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Research Article

Marriage counterfactuals in Japan: Variation by gender, marital status, and time

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Marriage counterfactuals in Japan: Variation by gender, marital status, and time

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Abstract

BACKGROUND

This paper takes a unique perspective on the debate surrounding the deinstitutionalization of marriage. Rather than examining how diversification of family behaviors (external context) relates to marriage, it considers how perceptions of marriage dimensions (the internal context) vary across relevant stakeholders.

OBJECTIVE

We ask whether perceived consequences of marriage differ for people who married vs. people who never married and men vs. women and over time.

METHODS

Based on data from the 1994 *National Survey on Work and Family Life* in Japan and the 2000 and 2009 *National Survey of Family and Economic Conditions* (NSFEC) in Japan (N = 8,467) we use unique measures of perceived consequences of marriage (“marriage counterfactuals”) to examine social, economic, psychological, and personal dimensions (i.e., respect, living standard, emotional security, freedom, and overall satisfaction).

RESULTS

Ordinal regression results reveal that marital perceptions worsened over time (in terms of living standard and freedom), consistent with worsening economic conditions. We also find that people who have never been married tend to view marriage more favorably than their married counterparts (especially freedom and respect), while men view marriage consequences (except for living standard) more favorably than women.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite more negative change over time in perceptions of marriage among people who never married than people who have married, the traditional breadwinner-homemaker

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model of marriage continues to be important and influential in Japan, and cultural beliefs regarding traditional marriage persist in spite of structural changes.

CONTRIBUTION

Research and theory on family change should pay more attention to the internal marriage context more fully than they have in the past.

1. Introduction

With the advent of delayed marriage, cohabitation, lifetime singlehood, and same-sex marriage (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004; Heuveline, Timberlake, and Furstenberg 2003; Holland 2017; Jones and Yeung 2014; Kiernan 2001), it is clear that marriage as an institution has been changing throughout many parts of the world. As behavioral changes surrounding the marriage institution abound, attitudes toward, and perceptions related to, marriage and family have also shifted away from traditional norms of universal marriage and childbearing (Fuwa 2014; Gubernskaya 2010; Jones 2005) and toward greater individualism and tolerance for diversity of personal and family behaviors (Lee and Mutz 2019; Lesthaeghe 2014; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Treas, Lui, and Gubernskaya 2014).

These family changes have been viewed as evidence that marriage is undergoing *deinstitutionalization*, which has been defined in terms of the rise of marriage alternatives and a decline in the dominance of marriage (Cherlin 2004, 2020) as well as the lesser governance of spouses' behaviors by social norms (Cherlin 2004, 2020; Lauer and Yodanis 2010). An alternative perspective is *diversification*, which does not focus on understanding family change in terms of the marital institution but in other ways, including personal life and relationships (for a comprehensive discussion, see Knapp and Wurm 2019). However, putting aside questions of whether alternatives to marriage (i.e., contexts external to the institution) should be interpreted in terms of deinstitutionalization or diversification, in this paper we focus on a less-studied aspect of marriage, namely, how social, economic, psychological, and personal dimensions of the marital experience, or what might be considered features of the internal context of marriage, are changing over time and across relevant stakeholders.

To gauge such internal factors, we use responses to a unique set of survey questions (that we refer to as “marriage counterfactuals”) which asked respondents to indicate how their life would be different (in terms of respect, emotional security, living standard, freedom, and overall satisfaction) if they had a marital status that differed from the one they held at the time of the survey. Questions about marriage are often general in nature, such as when survey respondents, regardless of marital status, are

asked whether it is necessary to be married or whether people are happier being married, or when married individuals are asked to provide global assessments of their marital happiness or satisfaction (cf. Gubernskaya 2010; Lee and Ono 2008; Qian and Sayer 2016; Treas, Lui, and Gubernskaya 2014). However, overall, the literature lacks a comprehensive grasp of the way marriage is perceived within the general population, especially along dimensions (other than economic benefits) that are usually seen as inducements to marriage. Moreover, evidence of how perceptions might be shifting among those whose choices will shape the future of the institution (i.e., the not-yet-married) is altogether absent, making it difficult to assess a normative shift and, therefore, to fully assess concepts such as the “deinstitutionalization of marriage.”

Our study is set in Japan in the period between 1994 and 2009, which for several reasons is an important sociohistorical context for such a research topic. First, while some marriage and family trends in Japan are similar to those in Western countries (e.g., increasing delays in marriage and rates of lifetime singlehood) (Jones 2005; Raymo et al. 2015), others, especially those related to alternatives to traditional marriage (e.g., cohabitation, single-parenthood, and same-sex marriage), are quite dissimilar from those seen in Western countries (Raymo, Iwasawa, and Bumpass 2009; Rindfuss et al. 2004; Tamagawa 2016). Thus, our paper is important for comparative purposes.

Our study setting is important for another reason, one that is related to temporal changes: marriage in Japan⁴ is a highly gendered institution, and is still largely (although not exclusively) characterized by a man-as-breadwinner/woman-as-homemaker model of household labor division that is heavily dependent on the employment opportunities available to men (and has been characterized by relatively more limited opportunities for women). However, starting in the 1990s, the Japanese economy sank into a prolonged recession and the labor market began shifting toward a higher prevalence of nonregular or nonstandard work, especially for young men. These changes affected the marriage market and threatened the viability of the traditional breadwinner role, making it difficult for men to realize their marriage intentions (Piotrowski, Kalleberg, and Rindfuss 2015). Because of the tight link between fertility and marriage in Japan (and much of East Asia; Dales 2018; Raymo et al. 2015), where the vast majority of childbearing occurs exclusively within legal, marital unions, failure to realize marriage intentions is concomitantly linked to failure to realize fertility intentions (Gauthier 2015; Jones 2007). This is significant, because fertility levels in Japan are very low (Frejka, Jones, and Sardon 2010; Tsuya 2015). Understanding counterfactual marriage perceptions, especially of the population of people who have never been married, during a period of economic change and labor market restructuring,

⁴ At this time of writing, same-sex marriage is not legally recognized in Japan, thus our analysis is limited to heterosexual marriage.

is therefore important to understanding the wider context surrounding the low fertility phenomena in Japan and other countries.

We pose the following research question: Did perceptions of consequences of marriage in Japan change over time, and by marital status and gender, in the period between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s? In what follows, we begin by discussing personal costs and benefits of marriage, their relationship to the “specialization and trading model,” and how these may be affected by economic changes, followed by a review of the literature on Japanese marriage and how it has been affected by changes in the economy. In so doing we also provide an overview of the setting for our research, Japan during the mid-1990s to the late 2000s, before describing our research design and presenting our results. We conclude by discussing how our findings contribute to the larger debate over the changes in the marriage institution, particularly from the perspective of the institution’s internal context (i.e., social, economic, psychological, and personal dimensions of marriage).

2. Background

Much of our understanding of the link between marriage and changes in the social context comes from studies conducted in the Western setting. According to Becker’s (1991) specialization and trading model, an economically efficient gendered division of labor emerges (based on comparative advantage of gender-differentiated skills), whereby men invest in the labor market and women invest in the home. This creates interdependencies within marriage, increasing marital stability. However, the benefits of marriage diminish as a consequence of women’s employment, and their increased economic independence leads to later and fewer marriages (i.e., an independence effect) and greater marital instability.

In contrast, Oppenheimer (1988), drawing upon job-search theory, developed a model of marriage timing predicated on the transition to stable work. Considering the context of marriage markets, she suggests that, with increasing labor force participation, women’s earnings potential becomes a more prominent basis for evaluating their own marriage prospects and lessens the importance of men’s role as economic provider (Oppenheimer and Lew 1995). While women’s growing economic resources can facilitate a longer search by them for a “good match,” a poor economy can affect marital timing for men by delaying their transition to stable work (Oppenheimer 1988). In other words, the marital bargain changes in tandem with changes in the socioeconomic landscape.

