

SOCIAL NORMS & FERTILITY



DR YI JUNJIAN

We first document three stylized facts about marriage and fertility in East Asian societies: They have the highest marriage rates in the world, but the lowest fertility; they have the lowest fertility, but almost all married women have at least one child. By contrast, almost no single women have any children. We then explain these facts, focusing on two social norms associated with Confucianism: the unequal gender division of childcare within a household and the stigma attached to out-of-wedlock births. We incorporate the two social norms into a structural model and estimate it using data from South Korea's censuses and household surveys. Quantitative analyses show that, on the one hand, the social norm of unequal gender roles significantly contributes to the low fertility of South Korea, and its effect varies across education: It lowers fertility for highly educated women but increases it for lowly educated. Pro-natal policies mitigate the role of this norm by increasing fertility for the lowly educated, but they are ineffective in boosting fertility for the highly educated. On the other hand, we find that the social stigma has negligible effects. Historical simulation results show that fertility would have decreased less dramatically without the first social norm, especially for younger cohorts. We conclude that the tension between the persistent gender ideology and rapid socioeconomic development is the main driving force behind the unique marriage and fertility patterns of East Asian societies, and this tension has escalated in recent decades.

Dr. Yi is an assistant professor in the Department of Economics at National University of Singapore since 2014. He received his Ph.D. in Economics from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2011. Subsequently, he conducted the postdoctoral research in the Department of Economics at the University of Chicago in 2011-2014. His research focuses on Economics on Health and Healthcare; Healthcare Big Data Analyses, Labor and Demographic Economics, Economic Development, and Economics on Human Capital.

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