ESSAYS ON THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND GENDER IN THE TRANSFER OF AND RETURNS TO HUMAN CAPITAL

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This dissertation explores the role of family and gender in understanding the disparities in human capital accumulation and corresponding disparities in labor market outcomes. The first essay explores how the employee-employer gender matches affect the direction and magnitude of workers’ occupational skill match quality and the associated wage effects over the course of careers. The second essay examines the extent of and the premium associated with the intergenerational transfer of task-specific human capital. The third essay focuses on the cadres, the political elite in China, and empirically explores whether a cadre parent improves their offspring’s labor market outcomes, in terms of wages and promotion prospects.

Essay 1: Diversity is More than Numbers: The Wage Effects of Supervisor-Worker Gender Match

This essay explores the relationship between workers’ wages and the gender of their supervisor, conditioning on the occupational gender composition. It develops a theoretical model suggesting that supervisors’ task assignment accuracy is affected disparately in occupations of different gender types, leading to varying degrees of skill mismatch among workers. This leads to average wage differences between workers with female supervisors and those with male supervisors in occupations of different gender types. Consistent with the theoretical predictions, the empirical evidence suggests that workers have better occupation-skill matches and higher average wages if they work with female supervisors in predominantly female occupations, compared to those with male supervisors; the opposite is true for workers in predominantly male occupations. Although not significant at the early career stage, supervisor wage effects emerge as a worker’s career develops. These findings emphasize the importance of supervisors’ task assignment accuracy in workplace gender wage disparity, and underscore the necessity of integrating minority managers to the “gendered” organizational contexts.

Essay 2: “Following (Not Quite) in Your Father’s Footsteps: Task Followers and Labor Market Outcomes” (with John Gordanier and Orgul Ozturk)

This essay examines the extent to which children enter occupations that are different from their father’s occupation, but require similar skills, which we call task following. We distinguish between task followers and occupational followers, considering the possibility that fathers can transfer task specific human capital either through investments or genetic endowments to their children. We show that there is indeed substantial task following,
beyond occupational following and that task following is associated with a wage premium of around 5% over otherwise identical workers employed in a job with the same primary task. The wage premium is robust to controls for industry, occupation categories and occupation characteristics. The premium is largest for followers in non-routine cognitive jobs and college graduates.


Using a nationally representative sample, this study sheds light on whether and how cadre parents affect their offspring's labor market outcomes in China. On the one hand, individuals with a cadre parent tend to have higher promotion rates over those without a cadre parent. This effect remains robust when a rich set of individuals, parental, occupational and social network characteristics are controlled for. On the other hand, evidence does reveal a 10% cadre parent wage premium at the mean level, which is not attributable to individual, parental and occupational characteristics. Most of this premium can be explained by individual’s larger size of social networks and closer relations with government officials and people from the public owned enterprises. This suggests that social networks may be one of the mechanisms through which cadre parents benefit the labor market outcomes of the next generation. prospects.