



Seminar

“Hard To Get: The Scarcity of Women And The Competition for High-income Men in Chinese Cities”

(in English)



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Biography:

David Ong received his Ph.D. in economics from the University of California, Davis. He has published theoretical and experimental work on gender differences in competitiveness and on gender differences in preferences for mate income and education.

Date: 24 November 2015 (Tuesday)

Time: 2pm – 3:30pm

Venue: WYL314, Dorothy Y. L. Wong Building

Abstract:

There have been increasing reports in China of the difficulties of elite women to find suitable mates despite the growing scarcity of women. To help explain this, we consider the influence of women's preference for men who have higher incomes than themselves. We show that the key characteristic of this “reference dependent preference” (RDP) is to escalate the competition women face as their incomes increase by reducing the pool of men they desire while simultaneously expanding the pool of other women who desire those men (i.e., reduce the “prize to participant” ratio). Consequently, high-income women can be made worse off when high-income men are even richer or more plentiful, because both increase the returns to poorer women in competing for those men. We confirm the RDP finding with a new set of online dating experiments across 15 cities, and with marriage data from the Census. We subsequently exploit variations in local sex ratios and men's incomes across major cities in China to test for changes in the online dating search intensity, marriage probability, and household bargaining power of women. As predicted, the search intensity, singles probability, and share of housework of only the high-income women increase with the incomes and plentifulness of men. Our findings with online dating, census, and time use data suggest that the reported difficulties of elite women are merely the most conspicuous consequences of RDP, which creates heterogeneous competitive environments of “effective” sex ratios at variance with the average effects of the “nominal” sex ratio predicted by standard theory.