Indeed, the most prominent explanation for reduced or delayed partnership and family formation patterns is persistently high unemployment and unstable work (see

Kreyenfeld, Andersson, and Pailhe 2012; Sassler and Lichter 2020 for an overview). Economic changes can create tension or incompatibility between longstanding ideas related to marriage and the realities facing individuals contemplating its costs and benefits, thereby creating distinct experiences among cohorts or across time periods in the general population. Characteristics of worsening economic conditions (such as lower income, increased job demands, or general employment uncertainty) or factors associated with mass economic shifts (e.g., the change from an industrial to a service base), may lead people to view traditional (breadwinner-homemaker) marriage as a less viable economic avenue for improving one's standard of living or other facets of well-being.

Economic changes notwithstanding, research has shown that women's earnings are now positively associated with marriage formation in Western countries, supporting Oppenheimer's ideas but not Becker's (Ono 2003; Sweeney 2002). The same is true in Japan, at least for a recent (1970s) birth cohort of Japanese women (Fukuda 2013). Similarly, Fukuda, Raymo, and Yoda (2019) found the relationship between education and first marriage has reversed for women, shifting from a negative educational gradient that ended by 2005 to a positive one that began after 2009 (and that remains positive for men). However, we should be cautious in assuming that marriage in Japan is directly analogous to that of Western marriage. As we discuss in more detail below, unlike its Western counterparts, the Japanese marriage context is still characterized by a rigidly packaged arrangement of concurrent statuses and roles, including the man-as-breadwinner and woman-as-homemaker roles (Piotrowski, Kalleberg, and Rindfuss 2015). This arrangement persists despite economic changes antagonistic to the maintenance of this gendered division of labor.

Besides marriage timing, the specialization and trading model has also been used to study marital happiness (Lee and Ono 2008), but perceptions of the benefits of marriage for other key stakeholders, namely, people who have never been married, have received less attention in the research literature. It is well established in the literature that marriage provides benefits for married people that are not enjoyed by people who have never been married, especially in terms of health, well-being, and economic stability (e.g., Waite 1995; Waite and Gallagher 2001; Wells and Zinn 2004). Although benefits are likely due to both selection and causal effects (Carr and Springer 2010; Fincham and Beach 2010), there is a clear tie between marriage quality and marriage benefits (Karney and Bradbury 2020). Married couples commonly benefit from economies of scale because they share economic resources such as income, residence, and financial assets. There are also benefits, especially for men, in terms of emotional security from intimate partnerships. For people who have never been married, in addition to potentially accessing these benefits, the possibility of becoming married can be an important social marker of the transition to adulthood, particularly for men, and is

thus afforded a unique type of social status (Nock 1998). Nevertheless, there are also perceived costs to marriage, such as potential loss of personal freedom or individual ambition (Regnerus and Uecker 2011) due to marriage being a “greedy institution” (cf. Coser 1974; see also Gerstel and Sarkisian 2006).

It is important to examine variation in men’s and women’s perceived benefits and costs of marriage in a setting such as Japan, where gender remains a powerful influence on the division of paid and unpaid labor within marriage (Raymo et al. 2015; Tsutsui 2016; Tsuya et al. 2012), and where changing economic circumstances may exacerbate already gendered perceptions of the value of marriage. We now turn to a discussion of these issues within the Japanese context.

2.1 Marriage and family in Japan

The traditional East Asian family, characteristic of Japan, is markedly more patriarchal, patrimonial, patrilineal, and patrilocal than in the West (Chen and Li 2014; Chu and Yu 2010; Kim and Park 2010), and marriage as part of a package that bundles together various family roles and obligations (childcare, caring for dependent elders) along gender lines remains profoundly entrenched in Japan (Tsutsui 2016; Tsuya et al. 2012). With this in mind, marriage and family behaviors and attitudes in Japan can be characterized as: (1) changing in some of the same ways as they have in Western countries, (2) differing in other ways from patterns in Western countries, and (3) continuing to privilege highly the traditional breadwinner-homemaker model of marriage.

Since the post-War era, and accelerating after the 1970s, rates of marriage and childbearing declined steadily, while age at first marriage and childbearing have increased (NIPSSR 2017b; Raymo et al. 2015). The Japanese total fertility rate dropped from 4.4 in 1945 to a rate of around 1.4 more recently (Frejka, Jones, and Sardon 2010; Tsuya 2015). According to statistics from the *Statistical handbook of Japan* (2019), the mean age at first marriage rose over a 20-year period by 2.5 years for men (to an age of 31.1) and 2.7 years for women (to an age of 29.4) as of 2018, while the percentage of those who have never married by age 50 was 23.4% for men and 14.1% for women in 2015, and mother’s average age at first birth rose from 25.6 in 1970 to 30.7 in 2018.

Alternatives to traditional marriage in Japan are less common than in Western countries. Nonmarital cohabitation rates, although increasing, remain among the lowest in the world. Those that do occur, moreover, tend to be short in duration and a precursor to traditional marriage rather than an alternative to it, both of which are anomalous relative to a number of Western countries (Raymo, Iwasawa, and Bumpass 2009; Raymo et al. 2015; Tsuya 2006b). Also in contrast to many Western countries, rates of

nonmarital childbearing are very low due to a strong birth-in-wedlock culture (Dales 2018; NIPSSR 2017b; Raymo and Iwasawa 2017). Finally, the divorce rate also remains low compared to countries like the United States (Taniguchi and Kaufman 2014), although it has risen since the mid-twentieth century (Raymo, Fukuda, and Iwasawa 2013).⁵

2.2 The changing economy, marriage, and gendered expectations

The prominence of Japan's traditional marriage structure, with its well-defined gendered division of labor, is rooted in economic factors past and present. In the post-War era, Japan adopted a lifetime employment system (Cole 1971; Koike 1983; Lincoln and Nakata 1997), which created high costs for employers and thus demanded high levels of devotion (in hours and years) from regular employees (Brinton 1993; Ogasawara 1998). The resulting work environment encouraged "voluntary" job exits among some workers perceived to be less suitable, which invariably included most women, who often occupied either clerical jobs (known as "office ladies" in large companies) or were only secondary earners (Brinton 1993; Ogasawara 1998). The result was a set of gender-stratified tracks for education, professional training, employment, and promotion (Brinton 1993; Ogasawara 1998) that placed men on a path to life-long breadwinner status and women into the permanent homemaker (and sometimes supplementary earner) role. In other words, the labor market and marriage were mutually reinforcing. At the height of this arrangement, the Japanese economy experienced three decades of unprecedented growth.

Japan's economic bubble burst at the end of 1989, precipitating a fifteen-year downturn from which the economy has never fully recovered (Hoshi and Kashyap 2004; Hutchison, Ito, and Westermann 2006). The traditional employment system downsized in the face of the longest and deepest economic recession seen in the industrial world since the 1930s, substantially weakening the employer-employee commitment contract (Ahmadjian and Robbins 2005; Ahmadjian and Robinson 2001; Kambayashi and Kato 2017; Lincoln and Nakata 1997; Yu 2010). Other important economic shifts include the rise of the service sector, increasing agricultural efficiency, and the outsourcing of manufacturing and manual-labor jobs and a general emergence of a precarious workforce (Gordon 2017; Osawa, Kim, and Kingston 2013). With the downturn in real wages beginning in the early 1990s, meeting basic expenses has

⁵ Variation in family behaviors by educational level in Japan should be noted. For example, nonmarital cohabitation and premarital and bridal pregnancy are most frequent among less-educated Japanese women (Raymo and Iwasawa 2008; Raymo, Iwasawa, and Bumpass 2009; Raymo et al. 2015; Tsuya 2006a), and divorce is negatively correlated with education (Raymo, Fukuda, and Iwasawa 2013).

become more challenging for the average citizen (Nippon 2019).⁶ Moreover, the costs of education in Japan are among the highest in the world and are borne mostly by individual households; thus, acquiring the education necessary to be competitive in the Japanese labor market is a substantial financial burden (Brasor and Tsubuku 2011).

