Research proposal to explore the relationship between the phenomenon of bare branches and crime rates in China.

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HS4008 Research Proposal

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Background of Focus

In my previous literature review I sought to explore and explain the phenomenon of the bare branches in China by looking at the possible factors that contribute to it. The multi-faceted phenomenon of the bare branches in China is mainly attributed to the one child policy as its root cause that has extensive far reaching impacts, and bare branches is one of the policies’ latent manifestation.

The one child policy that was first implemented in the 19th century to curb unchecked population growth in order to secure sustainable growth that can only be achieved with population kept in check. (Wang 2005) Rampant unchecked population growth is detrimental to progress and a nation’s development due to the problems that large populations bring about, posing as economic liabilities and the state will have difficulty coping with provision of a substantial standard of living. However, the implementation of the one child policy has resulted in sex ratio imbalance to say the least due to strong son preferences. Wang (2005) used the 2000 census that reported a high disparity between boys and girls whereby every 1000 girls there is 119.2 boys, which indicates a good 10% more boys than girls in the population. As a result of this high level sex ratio disparity in China, rural men are finding it increasingly difficult to get married and form a family. This renders them being “bare branches” whereby they are unable to have children and carry on the family name. According to Jiang and Li(2009) definition, bare branches’ are men who are involuntarily unmarried over a certain age and thus have no wife and children.

As I attempted to delineate the reasons behind this phenomenon in my previous literature, the factors that contribute to this position that land rural men unmarried involuntarily, would be socio-economic status, hukou disadvantaged rural or agricultural status and bride price. In summary, the hukou system not only denotes one’s social status and opportunities, it has also become key in engineering marriageability,
whereby women are according to Fan and Huang (2010) are taking advantage of the shortage of brides to secure a better social status by utilizing marriage as a vehicle to attain better hukou status and achieve mobility. Another factor that contributes to the difficulty of rural men to get married would be the bride price system. Zhang and Zhong (2010) argues that bride price plays a determinant factor for marriages now that places immense pressure on men as the exorbitant prices are hard to afford and hence poses as a great obstacle for rural men in their pursuit of a bride. This rational decision to marriage to areas that offer a better hukou status is also accompanied by the practice of bride price that functions as a double barrier that rural men face in the pursuit of marriage, which doubly discriminates them in the grounds of rational and pragmatic notions behind marriages in modern day China.

This trend of increasingly more rural men having difficulty in having a bride and hence, forming a family might bright about unintended latent manifestations. Hence in this research proposal I aim to delineate whether this phenomenon of bare branches actually brings about extensive cost on the society borne and threatens social stability.

Does the phenomenon of ‘bare branches’ in contemporary China give rise to criminal behaviour and destabilizes the society?

With the increased proportion of involuntarily single men, even to the extent of forming what Davin (2007) terms as “bachelor villages” that is basically made up of high percentage of bachelors that are unmarried due to their undesirable socio-economic status and the shortage of women there, I seek to uncover whether there are negative consequences that would negatively impact social life, in specifically, increase in crime rates and offences commit by men. With the rise of unmarried men, the suggested social consequences would cover things like increasing tendencies for alcohol abuse, bride abduction, rape cases or smuggling of females. Most of the studies done on this topic have so far failed to study this phenomenon in detail and only briefly suggest the possibility of such a causal relationship derived from
the bare branch phenomenon, and would focus their study on the general impacts of such increasing unmarried male population on distribution of labor and the inability to carry on the family name that would prove to be problematic in the future when there will be no children available to undertake care and provision role for them.

Rationale

The rationale that lay behind conducting such a study would be due to lack of knowledge in this aspect of the bare branch experience. Studies conducted on the phenomenon of bare branch and marriage squeeze in China in so far only suggest possible problems that it might bring about mainly concerning social stability. Mo (2005) mentions that the possibility of failure to marry may foster stigmas and consequentially, threaten social stability, and his point was contended by Hudson and den Boer (2002), who also mentions the possibility of such high proportion of involuntarily unmarried men may endanger international security.

The increasing difficulty rural men would face in search of marriage could pose as a threat to society due to demand for brides would tentatively give rise to various forms of vices. Men desire for marriage that is contrasted by shortage of brides might be make up for with unorthodox forms of marriages such as child marriage, fraud marriage, forced marriage or other alternative forms of marriage. In Chinese history, shortage of women would often stipulate adoption of solutions that consists of alternative forms of marriage. (Sommer 2000; Wang 2000; Guo 2003; Wolf and Huang 1980) However, when such strategies are adopted in an attempt to increase marriage options and chances for men, it often discriminates women and renders them as ‘tradable commodities’. (Liu et al 2009) This might lead to inevitable trafficking of women in order to supply the demand for brides that far exceeds the available supply in China. Whenever
there is a situation whereby demand surplus exists, supply would be offered no matter legal or not that usually give rise to increase in vices, this is the logic that prevails in modern capitalist economy. In this case, women will not be spared and safety would be an issue that should be looked into.

