

## Abstract

### **Trends and Implications of Delayed and Non-marriage in Korea**

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Korea has experienced marital transition since the 1920s and, as a result, the age at marriage, which was one of world lowest at the beginning of the transition, arrived at the level of the world highest about 70 years later. However, the journey is not completed as yet. Recently, various marriage related indicators reveal rapid changes in the major marital norms and these are usually related to the second transition of fertility, fast growing gender equality and recent economic developments. This points at the necessity of understanding the process of change in marital behaviour in the context of societal transformation as well as demographic transition since the 1920s.

It is within this context that the current study is situated. The construction of refined measures regarding the timing of marriage was attempted first in order to reveal its demographic patterns. The measures selected here consisted of various sets of age-specific (first) marriage rates and the total (first) marriage rates from census and vital statistics, proportions of remarriage in terms of age, propensity of marriage of single persons, and cohort ASFMRs/TFMRs. Finally, the results were brought under various societal as well as demographic lights to discuss their implications and meanings.

The current analysis reveals many limitations in the received views reflected in various arguments. For example, the influence of traditional family and marriage related norms in shaping the trend and patterns of marriage are found to have been persistent though the strength has been weakened: The idea of universal marriage appears to have buttressed the family from rapid dissolution; the rate of remarriage has increased markedly since the early 1990s, but the proportion of remarriages in a given age group shows little change or no consistent pattern of change at all. This study also confirms close relationships between marital behaviour and societal changes on a macro level. For instance, the trend and patterns of age at marriage have been persistent, but a break-through was observed whenever fundamental historical changes took place. This study paid particular attention to demographic implications of the findings and noticed that demographic exigency has been a crucial determinant in marriage market situation and marital behaviour.

Concerning lifetime non-marriage, contrasting prospects can be drawn from census and vital statistics: Judging from various census estimates, the current state of lifetime non-marriage is not serious and its progress would be rather slow, whereas the government estimates suggest that non-marriage has progressed very quickly since 1980 and was already a serious threat to society and the family. According to the analysis of cohort ASFMRs and the propensity of marriage of

single persons, however, the universality of marriage appears to have been threatened from the mid 1980s, more for men than women. This phenomenon is explained by the collapse of rural marriage market in the 1980s that put increasingly severe constraints on rural young men in finding brides. All these allude to the importance of demographic exigencies, together with social contingencies, in understanding the recent developments in marriage related behaviour and structure.