Despite the changes that occurred, Japanese firms from the 1990s onward retained many of the core (employer-benefiting) elements of the permanent employment system (Kato 2001; Yashiro 2011; Yu 2010), including long work hours, scarce leave time, and minimal employee freedom. Policy efforts to make the full-time labor force more accessible to women have been highly publicized and numerous in recent years, most notably the Abe administration's "Womenomics" policy, first unveiled in 2013. However, these policies appear to have benefited only the small number of women capable of assimilating into Japan's traditional, masculinized employment arrangement while segregating the majority of women into precarious, part-time work (Dalton 2017). In addition, a relatively weak welfare system, ineffective government policies for easing work-family conflicts, and an insufficient number of day care center spaces (Boling 2015) have made it difficult for wives and mothers to balance family obligations with those of full-time paid work. Although the employment rates of married Japanese women have increased modestly (Brinton 2017), many Japanese women still exit the labor force after marriage or when their first child is born and return to work years later, usually in part-time jobs (Brinton 2017; Raymo and Iwasawa 2017; Raymo and Lim 2011; Yu 2002, 2005). Economic dependence on their husbands leaves them shouldering a potentially onerous load of housework and intensive rearing of children (Gottfried 2014; Hirao 2001; Oshio, Nozaki, and Kobayashi 2013), as well as possible coresidence with, and care of, parents or in-laws (Roberts 2016). In sum, economic and labor market factors are arguably the most important reasons for continuation of the man-as-breadwinner and woman-as-homemaker model of marriage in Japan (Park and Sandefur 2005; Raymo et al. 2015).⁷

Some evidence suggests that the Japanese tend to see marriage as more essential to men's life satisfaction than to women's (Choe et al. 2014). As Japanese marriage typically supports men acting as breadwinners and employees, men may internalize and act in accordance with the view that marriage is essential to fulfilling these prescribed roles. Supporting the specialization and trading model, research has shown that Japanese men's marital happiness is negatively associated with wives' employment

⁶ Japan is famous for its high cost of living (WorldData 2019), which has been implicated in the country's population decline. It should be noted, however, that this reputation arises in part due to the notoriety of Tokyo as one of the most expensive cities in the world, whereas the cost in other parts of the country may be as little as half that found in the capital (Japan-Guide 2019).

⁷ Other factors that have contributed to persistent marriage traditionalism in Japan include the country's very low immigration population and rate (Boling 2008) and overall high population homogeneity (Levey and Silver 2006; Ono and Ono 2015).

(Lee and Ono 2008), while Japanese women's marital happiness is positively associated with husbands' employment and personal income but negatively (or not at all) associated with her own employment and personal income (Brinton 2017; Lee and Ono 2008). Men who marry typically see little change in their (already low) share of housework (Tsuya et al. 2012), but results are mixed with respect to whether husbands' (and wives') marital satisfaction is related to their share of housework (Brinton 2017; Kaufman and Taniguchi 2009; Oshio, Nozaki, and Kobayashi 2013; Qian and Sayer 2016). Because married Japanese men benefit from a spouse's physical and emotional caretaking, they are more likely than women to see marriage as providing emotional security and support and as a source of happiness (Boling 2008; Inaba 2004; Lee and Ono 2008). Furthermore, as men living in a patriarchal society, they likely have stronger investment in maintaining the *status quo* than women.

These gendered inequalities have likely created ambivalence toward marriage among some Japanese women; concerns over their autonomy being limited and their ability to avoid sexist partners were two reasons why the highly-educated Japanese women who have never been married interviewed by Nemoto (2008) were reluctant to marry. Nemoto, Fuwa, and Ishiguro (2013) also found ambivalence toward marriage among the highly-educated Japanese men who have never been married in their interview study because of weaker social pressure to marry and marriage age norms and the men's concerns that they will lose autonomy and freedom once they marry (see also NIPSSR 2017a). Japanese adults (women and men) who have never been married often enjoy comfort, freedom, and limited responsibilities while single, especially if they live with their parents (Yoshida 2017; Yu and Kuo 2017), though many scholars and the media see coresidence with parents as problematic, referring to such people as "Parasite Singles" (Ronald and Hirayama 2009; Yamada 2001). Not surprisingly, then, "freedom of action and lifestyle" has been given as one of the chief merits of being single among most respondents of both genders who have never been married in national Japanese surveys conducted since the 1980s (NIPSSR 2017a).

In spite of the potential benefits of remaining single, national survey data also indicates the vast majority of Japanese men and women express relatively strong intentions to marry (Kawamura 2011; NIPSSR 2017a; Yu and Kuo 2017). Japanese people who have never been married report being significantly less happy than those of other marital statuses (married, divorced, widowed) (Kaufman and Taniguchi 2010), and Japanese women report "drifting" into singlehood more than actively choosing (Yoshida 2017). Among both young women and men who have never been married, having one's own "children and family" and "psychological relief" are the two most commonly reported benefits of marriage, with a higher percentage of women than men (49% versus 36% in 2015) giving the former as a primary benefit (NIPSSR 2017a). Moreover, men's breadwinning capacity is highly valued by Japanese single women,

and anticipation of doing nearly all the housework does not inhibit them from wanting to marry, highlighting the continued salience of the man-as-breadwinner and woman-as-homemaker (or specialization and trading) model (Brinton and Oh 2019). These findings suggest that traditional Japanese marriage remains highly culturally relevant even as participation falls.

For both men and women, recent economic changes may present an important barrier to marriage, however, with having enough money viewed by many young, single Japanese men and women as an obstacle (Kawamura 2011; NIPSSR 2017a). Because securing regular, stable employment is now more challenging for men, possibly the primarily economic benefit of traditional marriage for women is decreasing in both absolute and relative (to men) terms. Additionally, un- and underemployment may have left some men feeling they are undesirable candidates for marriage (Yoshida 2017), and research suggests that employment in nonregular work reduces their marriage chances (Piotrowski, Kalleberg, and Rindfuss 2015). In sum, economic pressures and declining opportunities may make it difficult for individuals to reconcile their financial concerns with their marriage and/or fertility goals (Piotrowski et al. 2018; Rossier and Bernardi 2009).

3. Hypotheses

Drawing upon theoretical and empirical work discussed here, we aim to understand how perceptions of the internal context of marriage, in terms of the social, economic, psychological, and personal dimensions of the marital experience, differ across time and across key stakeholders in Japanese society. We advance the following hypotheses. First, we predict a general decline across marital statuses (i.e., among both people who have married and people who have never been married) in the perceived benefits (in terms of respect, living standard, emotional security, and overall satisfaction) or costs (in the case of personal freedom) of marriage over the time period examined, concomitant with the worsening economic situation in Japan. In the case of people who have never been married, the less favorable economic climate may lead them to see marriage as especially out-of-reach (as compared to their married counterparts) and therefore of less benefit. Second, given the characteristics of the traditional man-as-breadwinner and woman-as-homemaker model of marriage (i.e., the specialization and trading model), we predict at all time points that, everything else being equal, men will perceive marriage as more beneficial than women, with one exception: women may perceive marriage as more beneficial economically than men. Third, given the deterioration of the economy but ongoing pressure on men to enact the breadwinner role, we expect over the time period men will view the benefits of marriage as less

advantageous (increasingly less positive) and the cost of marriage as more disadvantageous (increasingly more negative); we do not expect similar changes over time for women.

