

SOCIAL NORMS AND FERTILITY

Sunha Myong
Singapore Management University

JungJae Park
National University of Singapore

Junjian Yi
National University of Singapore

Abstract

We document three stylized facts on marriage and fertility patterns in East Asian societies: (i) their marriage rates are among the highest in the world, but their total fertility is the lowest; (ii) although they have the lowest total fertility, almost all married women have at least one child; and (iii) almost no single women have any children. As these societies have been influenced by Confucianism over millennia, marriage and fertility decisions are potentially shaped by two social norms: the unequal gender division of childcare and the stigma attached to out-of-wedlock births. We present a model incorporating the two social norms, and structurally estimate it using data from South Korea. We find that the social norm of unequal gender division of childcare plays a significant role in the low fertility rates, especially for highly educated women. However, the social stigma attached to out-of-wedlock births has modest effects on the childlessness rate for single women. Our results show that the tension between the persistent gender ideology and the rapid socioeconomic development is the main driving force behind the unique marriage and fertility patterns in East Asian societies. (JEL: J11;J12;J13)

Keywords: Confucianism; Social norms; Fertility; Demographic transition; East Asian societies.

The editor in charge of this paper was Paola Giuliano.

Acknowledgments: This paper has been benefited from comments at numerous conferences and seminars. We thank Soohyung Lee, Yujin Hahn, Sam-Ho Lee, Seik Kim.

E-mail: sunhamyong@smu.edu.sg (Myong); ecspj@nus.edu.sg (Park); junjian@nus.edu.sg (Yi)