

Revisiting Selection in Heterogeneous Returns to College Education

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ABSTRACT

Sociologists describe the pattern of selection in heterogeneous returns to college education as negative, in contrast to the positive selection proposed by economists. This article moves beyond such a conflicting contrast, suggesting that the contradictions between “selection on observables” and “selection on unobservables” are at the heart of the contradictions between these two selection hypotheses. Employing both sociological and econometric counterfactual approaches to estimate college treatment effects, this article shows that the negative pattern of social selection based on family background characteristics and the positive pattern of self-selection based on the principle of comparative advantage are not mutually exclusive—both patterns emerged in the early 1990s, when Taiwan’s higher education systems were rationed with structural barriers. Since Taiwan’s swift expansion in higher education over the last two decades, nevertheless, there have emerged signs of decline in the treatment effect for the treated, coupled with a sorting loss in the face of negative social selection.

Key Words: social selection, self-selection, sorting gain, college treatment effect, counterfactual analysis

再論大學教育之異質回報的選擇性

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摘 要

社會學家認為大學教育之異質性經濟回報是負向選擇的結果：最不可能上大學者，其回報最高。經濟學家則主張正向選擇：回報愈高者，愈可能上大學。本文說明：這兩個假設之所以看似矛盾對立，和「可觀察變數的選擇性」與「不可觀察變數的選擇性」之差別，息息相關。臺灣之實徵分析結果顯示：在九〇年代初期，基於家庭背景的「負向社會選擇」與基於比較優勢原則的「正向自我選擇」可以並存，並非彼此互斥。然而，近二十年來大量擴展高等教育的結果，晚近的回報已顯著不如早期，自我選擇的分類收益有由正轉負的跡象，但負向的社會選擇依然如故。

關鍵字：社會選擇、自我選擇、分類收益、大學教育回報、反事實
(擬真)分析