4. Methods

4.1 Data

We use repeat cross-sectional Japanese data from the 1994 *National Survey on Work and Family Life* and the 2000 and 2009 *National Survey of Family and Economic Conditions* (NSFEC). The data collection was directed by Keio University and was carried out by Shin Joho Center. Data collection for each year used a similar approach: a two-stage nationally representative probability sample of men and women ages 20–49. The first stage used geographic primary sampling units, based on population census tracts, and the second stage used the basic residence registration (*jumin kihon daicho*) system. Response rates for these surveys were modest: e.g., 70, 64, and 54% of those sampled from Japan’s basic residence registration system participated in the 1994, 2000, and 2009 cross-sectional surveys, respectively (Rindfuss et al. 2015; Tsuya and Bumpass 2004).⁸

Sample individuals were first contacted with a postcard explaining the research project and informed that a fieldworker would visit to drop off a self-administered questionnaire. After the completed questionnaires were collected, respondents were given two things: (1) a gift certificate worth ¥2000 (approximately US\$20) and (2) a postcard to notify the survey agency in the event of an address change. In Japan, research suggests that drop-off self-administered surveys generally have higher response rates than personal interviews (Yamada and Synodinos 1994).

⁸ While not a high response rate, these values are in line with survey responses of other major Japanese data collections, such as the Japanese General Social Survey (cf. Rindfuss et al. 2015, Table 1). Moreover, Rindfuss et al. (2015) using comparisons of the 2000 and 2009 data to paradata (i.e., data about the process by which data were collected), found that relationships between variables in multivariable analysis, controlling for a variety of background variables, did not reveal a pattern of systematic bias from low response rates.

4.2 Sample

All respondents, ages 20–49⁹ of both genders, were used in the analysis, with the exception of the following two groups. First, we excluded any respondents (about 4% of the overall sample) who were previously married (i.e., divorced, separated, or widowed) as they were not asked survey items used for our dependent variables. Second, we used list-wise deletion to drop any cases having missing data on any of the variables used in our analysis (an additional 6% of cases). Our analytical sample has a total of 8,465 respondents.

4.3 Measures

Our dependent variables – the “marriage counterfactual” measures – include a series of questions about each respondents’ perceived consequences of having an alternate marital status. Specifically, if respondents were married, they were asked to imagine how their life would be different if they were not married right now, and vice-versa. A series of questions asked about five specific perceived differences: respect, emotional security, standard of living, freedom, and overall satisfaction; the following includes a translation¹⁰ of the actual item asked about in the survey.

Mnemonic	Survey Question
Respect	Respect from others
Emotional Security	Your sense of emotional security
Living Standard	Your standard of living
Freedom	Your freedom to do the things you enjoy
Overall	Your overall satisfaction

In each case, respondents were asked to indicate how these aspects would be better or worse than their present marital status (i.e., not married if currently married and vice-versa). Each is measured on a 5-point Likert scale, which had the following categories (from lowest to highest values): “Much Worse,” “Somewhat Worse,” “Same,” “Somewhat Better,” and “Much Better.” We coded these items in such a way that for both married respondents and respondents who have never married, higher values

⁹ The data collection also captured some respondents who were 50 years old. In 1994, the age range was wider (i.e., up to 60 years old), but we limited the analysis to only those between the ages of 20 and 49 to keep comparability with the 2000 and 2009 data.

¹⁰ We believe that the following may represent better translations than those shown in the table (which are taken from the technical materials for the studies): freedom – “freedom to do what I want to do”; emotional security – “emotional peace/ease”; overall – “satisfaction about everyday life in general.”

indicate that married life is viewed more as a benefit than single life and lower values indicate the reverse, that married life is viewed more as a cost than single life.¹¹ Doing so facilitated pooling the data for some analysis.

Gender (men = 1), marital status (never-married = 1), and year of survey (i.e., 1994, 2000, 2009) are our main independent variables of interest. We also include measures of basic demographics, including age (in years), education, employment status, urban upbringing, and homeownership. We used dummy variable coding (including a series of dummy variables, as needed) for several measures, including: education (high school and below, junior college, and college and beyond), employment status (for regular work, nonregular work¹², and not in the labor force), urban upbringing, and homeownership.

4.4 Research design and analytical approach

The marriage counterfactual measures are the dependent variables. We performed the analysis separately by marital status and by gender, although we also pooled the data (with marital status and gender as independent variables) for some analysis. Because our dependent variables are measured at an ordinal level, we used a series of ordered logit models (see Long 1997 for technical details) to examine the association of our outcomes and the main independent variables, net of controls.¹³ To examine the magnitude of results, we computed predicted probabilities from the model estimates, varying the value of some variable(s) of interest (i.e., gender, marital status, and time period) while keeping the other variables at their actual value in the dataset. We present these results in figures.

¹¹ We accomplished this by reverse-coding the dependent variables for married respondents.

¹² Information about self-employment was only collected for the 2009 data and not for years 1994 or 2000. Therefore, in an effort to keep a consistent definition of employment status across time (i.e., to contrast regular full-time workers from part-time, contract, or other arrangements), we grouped self-employed workers (about 5% of the analytical sample that year) along with nonregular workers in that year. As a sensitivity test, we also tried grouping self-employed workers along with regular workers in the year 2009; our main results were unchanged by this alternative categorization (*results available on request*).

¹³ In preliminary analysis we used confirmatory factor analysis and latent class analysis to create continuous and categorical variables, respectively, from these observed items. However, results suggested that these items were capturing different aspects of marriage and we therefore could not identify any meaningful underlying commonalities in the measures.

5. Results

Table 1 shows a distribution of the marriage counterfactual measures, separately by marital status and gender. Across marital statuses and genders, respondents were mostly neutral (although more optimistic than pessimistic) about respect accruing from marriage, but generally much more optimistic about emotional security and overall satisfaction, while much more pessimistic about personal freedom. Compared to women, men tend to be more optimistic about respect and emotional security, but women are more inclined to see standard of living as a potential benefit of marriage. Finally, compared to people who have never been married, currently married respondents tend to see standard of living as more of a marriage benefit.

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for the independent variables, separately by marital status and gender. A slightly higher proportion of men that have never been married in the sample are compared to women (43% vs. 36%); the sample is gender-balanced, although there are slightly fewer men than women among the currently married, and slightly more men among the people who have never been married. The average age is higher, as one would expect, for currently married respondents compared to respondents who have never been married (37.5 vs. 27.8 years), but it is similar for men and women overall (around 33 years). The distribution of education is similar for both marital status groups, with around half in the lowest category (high school and below), followed by junior college, and college and beyond. There is evidence of educational tracking by gender, as noticeably more women have junior college degrees (38%), while over twice as many men have a college degree or beyond (31% vs. 15%). The majority of respondents of both marital statuses are employed as regular workers, although the proportion is smaller for the currently married and is clearly very gendered¹⁴, with the majority of women either working as nonregular workers or not in the labor force. Urban upbringing is notably higher among people who have never been married compared to currently married people (74% vs. 57%), although similar for men and women (around 60-some % for each). Homeownership varies by marital status, with over half of currently married respondents owning homes compared to less than a fifth of respondents who have never married, but there is little difference by gender. The distribution by year shows that most respondents, around half, were surveyed in the year 2000.

¹⁴ This is most likely due to married Japanese women dropping out of the labor force upon having a child and returning years later as nonregular workers. In preliminary analysis (*results available on request*), we confirmed that a larger proportion of currently married men than women (93% vs 26%) were working as regular workers in our sample.

