

Son Preference and the Persistence of Culture: Evidence from Asian Immigrants to Canada

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Motivation

Sex ratios above biologically normal in a number of Asian countries

- Normally, there are close to 1.05 boys born per girl born
- China
 - 1.20 boys born per girl [Li, 2007]
 - There are 25 million excess males in China under age 20 [Zhu et al., 2009]
- India
 - 1.08 boys born per girl in 2001 for those aged 0 to 6
 - Punjab has sex ratio of 1.25

Male Sex Ratios

Culprits?

- 1 Preference for Consumption
 - Old Age Support
 - Dowry
- 2 Preference for Sons
 - Family Name
 - Ancestor Worship
- 3 One Child Policy

Asians in the West

- Rich
- Little discrimination against women in society
- No dowry
- No one child policy

Sex selection among Asians in the West

Related Literature

- Dubuc and Coleman (2007): England and Wales
- Almond and Edlund (2008): US Census data
 - Focus on 2000 Census
 - 5% Sample
- Abrevaya (2009): California natality data

Prenatal Sex determination

- Possible through ultrasound around week 12 of pregnancy
- Legal in Canada
- British Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons: fetal determination for non-medical purposes is “unethical.”
- Society of Ob/Gyn of Canada: “discriminatory”

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- Effective access
 - Clinics in Washington state will perform sex determination (very close to Vancouver)
 - Winks and nods

Abortion Law and Religion

Abortion law

Canadian law very permissive since 1988 *R.v.Morgentaler* decision

Religions and infanticide

- Historically, sex selection achieved through infanticide
- No religion promotes infanticide
- Christianity stands out as proscribing infanticide
- Islam stands out as proscribing female infanticide

Canadian Census

2001 and 2006 Surveys

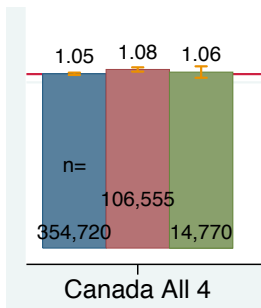
- 20% Samples
 - Canada relatively small country but more Asian immigrants
 - Larger sample than available for US (5%)
- ⇒ larger analysis sample than available for US
- Data elements
 - Country of birth
 - Age at immigration
 - Can distinguish first versus second generation immigrants
 - 2001 data has religion

Present basic results in a series of bar figures

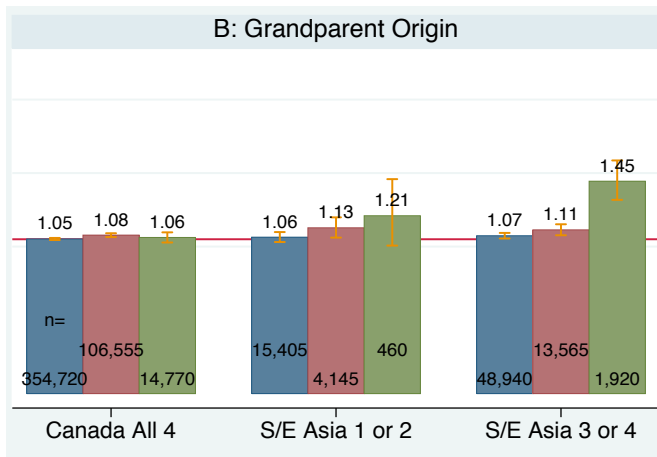
- Height of bar is the sex ratio
- 1.05 is normal sex ratio
- Consider sex ratio by parity
- See whether sex ratio increases when previous children are female
 - Uses information on family

Sex Ratio By Parity among Natives

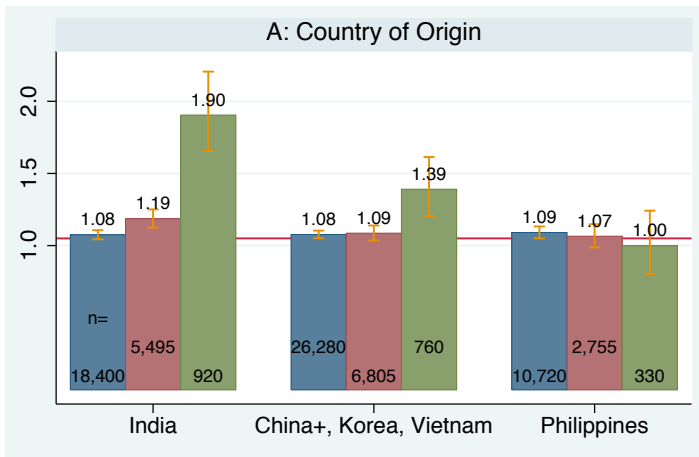
- **First bar:** sex ratio for oldest child
- **Second bar:** sex ratio of second child following one older sister
- **Third bar:** sex ratio of third child following two older sisters



