

Socioeconomic Differentials in Declining Marriage Rates in Taiwan: A rebuttal to common-sense myth

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1. Aim

This paper examines the trend of retreat from marriage in Taiwan. In particular, gender and educational differentials are examined. The potential factors and the broader socioeconomic context leading to low marriage rates are also explored for plausible explanations.

2. Data & Methods

Macro-level marriage trends are depicted with calculations based on vital statistics. Analyses on the reasons for staying single and the broader social context that forms the backdrop of non-marriage make use of several large nationwide social surveys and aggregate economic indicators. Descriptive statistics and regression analyses are conducted to explore the values and attitudes of single men and women.

3. Results

Marriage rates are declining across all educational groups for both sexes—though the drop is the steepest among the least educated. In addition, the educational gradient of first marriage rates for women change from negative to positive between 1980 and 2010. When asked about the reasons of staying single, more college-educated women indicated not finding a suitable partner as the main cause, while less educated women tend to state a fear of having unhappy marriages as the main concern. Finally, the worsened economic conditions among young employers should not be left out of the discussions on recent decline in marriage rates, as the economic foundation needed for a new family has become more difficult to build among single people in a post-industrialized society.

4. Conclusion

Contrary to the “common-sense” myth, the least educated single men and women have the weakest marriage intentions and behaviors than the better educated in recent years. The analyses underscore the importance of economic improvement and gender equality. Before a reconciliation between men and women can be reached regarding domestic division of labor and a common marriage expectation, further marriage decline is foreseeable in the years to come.