Table 1: Distribution of perceived marriage benefits by marital status and gender

	Cur Mar %	Neu Mar %	Men %	Women %	Total %
Respect					
Much worse	1.48	0.69	0.87	1.45	1.17
Somewhat worse	4.87	2.28	2.16	5.45	3.85
Same	65.01	72.03	62.33	72.92	67.77
Somewhat better	22.58	21.69	27.91	16.84	22.23
Much better	6.07	3.30	6.72	3.34	4.98
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Emotional security					
Much worse	4.13	1.83	2.48	3.93	3.22
Somewhat worse	9.58	5.80	5.68	10.37	8.09
Same	25.30	25.50	23.86	26.82	25.38
Somewhat better	36.94	43.98	40.63	38.83	39.71
Much better	24.06	22.89	27.35	20.04	23.60
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Living standard					
Much worse	10.59	11.20	13.35	8.44	10.83
Somewhat worse	23.32	33.55	27.99	26.73	27.34
Same	36.16	35.75	36.92	35.13	36.00
Somewhat better	19.27	16.28	14.73	21.28	18.09
Much better	10.67	3.21	7.01	8.42	7.74
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Freedom					
Much worse	36.49	25.02	30.39	33.49	31.98
Somewhat worse	35.48	49.17	40.02	41.66	40.86
Same	21.06	21.87	23.93	18.96	21.38
Somewhat better	4.75	2.91	4.03	4.03	4.03
Much better	2.22	1.02	1.63	1.86	1.75
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Overall					
Much worse	4.13	3.12	3.35	4.09	3.73
Somewhat worse	12.01	9.79	8.62	13.53	11.14
Same	29.31	30.55	27.60	31.88	29.80
Somewhat better	35.09	41.27	39.00	36.12	37.52
Much better	19.46	15.26	21.43	14.38	17.81
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>N</i>	5138	3329	4120	4347	8467

Note: Respondents asked to indicate (rank) how life would be different (on five dimensions) if their marital status was different (i.e., never-married became married or married became never-married). Reverse-coding used for married respondents, so that 'Much Better' refers to becoming married or staying married.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for independent variables

	Currently married		Never married		Women		Men	
	mean	sd	mean	sd	mean	sd	mean	sd
Never married					0.36	0.48	0.43	0.49
Gender (Men)	0.46	0.50	0.53	0.50				
Age	37.52	6.83	27.83	6.20	33.56	8.11	33.86	8.11
Education								
HS and below	0.52	0.50	0.46	0.50	0.47	0.50	0.53	0.50
Junior college	0.27	0.44	0.29	0.45	0.38	0.49	0.16	0.37
College and beyond	0.21	0.41	0.25	0.43	0.15	0.36	0.31	0.46
Employment status								
Regular	0.57	0.50	0.67	0.47	0.40	0.49	0.83	0.38
Non-Reg	0.20	0.40	0.17	0.37	0.29	0.45	0.09	0.28
Not if LF	0.23	0.42	0.16	0.37	0.32	0.47	0.08	0.28
Urban upbringing	0.57	0.49	0.74	0.44	0.62	0.48	0.65	0.48
Homeowner	0.56	0.50	0.19	0.39	0.43	0.50	0.40	0.49
Year								
1994	0.24	0.43	0.13	0.33	0.18	0.39	0.20	0.40
2000	0.45	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.49	0.50	0.48	0.50
2009	0.31	0.46	0.35	0.48	0.33	0.47	0.32	0.47
Observations	5138		3329		4347		4120	

Table 3 shows ordered logit regression results for the pooled sample. We can reject the null hypothesis (at a 0.05 alpha level) that the coefficient showing the difference between never-married and currently married is equal to zero on only two dimensions: perceived respect and freedom. Both of these coefficients are positive for being never married. Recall that the dependent variables measure the gradient of perceived benefit (or perceived cost) of changing marital status to married (for respondents who have never been married) or of remaining married (for those who are already married). Thus, the associations between the never-married status and perceived respect and freedom imply that people who have never been married see more benefit to each of these dimensions (relative to the currently married) in a change to being married or to remaining married (which, as a shorthand, we refer to throughout as “benefit of marriage”). As expected, with the exception of living standard, men tend to see higher benefit to the other dimensions of marriage compared to women. Given the pressures of the breadwinner role, it is not surprising that men are less likely to see standard of living as a benefit (alternatively, we can say they see it as more of a cost of marriage). Also as expected, across years, the perceived benefits of marriage are lower in 2000 and 2009, relative to year 1994 (indicating a declining trend over time), but only in terms of living standard and freedom (we cannot reject the null hypothesis that coefficients for the other dimensions are equal to zero), perhaps exemplifying the deteriorating

economic conditions and possibly rising individualism (or perhaps the adoption of a more Western mindset).

Table 3: Ordered logit regressions of pro-marriage counterfactual

	Respect	Emotional	Living Stand	Freedom	Overall
Never married	0.20	0.09	-0.09	0.51	0.08
	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
	0.001	0.081	0.082	0.000	0.115
Gender (Men)	0.71	0.39	-0.25	0.17	0.40
	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Age	0.03	-0.01	0.03	0.03	0.01
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	0.000	0.015	0.000	0.000	0.109
Education					
HS and below	—	—	—	—	—
Junior college	-0.02	0.19	-0.14	-0.07	0.07
	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
	0.669	0.000	0.004	0.161	0.136
College and beyond	0.15	0.46	-0.05	-0.06	0.43
	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
	0.013	0.000	0.333	0.209	0.000
Employment status					
Regular work	—	—	—	—	—
Non-Reg	0.01	-0.05	0.31	0.17	0.01
	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
	0.940	0.391	0.000	0.003	0.864
Not in LF	-0.05	0.03	0.31	0.06	0.08
	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
	0.447	0.583	0.000	0.315	0.133
Urban upbringing	-0.07	-0.04	0.01	0.11	-0.04
	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04
	0.180	0.316	0.867	0.012	0.286
Homeowner	0.16	0.09	0.12	0.07	0.14
	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
	0.002	0.060	0.012	0.155	0.002
Year					
1994	—	—	—	—	—
2000	-0.09	0.01	-0.33	-0.33	-0.01
	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
	0.187	0.825	0.000	0.000	0.912
2009	-0.09	0.11	-0.12	-0.33	0.12
	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
	0.215	0.074	0.037	0.000	0.052

Table 3: (Continued)

	Respect	Emotional	Living Stand	Freedom	Overall
Cut Points					
cut1	-3.29	-3.27	-1.48	0.24	-2.69
	0.19	0.15	0.14	0.14	0.15
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.088	0.000
cut2	-1.78	-1.92	0.18	2.01	-1.18
	0.16	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14
	0.000	0.000	0.176	0.000	0.000
cut3	2.27	-0.38	1.78	3.83	0.38
	0.16	0.14	0.14	0.15	0.14
	0.000	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.005
cut4	4.28	1.37	3.24	5.07	2.16
	0.17	0.14	0.14	0.16	0.14
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total	8467	8467	8467	8467	8467
-2 LL	15295.4	22966.8	24480.8	21154.9	23540.8
AIC	15325.4	22996.8	24510.8	21184.9	23570.8
BIC	15431.1	23102.5	24616.4	21290.6	23676.5

Note: Standard errors in second row, p-values in third row.

