36.1%) and developing countries (45.8%).

Paper Overview – cont'd

- Hypotheses to explain the three facts – social norms related to Confucianism:
 - ① The norm of unequal gender division of childcare.
 - ② The norm of stigma attached to out-of-wedlock births.
- A static structural model incorporating the two social norms to evaluate quantitatively whether the three facts can be explained by the two norms.
- Model features:
 - Wife's bargaining power depends on w_f/w_m .
 - Norm of unequal gender division of childcare: α' .
 - Norm of stigma attached to out-of wedlock births: lower marginal utility of having children for single women.

Paper Overview – cont'd

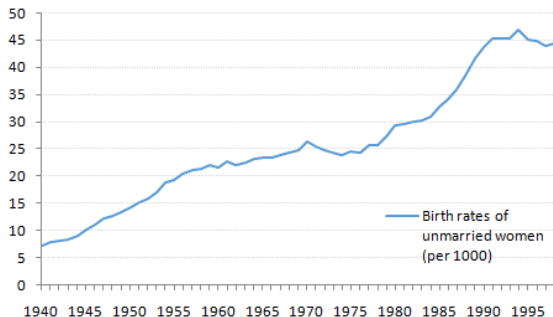
- Main results:
 - When the social norm on the division of childcare is removed:
 - Average completed fertility of married mothers increases by about 10 percent.
 - The completed fertility rates increase more for those with higher educational attainment: Those with a Ph.D. increases by around 110 percent (1.442 \Rightarrow 3.039).
 - Removing the stigma can only decrease the childlessness rates and increase the completed fertility of single mothers with years of education of 14 years or lower.
 - The reason behind the high childlessness rates of single mothers in South Korea is the high opportunity cost of child rearing.

Discussion

Before discussing the paper, I would like to raise some questions:

1. Is unequal division of childcare/household chores specific to Confucianism?
 - Goldin (1990): “husbandry” vs. industrialization and the rise of mass production.
 - The feminism movement rose up in the 19th century, e.g. Kate Chopin in the US and Virginia Woolf in UK.
 - Kawaguchi and Miyazaki (2009): Men raised by full-time working mothers are less likely to support traditional gender roles in Japan.
 - The “norm” can be changed but at a slow speed.
2. Is stigma of having children for single women specific to Confucianism?

Birth Rates of Unmarried Women in the US



Data source: National Vital Statistics Reports, Volume 48, Number 16, 2000. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, USA.

Discussion – cont'd

3. Confucianism:

- “There are three ways to be unfilial; having no sons is the worst.” – the son preference.
 - The pressure for married women: The must to have a son.
- Unmarried daughters in the family:
 - Cannot be admired by the family once passing by.
 - The son preference: Daughters are not expected to bring extra burden to the natal family; instead, need to provide support to help their brothers.

Discussion – cont'd

Observations in the East Asia:

- High population density: Population density in 2019
 - UK: 274/km²; US: 35/km²; Canada: 4/km².
 - Macau: 21,081/km²; Singapore: 8,158/km²; Hong Kong: 6,729/km²; Taiwan: 655/km²; South Korea: 511/km²; Japan: 337/km².
- Unfriendly environment for families with kids (possibly due to the high density in population):
 - Lower tolerance for mess and noises.
 - More expensive housing.
 - Relative abundance labor and hence more competitive labor markets for *current* workers and *future* workers.
 - Possible consequences?

Discussion – cont'd

Possible consequences from relative abundance labor:

- For current workers:
 - More difficult for moms to continue their career if their career is interrupted by pregnancies/childcaring.
 - Longer working hours and less flexible time schedules. More difficult to cope with unexpected events when having small kids.
- For future workers:
 - More competitive for children in order to be outstanding – parents “compete” in investing in children. Cost of raising children high.

Suggestions

Some suggestions to the paper/topic along the lines of the discussion:

Regarding the social norms arising from Confucianism:

- Perhaps the more direct norm from Confucianism is the son preference: The responsibility of married women to have sons to pass family names.
- The son preference is weakened in South Korea (Chung and Das Gupta, 2007; Edlund and Lee, 2013; Choi and Hwang, 2014).

Suggestions – cont'd

Regarding childcare:

- In the literature, childcare is usually modelled as something that can be completely outsourced.
- In reality, it is never the case.
- “Evidence”: footnote 13 on p 15, estimation of $\alpha = \iota_0 + \iota_1(w_f/w_m) + \varepsilon$ and $\alpha = \omega_0 + \omega_1 edu_f + \omega_2 edu_m + \varepsilon$, the authors cannot reject the null hypothesis that $\iota_1 = 0$ and $\omega_1 = \omega_2 = 0$ at the 10% level.
- Interpretation of the results:
 - Authors: Support that the social norm plays a dominant role in intrahousehold time allocation in South Korea.
 - Another possible explanation: Childcare cannot be completely outsourced. Someone in the family has to bear the responsibility of cultivating the children.

Suggestions – cont'd

Regarding the norm of unequal division of childcare:

- The norms exist and change gradually.
- The authors currently use a conservative α' from 1999 Korean Time Use Survey (across all households), and take the lowest α' as the social norm in the paper. They then back out the CES substitutability parameter ψ using the 1920 birth cohort and assume that the unequal gender division of childcare is efficient for this cohort.
 - Conservative but not that interesting.

Suggestions – cont'd

Regarding the norm of unequal division of childcare – cont'd:

- As the model is static, why not endogenize α' in the quantitative analyses?
 - Take the 1920 cohort's gender division of childcare as the initial α' and back out ψ .
 - Allow α' to be dependent on previous α' , or introduce directly the speed of change of α' .
 - Counterfactual analyses:
 - How would the TFR be if α' does not change over time?
 - Policies accelerating changes of α' or the speed of change of α' .

Suggestions – cont'd

Regarding problems arising from relative abundant labor:

- The race of investing in children: The rising education cost in East Asia.
- Less flexible working schedule, longer working hours, not so easy to re-enter the market: Difficult for mothers to strike a balance between career and family life.