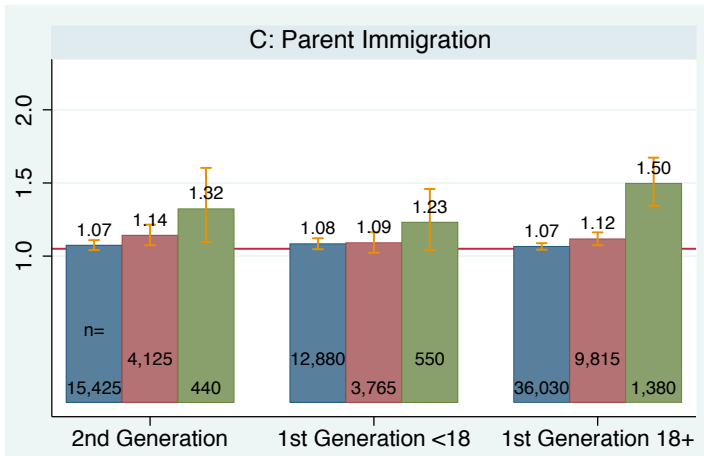
Sex Ratio By Parity: Region of Origin



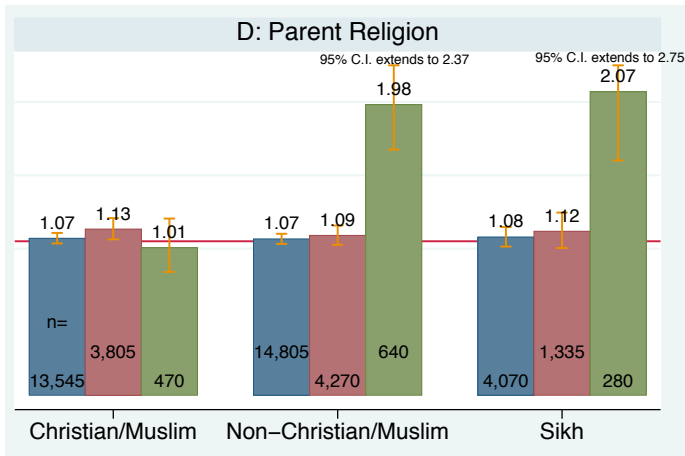
Sex Ratio By Parity: Country of Origin



Sex Ratio By Parity: Recentness of Immigration



Sex Ratio By Parity: Religion



Adjusted versus Unadjusted

- Regression control variables
 - Mother and father age
 - Mother and father education
 - City of residence
 - Survey year
- Point estimates with regression adjustment are essentially unchanged
 - Adjusted sex ratio for non-Christians/Muslims is **also** 1.98
 - Similarity tells us sex of previous children basically random when considering sex of subsequent children
 - E.G., education of father not telling us much about sex of previous children

Fertility stopping rule?

- So far, have looked at deviations from normal sex ratios
- We interpret as sex selection
- Alternatively, can continue having kids until have a boy, then stop
 - It is argued one child policy raised sex ratios by reducing scope for stopping rule (e.g., Ebenstein 2009)
 - Immigrants to West may experience reduced fertility with assimilation [Blau et al. 2008]

Continue having child after two previous girls?

	(1)	(2)
<i>N</i>	12930	12930
All Girls	0.146 (0.013)	-0.053 (0.029)
Mix	-0.057 (0.011)	-0.126 (0.025)
MomDad1st ^a	-0.032 (0.019)	-0.132 (0.028)
MomDad1st × Girls		0.249 (0.033)
MomDad1st × Mix		0.085 (0.028)

Additional findings from regression analysis

- ① Tendency to express son preference through stopping rule dissipates for second generation
- ② Christians and Muslims do show a son preference
 - Expressed through stopping rule: 5.2 percentage points more likely to continue childbearing after two girls
 - Not expressed through sex selection
- ③ For **non**-Christians/Muslims son preference expressed through
 - Stopping rule
 - Sex selection
 - Both channels stronger for first generation of immigrants

Conclusions

- 1 Economic explanations for high sex ratios appear incomplete
- 2 Our findings consistent with persistence of cultural son preference
- 3 Evidence of assimilation in stopping behaviour, but less so along sex selection
- 4 Among Asian immigrants, reported religion emerges as stronger indicator of son preference than country of origin
 - Aligns with doctrinal proscriptions on infanticide among Muslims and Christians