Next, we consider separate models for men and women (Table 4) and for married and never-married (Table 5), for which we include predicted probabilities (see Figures 1 and 2, respectively). Surprisingly, differences over time do not appear to be gendered: Men and women both see lower benefits (or higher cost) to marriage in terms of living standard and freedom (albeit for women, unlike for men, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the effect of living standard in 2009 is equal to zero). So, although on the whole men anticipate greater benefits to marriage compared to women, both genders see declines in benefits over time on at least these two dimensions.¹⁵ From the predicted probabilities (Figure 1) the most pronounced time trend is for living standard, for which the proportion of men who perceive this dimension of marriage as worse (i.e., either ‘much worse’ or ‘somewhat worse’ or overall less beneficial) increased especially between 1994 and 2000 (from 10% to 14% and 25% to 29%, respectively), although by 2009 the trend had leveled out; for women, the differences across time were less pronounced. From Table 4, we can also see some differences in the effect of marital status by gender. Specifically, relative to their married counterparts, women who never married, but not men, see more benefits to marriage in terms of respect, emotional security, and overall satisfaction. For both genders, individuals who never

¹⁵ We also performed Wald tests of differences in coefficients across male and female equations. For each dependent variable except for “respect”, we can reject that null hypothesis that the marital status coefficient was different for men and women; however, we could not reject the null hypothesis for any of the time period coefficients showing such differences across these equations (detailed results available on request).

marry are more likely than their married counterparts to perceive freedom as a benefit of marriage, while living standard operates in contrasting ways for men and women (with the men who never marry seeing it as less of a benefit of marriage relative to married men).

Table 4: Ordered logits regressions of pro-marriage counterfactual, by gender

	Respect		Emotional		Living standard		Freedom		Overall	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Never married	0.22	0.13	0.36	-0.12	0.22	-0.33	0.79	0.24	0.26	-0.07
	0.10	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.07
	0.025	0.116	0.000	0.117	0.006	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.001	0.348
Age	0.02	0.03	-0.01	-0.01	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.01
	0.01	0.01	0.004	0.01	0.004	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.004	0.01
	0.000	0.000	0.116	0.113	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.274	0.179
Education										
HS and below	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Junior college	-0.04	-0.02	0.22	0.16	-0.16	-0.12	-0.13	0.03	0.08	0.05
	0.08	0.09	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.08
	0.574	0.864	0.000	0.057	0.008	0.155	0.037	0.700	0.214	0.530
College and beyond	0.04	0.20	0.48	0.43	-0.09	-0.03	-0.17	-0.01	0.37	0.45
	0.10	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.06	0.09	0.07	0.08	0.07
	0.731	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.289	0.590	0.047	0.828	0.000	0.000
Employment status										
Regular work	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Non-Reg	-0.06	0.10	0.07	-0.05	0.31	0.48	0.16	0.41	0.02	0.17
	0.09	0.12	0.07	0.11	0.07	0.11	0.07	0.11	0.07	0.11
	0.511	0.412	0.338	0.642	0.000	0.000	0.032	0.000	0.743	0.118
Not in LF	-0.14	0.17	0.17	0.08	0.44	0.23	0.11	0.25	0.17	0.11
	0.09	0.12	0.07	0.11	0.07	0.11	0.07	0.11	0.07	0.11
	0.114	0.172	0.017	0.451	0.000	0.034	0.149	0.023	0.021	0.331
Urban upbringing	-0.03	-0.10	0.03	-0.15	-0.03	0.04	0.08	0.12	0.04	-0.14
	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
	0.713	0.127	0.605	0.018	0.583	0.495	0.194	0.047	0.550	0.018
Homeowner	0.19	0.15	0.14	0.07	0.22	0.03	0.10	0.07	0.17	0.14
	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07
	0.017	0.045	0.035	0.275	0.001	0.691	0.149	0.332	0.010	0.030
Year										
1994	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2000	-0.10	-0.07	-0.05	0.11	-0.29	-0.37	-0.40	-0.24	-0.09	0.10
	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08
	0.293	0.426	0.490	0.188	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.260	0.199
2009	-0.14	-0.03	0.06	0.17	-0.02	-0.26	-0.33	-0.34	0.10	0.14
	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09
	0.171	0.746	0.499	0.051	0.805	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.264	0.105

Table 4: (Continued)

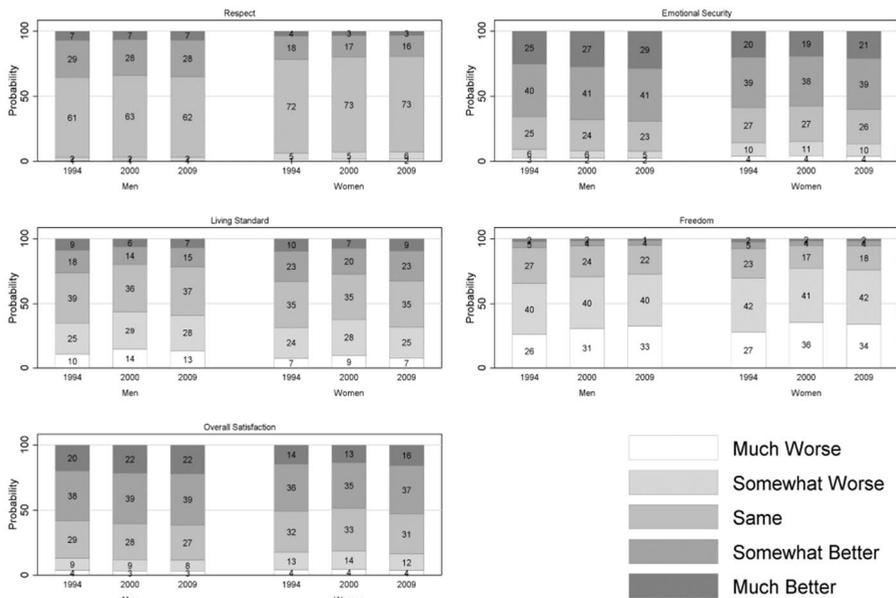
	Respect		Emotional		Living standard		Freedom		Overall	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Cut points										
cut1	-3.48	-3.76	-3.03	-3.79	-0.98	-1.71	0.34	0.073	-2.69	-2.98
	0.26	0.27	0.2	0.21	0.19	0.19	0.2	0.19	0.2	0.21
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.079	0.704	0.000	0.000
cut2	-1.87	-2.50	-1.61	-2.54	0.84	-0.16	2.18	1.79	-1.07	-1.61
	0.24	0.23	0.19	0.20	0.19	0.19	0.20	0.20	0.19	0.19
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.396	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
cut3	2.15	1.64	-0.16	-0.86	2.38	1.51	3.86	3.76	0.46	-0.02
	0.24	0.21	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.21	0.21	0.19	0.19
	0.000	0.000	0.392	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.014	0.921
cut4	4.15	3.66	1.60	0.89	3.95	2.83	5.06	5.05	2.28	1.73
	0.25	0.22	0.19	0.19	0.20	0.20	0.23	0.23	0.19	0.19
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total	4347	4120	4347	4120	4347	4120	4347	4120	4347	4120
-2 LL	7464.7	7817	12119.1	10796.1	12499.5	11910.9	10729.8	10370.4	12229.4	11276.7
AIC	7492.7	7845	12147.1	10824.1	12527.5	11938.9	10757.8	10398.4	12257.4	11304.7
BIC	7582.0	7933.5	12236.4	10912.6	12616.8	12027.5	10847.1	10486.9	12346.7	11393.3

Note: Standard errors in second row, p-values in third row.

