

## **Prudence and Pressure: Household Organization and Reproduction in Historical Eurasia**

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Households often exerted a strong influence on reproduction in preindustrial rural communities. The nature of the household effect however differed not only between the East and the West or among communities, but also within each community. Not only did the existence of a household itself depend on reproductive processes, the household as a group played a critical role in the reproductive decisions. This was especially the case in preindustrial rural populations, as the household was responsible not only for its economic but also for reproductive decision making.

Our comparative analysis of preindustrial populations in Europe and East Asia reveal complex relationships between household organization and reproduction and highlight the prominent role of human agency in reproduction. It also suggests a rather different logic than the one previously ascribed to household organization in reproduction. Our results confirm the conventional wisdom that Eurasian populations in the past were organized into different types of household organizations.

They also provide fresh and solid evidence that both axes of agency--property as measured by the household head's socioeconomic status, and power measured by a woman's position in the household organization--figured prominently in explaining differences in reproduction across and within populations. Economic status of the household figured prominently in producing different reproductive outcomes. Our

study also reveals that the more complex households did not provide their members with equal access to household resources. Rather, as domestic organizations driven not so much by individual as by collective goals, these more complex households restricted reproduction as often as they promoted it.

The results of our study further show that while women residing in complex family households were generally more likely than those in simple family households to have births, this difference varied by community, birth order, and the sex of the birth. The reproductive advantage of complex families is seen among later but not first births in both the Italian and the Japanese study populations. In the Japanese study villages, in particular, women living in complex family households took longer to produce an heir than those in simple family households. Reproductive advantage in this case is coupled with a longer interval between marriage and first birth. In the Chinese population, the reproductive advantage of those residing in a joint family household most clearly exhibited itself in having a first son, which was no doubt a top priority for the collective household. Once that goal was achieved, however, their reproductive advantage was no longer so clear. When the male heir to the household was not in question, social and economic advantages were manifested by having more female births.

Household size and age composition mattered less in these historical populations than household organization and the presence of various types of kin. For example, while a coresident father-in-law had no effect on reproductive outcomes, the presence of a mother-in-law increased the likelihood of an additional birth in the

two Japanese villages and of a female first birth in the Chinese state farm populations.

In both Japan and China, presence of a married child curtailed reproduction.

The complex role of household organization in reproduction is further shown in the different reproductive outcomes of women with various relationships to the head of the household although position in the internal household hierarchy clearly mattered. Under the stem family system prevalent in Niita and Shimomoriya, two communities in Japan, women who were non-kin or servants were highly disadvantaged. Even women in the main stem line (i.e., spouses of stem-kin who were mostly daughters-in-law of the head) were less likely to have a recorded first birth after marriage, compared to women who were heads' wives. In populations with other succession rules, however, stem kin and even non-stem kin members of the household head shared reproductive advantages, as shown in China's Liaodong state farms.

There were also clear signs of the reproductive effects of age differences between spouses in many of our study populations. Large age differences with wives at least 6 years younger than their husbands tended to be associated with the lower likelihood of second or higher births in almost all our study communities. On the other hand, in Liaodong, couples in which wives were older than their husbands showed a higher likelihood of first and later births registered, with the effect stronger for female than for male births. While our earlier study on mortality found few significant effects of household size and complexity on survivorship, the role of household organization was clearly stronger and more consistent in reproduction.

The communities included in our comparative study differed markedly in their household organizations. So did the role of the household organization in reproduction in these populations located at the opposite ends of the Eurasian landmass. In the Belgian and Swedish communities, reproductive control was first and foremost achieved by postponing the formation of the household through delayed or foregone marriages. Once formed, however, households in these locales generally retained a simple structure often with no more than one conjugal unit. Reproduction in these settings remained highly individualistic. In contrast, in the Chinese and the Japanese communities and, to some extent, the Italian communities, household formation did not usually follow marriages. Households in these populations tended to be more complex and sometimes also larger, and they often continued well beyond a single generation. The complex households in these populations were also in a better position to plan and achieve reproductive goals than the simple households. Complex households imposed constraints as well as providing resources for reproduction, and they exercised active reproductive control in multiple ways, sometimes encouraging births and other times killing infants. Reproductive decisions in these populations therefore were collective and strongly proactive.