

## **Migrations in the Adjustment between Population and Resources**

### **Eurasian Contributions**

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It is well-known that in the classical formulation of the demography transition theory migration is essentially seen as a result of the changing balance between births and deaths. In the components of the old East-West debate that are rooted in the Malthusian writings, adjustment behaviours decreasing population pressure on scarce resources have been considered, with an emphasis on marriage and infanticide, migration being barely considered. From a heuristic point of view, poor theoretical developments are associated with poor data sources. Indeed, accurate information on mobility and migrants are very rare in historical population. This is one of the wealth of the Eurasian Project for the Comparative History of Population and the Family to be funded on a network of teams who reconstituted population registers data that fill this gap in our knowledge for various rural and pre-transitional settings in Japan, China, Sweden, Belgium and Italy. In this paper, our ambition is to synthesize the many contributions brought by our fellow associates during the last 15 years and to evaluate at which point our findings can be generalized to illuminate the current scientific debates.

Researches on family systems, family reproduction, headship and patrimony transfers, were the first to see local establishment through marriage, local celibacy or out-migration as competing risks in the process of transition to adulthood. Eurasian researchers studied in-depth those alternatives and the many forms of life-cycle service in the East as well as in the West. A careful attention has been paid to the fate of widows and orphans. In a few cases, the almost unknown, although obviously sometimes socially and quantitatively important, migrations of the elderly have been scrutinized. All those studies can be integrated within the framework offered by the nuclear hardship hypothesis designed by Peter Laslett and contrasting Eastern complex family systems, judged more efficient to deal with the accidents of life than the Western simple family systems, in societies of mass poverty and life uncertainty. The databases collected by the teams belonging to the Eurasian Project offer a rare opportunity to further challenge this theory, looking at the sensibility of populations and their socioeconomic classes to short-term economic stresses, i.e. fluctuations of food prices on the local markets. We consider migration's answers disentangled by age, sex, SES, household type, but in this paper we will also use the three EAP published (or to be published) volumes to benchmark those answers with the other demographic responses.

In the literature on migration a large number of theories and hypotheses have been put forward to explain the observed behavior. Within the neoclassical economics of migration the focus has traditionally been on wage- and productivity differentials, investments in human

capital or more recently on the interactions between individuals and the family in dealing with risk, etc. Other theories focus on the role of networks or investments in the place of residence as investments in immobility rather than investments in migration. Here the focus will be more limited. Instead of providing a general explanation of migration we will focus on the role of migration in the preindustrial household economy with special reference to the way households dealt with economic and demographic uncertainties.

Before turning to the theories of migration, something needs to be said about the definitions of migration. Instead of just operating with a single definition, several forms of migration will be discussed. The least restrictive definition of migration is simply leaving the household, regardless of the distance moved. Apart from leaving the household we may then impose various restrictions on the move. Intra-community (e.g. parish or town) migration is the migration implying leaving the household of residence, but remaining in the same community, while inter-community migration implies migration over community borders. Inter-community migration may be short-term, for instance moving to the neighboring parish, or long-term. Finally, by emigration we mean leaving the country.

All these definitions have in common that they are based on some kind of administrative registration, such as parish, county or the country as a whole. Of course, if possible, it would be more informative to work with definitions based on distance, regardless of whether an administrative border was crossed or not. This is, however, rather difficult in most cases because of data restrictions. When looking at migration over long distances, or between parishes that are small in size, this distinction does not make a lot of difference. When dealing with large parishes, however, it may well be a relevant, although difficult, distinction to make. The extent of intra-community migration in relation inter-community migration, will to a large extent depend on the geographic size of the community. In dealing with large communities the failure to include migration within community borders will underestimate geographic mobility to a much higher extent than when dealing with smaller communities. This should also be kept in mind when comparing inter-community migration rates between communities of different sizes.

We may also distinguish different types of migration, such as children leaving home, family migration, individual migration, old-age migration, etc. Some of these types simply refers to migration of different sub-groups in society after age, occupation etc, while other refers to whether migration takes place individually or as a group. These distinctions are often highly relevant to make since quite different sets of factors determine different types of migration. For instance, both the decision making process and the important determinants are likely to be quite different between family migration and individual migration (cf. Mincer 1978) of adolescent servants, or between children leaving home and elderly people moving. To a large extent several Eurasian contributions dealt with these different types of migration and proposed more detailed models and theoretical reasoning. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to a more general discussion and how we may structure our thinking about migration in preindustrial communities.