Turning to results by marital status (Table 5), the perceptions of nearly every counterfactual dimension are lower for both currently married people and those that have never been married in the years 2000 and 2009 compared to year 1994. However, as expected, we could not reject the null hypothesis for coefficients on these dimensions as often for people who are currently married than for those who have never been married; the main exception to this pattern is freedom, which is negative for both currently married and never-married (we can reject the null hypothesis that living standard is the same in 2000 compared to 1994 for the currently married). Looking at the predicted probabilities (Figure 2), many of the differences across years are modest, although there is a noticeable difference in perceptions toward living standard, where, among people who have never been married, the predicted percent indicating ‘somewhat worse’ for living standard (if married) changed from 25 in 1994 to 37 in 2000 to 31 in 2009; similarly, the predicted percent of respondents who have never been married indicating ‘much worse’ for living standard (if married) increased from 7 to 13 between 1994 and 2000, then dropped to 10 in 2009. There was also a notable increase between 1994 and 2000 among people who have never been married reporting that freedom was ‘much worse’ (if married), a change from 18% to 26%. From Table 5, we see that the effect of being a man (within a given marital status) operates mostly the same way across counterfactual items, with nearly all coefficients being positive (in most cases we could also reject the null hypothesis that these coefficients are equal to

zero). The one exception is for freedom, for which we can reject the null hypothesis that gender (being a man) is equal to zero only for the currently married, but not for people who have never been married. Put differently, compared to their counterpart women, currently married men, but not men who have never been married, are more likely to see a benefit to freedom from marriage. Across all other dimensions, currently married and men who have never been married generally see more benefits to marriage than women (except for living standard, which women are more likely to see as a benefit).

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of marital counterfactuals, by gender



N = 4,120 (Men), N = 4,347 (Women)

Table 5: Ordered logits regressions of pro-marriage counterfactual, by marital status

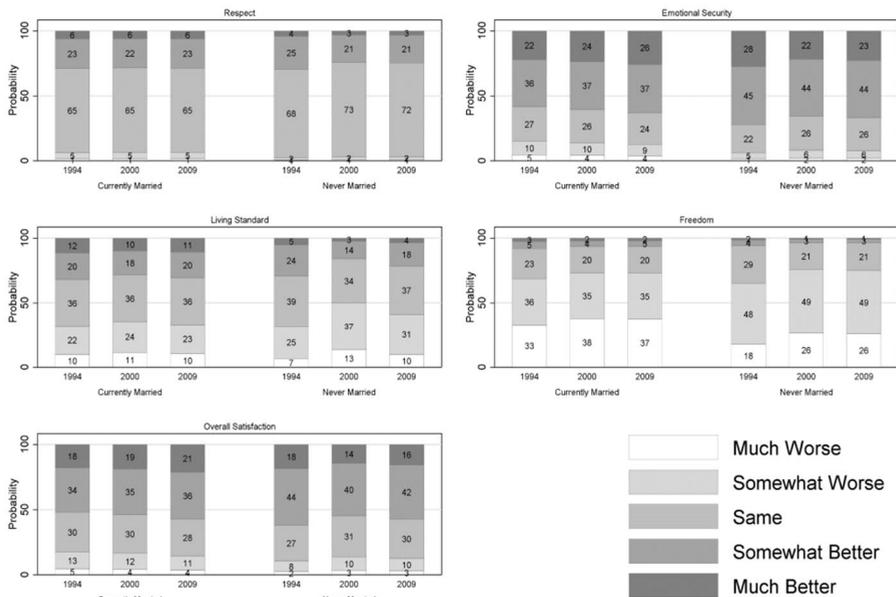
	Respect		Emotional		Living standard		Freedom		Overall	
	Cur Mar	Nev Mar	Cur Mar	Nev Mar	Cur Mar	Nev Mar	Cur Mar	Nev Mar	Cur Mar	Nev Mar
Gender (Men)	0.56	0.81	0.58	0.20	-0.16	-0.35	0.33	-0.05	0.50	0.29
	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.023	0.000	0.000	0.484	0.000	0.000
Age	0.03	0.01	0.00	-0.02	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.01	0.02	-0.02
	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
	0.000	0.033	0.761	0.005	0.000	0.005	0.000	0.282	0.000	0.006
Education										
HS and below	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Junior college	-0.03	0.03	0.22	0.11	-0.17	-0.08	-0.03	-0.09	0.11	0.003
	0.07	0.10	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.08
	0.706	0.745	0.000	0.168	0.007	0.312	0.628	0.244	0.084	0.970
College and beyond	0.09	0.26	0.57	0.26	-0.03	-0.10	-0.07	-0.07	0.53	0.27
	0.08	0.10	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.08
	0.250	0.006	0.000	0.001	0.635	0.226	0.324	0.373	0.000	0.001
Employment status										
Regular work	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Non-Reg	-0.19	0.23	0.01	0.08	0.25	0.49	0.19	0.26	0.00	0.13
	0.09	0.11	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.10	0.08	0.09
	0.036	0.039	0.944	0.365	0.002	0.000	0.021	0.006	0.973	0.162
Not in LF	-0.25	0.21	0.17	0.04	0.35	0.37	0.11	0.22	0.16	0.09
	0.10	0.11	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.09
	0.010	0.052	0.035	0.624	0.000	0.000	0.177	0.018	0.043	0.313
Urban upbringing	-0.10	0.03	0.00	-0.18	0.04	-0.07	0.13	0.05	0.01	-0.17
	0.06	0.09	0.05	0.07	0.05	0.07	0.05	0.07	0.05	0.07
	0.097	0.715	0.965	0.017	0.392	0.348	0.016	0.536	0.818	0.021
Homeowner	0.16	0.01	0.13	-0.16	0.13	-0.13	-0.03	0.16	0.16	-0.14
	0.06	0.11	0.06	0.10	0.06	0.10	0.06	0.10	0.06	0.10
	0.011	0.936	0.024	0.097	0.016	0.175	0.627	0.095	0.003	0.147
Year										
1994	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2000	-0.03	-0.28	0.09	-0.31	-0.17	-0.79	-0.22	-0.51	0.06	-0.30
	0.07	0.14	0.07	0.12	0.06	0.12	0.07	0.12	0.07	0.12
	0.720	0.043	0.183	0.008	0.008	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.333	0.009
2009	-0.01	-0.26	0.20	-0.26	-0.06	-0.42	-0.21	-0.49	0.22	-0.20
	0.08	0.15	0.07	0.12	0.07	0.12	0.07	0.13	0.07	0.12
	0.861	0.077	0.005	0.036	0.405	0.001	0.003	0.000	0.002	0.097
Cut points										
cut1	-2.96***	-4.32***	-2.59***	-4.60***	-0.86***	-2.44***	1.01***	-1.31***	-1.94***	-3.99***
	0.23	0.31	0.19	0.23	0.17	0.2	0.18	0.2	0.18	0.21
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
cut2	-1.44	-2.84	-1.27	-3.11	0.63	-0.54	2.55	0.87	-0.42	-2.46
	0.20	0.25	0.18	0.20	0.17	0.19	0.18	0.20	0.18	0.20
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.016	0.000

Table 5: (Continued)

	Respect		Emotional		Living standard		Freedom		Overall	
	Cur Mar	Nev Mar	Cur Mar	Nev Mar	Cur Mar	Nev Mar	Cur Mar	Nev Mar	Cur Mar	Nev Mar
cut3	2.30	1.89	0.16	-1.31	2.20	1.15	4.22	3.02	1.08	-0.80
	0.20	0.24	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.19	0.19	0.21	0.18	0.19
	0.000	0.000	0.376	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
cut4	4.18	4.21	1.80	0.62	3.50	3.17	5.42	4.40	2.74	1.20
	0.21	0.25	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.21	0.21	0.26	0.18	0.19
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total	5138	3329	5138	3329	5138	3329	5138	3329	5138	3329
-2 LL	9971.5	5202.1	14315.4	8519.9	15243.4	9073.5	13121.9	7790.4	14490.4	8932.5
AIC	9999.5	5230.1	14343.4	8547.9	15271.4	9101.5	13149.9	7818.4	14518.4	8960.5
BIC	10091.1	5315.7	14435.1	8633.5	15363	9187.1	13241.5	7903.9	14610	9046.1

Note: Standard errors in second row, p-values in third row.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of marital counterfactuals, by marital status



N = 5,138 (Currently Married), N = 3,329 (Never Married)

With respect to the other independent (control) variables in the models and the marriage counterfactuals, perceived respect and overall satisfaction are higher among

those with a college (or beyond) education compared to the reference category (high school or below), but this is mainly the case for men and people who have never been married in the case of respect; perceived emotional security tends to increase with education; living standard is perceived to be lower for those with a junior college degree (relative to the reference category), but mainly for women (recall educational tracking discussed earlier) and people who are currently married. Living standard is related to employment status, with both nonregular workers and those who are not in the labor force expecting greater benefit from marriage relative to the reference category, regular workers; nonregular workers also perceive greater freedom from marriage (both findings hold across gender and marital status). Homeownership is associated with greater perceived respect, living standard, and overall satisfaction, although this pattern holds mostly for the currently married, not people who have never been married.