Another way in which, alternative solutions that rural men could pursue in lieu of obtaining marriage would be to buy commercial sex, otherwise known as patronise prostitution. This would give rise to a new threat as the increase demand for prostitutes would also result or encourage more trafficking of women, which Zhao(2003) has found out does indeed have a link with rising sex ratio, and more often than not these trafficked women were forced into prostitution or marriage. These alternative options that men might turn to when in face of bride shortage undermines social security and stability, especially that of women’s and poses a threat to the family structure and dynamic.

Furthermore, younger single men are found to be more violent that might result in more acts of violence, especially violent crimes. According to Den Bore and Hudson (2004), violent crimes are often carried out by men who are unmarried, young and impoverished. And it is the gender imbalance whereby more there is increasing prevalence for the rural poor men to fail in securing marriage that proves to be an area of concern that might threaten social security hence I would propose hereon how we should undertake this study to better understands this phenomenon and its consequences on society.

Methodology

In order to study and explore my research question to delineate whether the bare branch phenomenon would cause an insurgence of men perpetuated crimes, I would employ a two-pronged approach to accurately attain relevant information that would contribute to my understanding of this topic. However, to ensure the accuracy in studying this phenomenon I would focus my study upon one of the bare branch villages that’s established in the rural parts of China, on one specific bachelor village.
The first approach would be to attain data on crime rates, and the number of single men in the province. Then cross match to see if there are any correlations that can be observed such as the increasing number of single men at marriageable age and whether there is a trend of corresponding increase in crime acts perpetrated by men. Furthermore, particular attention should be paid to crimes committed that are sexually related such as rape or bride abduction or even murder. Such deviant behaviour should be studied to draw whether links exist between sexually related crimes in particular with the increasing number of unmarried men in the community.

The second approach would be to conduct ethnographic study to understand the phenomenon from the men’s perspective in order to put into perspective how they would deal with the situation and what actions they would take to alleviate this problem. An ethnographic study should be conducted with the whole village of “bare branches” to establish a variety of views and then to be consolidated to see whether demographics such as age or religion would contribute to a different experience or perspective, since they would all be poor unmarried men in the bare branch villages.

Significance of study

The significance herein lies upon the in depth understanding of the male experience in regards to marriage that would contribute to our understanding of China’s other social phenomenon or problems and to establish whether a correlation exists. To uncover whether or not this phenomenon of bare branches actually bear a cost on society in specifically to creation or leading up to other problems that is detrimental to social order. In conventional studies carried upon the theme or marriage, the central figure of attention would be women, and by establish our understanding of the men as central figure to this study, it lends us a different perspective and grants us a deeper understanding that do not assume that
men in general undergo a singular experience that comprises of the same difficulties and dilemmas faced. In fact, the intersecting and compilation of different problems and discrimination that they face in their position should give rise to bare branches with differential mentality and experience instead of a singular experience. Hence this study would provide us with a more balanced viewpoint in the study of marriage in China.

Furthermore, such a study would prove to be useful if a relationship can be established to show the positive correlation between bare branch phenomenon and social problems such as increase in crime rates, this would then empower the state to draft up policies accordingly to help curb the problems. It would also prove to be more effective to target such crimes by attacking the problem at its root cause which is namely the involuntary single men unable to get married. Policies to help alleviate the problem such as open up a bigger market for mail brides or otherwise known as, international brides or to eliminate the hukou system under the registration of the husbands status being transferrable to the that of the wife’s which is the primary cause of rural men facing a shortage of brides due to the trend of brides “marrying up”, to take advantage of the demand and supply situation in order to better their socio-economic status. Another way in which this study could contribute would be how the hukou system can be further fine-tuned or modified in order to correct this opportunistic drive for women to marry “up”, this would not require the eradication of the whole system but rather just some adjustments to curb such trends to balance out the field in marriage to not discriminate the rural men.

Another way in which this study could prove to be significant would be to establish the need for eradication of the bride price system, to criminalise and remove the privilege that wealthy in order to alleviate the problem. Such high proportions of rural men remaining single would prove to be detrimental to social stability as mentioned above due to the high likelihood for them to be a source of trouble to the society.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposal of this research to be conducted aims to provide insights to how does this bare branch phenomenon contribute to crime rates in China that seeks to alleviate the problem through certain measures that should be considered that would ensure a more equal distribution of brides in this era where China faces shortage of marriageable females due to the sex ratio imbalance as a result of the stringent implementation of the one child policy. Hence not only do the shortage of brides poses as a problem for household division of labor and the inevitable eminent problem of an aging population, it also manifests its consequences in undermining social stability and threatens to shake the very foundations upon which China’s current success is built on, its people as the economies driving force.

References


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