

Cheng Cheng

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ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Assistant Professor of Economics, The University of Mississippi, 2014 - present

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Economics, Texas A&M University, USA, August 2014

M.S., Applied Economics *with distinction*, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, November 2007

B.S., Applied Mathematics, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, China, July 2006

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Health Economics, Public Economics, Labor Economics

PUBLICATIONS

“Does Simplifying Divorce and Marriage Registration Matter? Evidence from China”, forthcoming in *Applied Economics*

This paper evaluates the marital consequences of easier access to divorce and marriage by exploiting a major policy change in China that simplifies both. I first use a regression discontinuity design to examine the short-run effect and find that simplified registration immediately triggered more and faster divorces and marriages. In estimating the long-run effect, I adopt a difference-in-differences strategy that further exploits cross-sectional variation in urbanization rate. Results indicate that the positive effect on marital outcomes, especially on marriage rate, persisted in the medium run for four years.

“Do Cell Phone Bans Change Driver Behavior?”, *Economic Inquiry*, 2015, 53(3): 1420-1436.

In response to concerns that distracted driving due to cell phone use has become a threat to roadway safety, many states have passed laws that prohibit drivers from texting and talking on handheld cell phones. In light of recent evidence that these bans do not reduce traffic accidents, this paper asks whether this is because the laws are ineffective in reducing usage. Using data on observed driver cell phone usage combined with a difference-in-differences approach that exploits the within-state variation in the adoption of bans, I find that prohibiting drivers from texting and talking on handheld cell phones reduces each by 60 and 50 percent, respectively. This suggests the policy is effective at reducing the targeted behavior, which leads me to discuss other factors and behavioral responses that may counteract the reduction in observed usage.

“Does Strengthening Self-Defense Law Deter Crime or Escalate Violence? Evidence from Expansions to Castle Doctrine” (with Mark Hoekstra), *Journal of Human Resources*, 2013, 48(3): 821-854.

From 2000 to 2010, more than 20 states passed castle doctrine and stand-your-ground laws. These laws expand the legal justification for the use of lethal force in self-defense, thereby lowering the expected cost of using lethal force and increasing the expected cost of committing violent crime. This paper exploits the within-state variation in self-defense law to examine their effect on homicides and violent crime. Results indicate the laws do not deter burglary, robbery, or aggravated assault. In contrast, they lead to a statistically significant 8 percent

net increase in the number of reported murders and non-negligent manslaughters.

WORKING PAPERS

“When Should We Trust Weighted Least Squares Estimates?” (with Mark Hoekstra)

Empirical studies frequently weight observations by factors such as group size and use the cluster-robust variance-covariance estimator to perform statistical inference. In this paper, we use Monte Carlo simulations to document that the use of skewed weight distributions in weighted least squares (WLS) can significantly exacerbate the finite sample bias of this commonly used cluster-robust variance-covariance estimator. Results indicate that null hypothesis rejection rates for WLS can be higher than 50 percent at the 5 percent level, which is substantially more severe than for OLS. Moreover, permutation exercises in the spirit of Bertrand, Duflo, and Mullainathan (2004) show rejection rates are nearly twice as high as they should be when using common panel data sets, which highlights the practical importance of this issue. Finally, we document the effectiveness of various bootstrapping techniques and conclude that the pairs bootstrap-t method performs well.

WORK IN PROGRESS

“The Disproportionate Impact of the Great Recession”

“Income Shocks and Domestic Violence” (with Mark Hoekstra)

“Land Price Cycles and Wealth Inequality” (with Bo Dai, Takuma Kunieda, and Charles Leung)

PRESENTATIONS

The University of Mississippi, 2014

University of North Carolina, Charlotte, 2014

Southern Economic Association Annual Meeting, 2013

Asian Real Estate Society Annual Conference, Shanghai, 2008

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Referee, *Eastern Economic Journal*, *Journal of Human Resources*, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *Social Science Journal*

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

The University of Mississippi

Principles of Microeconomics (Fall 2014, Spring & Fall 2015)

Econometrics I (graduate-level, Fall 2015)

Texas A&M University

Introduction to Economics: Microeconomics (Fall 2013, Spring 2014)

Introduction to Econometrics (Summer 2011, Fall 2010, Summer 2010)

HONORS AND AWARDS

Summer Research Grant, College of Liberal Arts, The University of Mississippi, 2015

Graduate Assistantship, Texas A&M University, 2008-2014

PERC Summer Research Fellowship, Texas A&M University, 2012

SELECTED MEDIA COVERAGE

“Cellphone Bans May Not Prevent Accidents”, 3/26/2014, Economix Blog, New York Times

“Protect-the-Castle Laws and Homicide”, 6/12/2012, Ideas Market Blog, Wall Street Journal

“Study Finds ‘Stand Your Ground’ Laws Increase Murder Rates”, 6/12/2012, Houston Chronicle

“Study Says ‘Stand Your Ground’ Laws Increase Homicides”, 6/11/2012, Law Blog, Wall Street Journal

“Report: ‘Stand Your Ground’ Laws Lead to Increase in Homicide”, 6/11/2012, Chicago Tribune

LANGUAGE

English (fluent), Mandarin (native), Cantonese (conversational)

CITIZENSHIP

China

REFERENCES

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