6. Conclusion

Using a unique set of measures found on three waves of cross-sectional Japanese data, we examine whether perceptions of overall personal satisfaction and perceptions of marriage as beneficial (or not) for respect, emotional security, standard of living, and freedom varied over time and by gender and marital status. Overall, most results are consistent with our hypotheses. The trends we observe indicate a generally worsening perception over time of the benefits of marriage over singlehood on two dimensions, living standard and freedom, concomitant with a period that witnessed a pronounced economic downturn in Japan. Specifically, with controls for several demographic factors, pooled sample results indicate respondents in 2000 and 2009 perceived lower living standard and freedom benefits to marriage than respondents in 1994. We interpret this as an example of how the economic circumstances that once supported a gendered division of labor within marriage and the marriage market as a whole (i.e., strong job prospects, stable employment, and robust economic conditions) are beginning to weaken, precipitating a decline in the perceived benefits of marriage.

Consistent with the notion that views related to marriage are differentially distributed within the population, we predicted that those whose choices will shape the future of the marital institution (i.e., people who have not yet married) would be differentially impacted by these macrosocietal changes over time (in contrast to their already-married counterparts). Results by marital status confirm that the period effects we observed were indeed more pronounced for respondents that have never been married than for currently married ones, especially in terms of emotional support, and to a lesser extent, respect and overall satisfaction.

Finally, given marital benefits accruing to men from the man-as-breadwinner and woman-as-homemaker division of labor, we predicted that, with the exception of living standard (owing to the economic climate), men would perceive various dimensions more favorably compared to women. Indeed, results of the pooled sample indicate that men see every aspect but this one more favorably than women. However, contrary to our other hypothesis that men would be especially likely to view other dimensions of marriage less favorably over time, results showed a lack of pronounced gender difference in this regard. Perhaps the worsening economic situation changed the perceptions of marriage for both genders in such a way that women, as well as men, saw marriage as less beneficial than in the past. Single women have also experienced rising income in Japan (Fukuda 2013), which may be another reason that women began to see fewer benefits to marriage.

We close with four major conclusions, which we link to the broader literature and debate about marriage and family change. First, although certain dimensions of marriage are viewed more positively among people who have never been married than those currently married, there has been far more negative change over time in perceptions of marriage among the former than the latter. Consistent with other research on attitudes in Japan (Choe et al. 2014; Lee, Tufiş, and Alwin 2010; Piotrowski et al. 2019), our findings suggest that ideas about marriage are changing. However, our research highlights the usefulness of examining perceptions of marital relationships among those who have not yet entered such unions (i.e., the never-married). If trends continue, the demographic implications for Japan (and elsewhere) are very consequential, especially considering the tight link between marriage and fertility in Japan, and the wide acknowledgement in the academic (cf. Tsuya 2015) and popular press (Siripala 2018) that Japan's marriage and fertility rates are at record low levels at a time when uncertain employment prospects are making the "marriage package" unattractive for both men and women.

Second, the findings indicate that (survey) research and theory on family change should examine the internal marriage context – that is, standard of living, respect from others, emotional security, and freedom, which highlight not only economic but also social and psychological dimensions of marriage – more fully than generally has been done in the past. Relatively little attention has been paid to these dimensions of marriage we examined. The heretofore-dominant focus in the literature on the external context surrounding marriage (which has been viewed in terms of the deinstitutionalization of the marriage institution and the diversification of family forms) largely ignores these factors and the internal context more generally (although some attention to this is given in recent work by Cherlin [2020]), leading to an incomplete picture of the contemporary institution. Our findings highlight that perceptions of marriage are changing on a number of dimensions, including social, economic,

psychological, and personal. Given the rigidly defined roles that have characterized Japanese marriage, perceptions of personal freedom were particularly interesting, and may signal a shift toward greater individualization of, or the beginnings of a more Western framing of, marriage within Japanese society (Yang and Yen 2011). Specifically, perhaps the perceived advantages of remaining single, vis-à-vis the heavy burden of some traditional aspects of marriage, is finding increasing support within the cultural milieu.

In spite of the changing perceptions suggested by the results for marital status (particularly perceptions of personal freedom), our third conclusion is that the traditional breadwinner-homemaker model of marriage continues to be important and influential in Japan. Men perceived more positively all of the marital dimensions we examined except for standard of living, which was perceived more positively by women, as one would expect under the specialization and trading model, which is generally thought to be more beneficial for men.

Fourth, the results, particularly those for gender, indicate how cultural beliefs regarding the traditional marriage model persist in spite of the structural changes that have occurred over the past few decades in Japan, especially in the economy and labor market. Thus, Japanese men and women are likely to marry (and stay married) even if personal costs have risen and benefits of marriage have declined over time. The implication of these two insights is that scholars need to carefully consider the setting within which they examine the association between marriage and structural changes.

Although we can only speculate, on the whole our results may point to the possibility that marriage in Japan is in flux. Japanese people who have never married may therefore be experiencing a sense of anomie (Durkheim [1897] 1951) or cultural lag (Byrne and Carr 2005) as they weigh their options. Specifically, they can remain single, pursue a more traditional Japanese marriage package (embodying Becker's specialization and trading model, which is more difficult to attain in the current economic climate), move toward a more Western-style marriage arrangement (as predicted by Oppenheimer's model), or pursue alternatives to marriage, such as long-term cohabitation (which go against the cultural grain valuing marriage over its alternatives and remain relatively rare). As these competing models interact with Japan's changing economy, labor market, and cultural milieu, their relative values are likely to shift in interrelated ways both in the minds of individuals and collectively in Japan.

Some limitations of our approach need to be considered in light of our results. First, our analysis is based on cross-sectional data, and thus should not be used to infer causality between marriage counterfactual measures and their determinants. Second, a larger set of items would have been desirable to more fully assess the consequences associated with marriage (such as measures of health and well-being). Third, our data

only includes information up to year 2009, and more social changes have occurred in the past decade (e.g., how nonregular work has impacted men's marriage, and thereby their potential to have children; cf. Piotrowski et al. 2018), which we cannot capture with our data.

Despite its weaknesses, our paper also has a number of strengths. It uses a unique set of questions asked to both the married and people who have never married over a period in which important structural changes (e.g., in the economy and labor market) occurred. It also examines the internal context of marriage in a non-Western setting which contrasts in interesting ways with the Western context upon which much of the prevailing scholarship on marriage and familial change, mostly oriented toward the external context of marriage, is based. Future research on the internal context of marriage in other settings is needed to better appreciate the significance of marital changes and their embeddedness in larger cultural and social structural transformations.

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