

The Present Situation and the Subject of Korean Population History

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Abstract

Korean historical demography is still in a beginning stage, mainly due to its lack of appropriate methodology. But it is a promising field with substantial materials like genealogies (*chokp'o*) and household registers (*hojok*), which in turn need rigorous evaluation as source materials for historical demography. Based on the brief survey of historical demography in Western Europe, Japan, and China, Korean scholars may get inspiration from the methodology of foreign historical demography and engage in two promising studies which may illuminate demographic realities in the Chosön dynasty; The one is to investigate the population changes in long terms, and the other is to find out population control mechanism, if any, comparable to those found in Western Europe, Japan, and China.

Keywords : historical demography, population changes, population control mechanism, genealogies, household registers

1. Population history and historical demography

The field of population history has had a long history all over the world, and it has been studied for 80 years in Korea. Shikata Hiroshi's research on the household registers (*hojok*) of the Chosön dynasty (1392-1910) also began as a part of population history research. On the other hand, historical demography is a quite new field. Historical demography brought into being by two French scholars of 1950s, Loius Henry and Pierre Goumert, who independently developed 'family reconstitution method' during that period. Two scholars examined the individual records of christening, marriage, and burial from parish registers (*registres paroissiaux*). By restoring such vital events as birth, marriage, and death etc. about individuals, they succeeded in making a definite statistical bases on population researches.

Before historical demography came into being, population history mainly had depended on the macro calculation of population figures, and it had used a crude method without presenting concrete evidences. Therefore, the introduction of historical demography had a great and epoch-making significance, as an

events which enhanced the level of population history research in a revolutionary way. Later, historical demography has spread from Europe to other areas of the world. The results of historical demography in Japan and in China have been presented since 1960s and 1980s respectively.

Historical demography takes the pre-modern age as a period of research. In the pre-modern age, modern methods of census did not begin yet, so population data were not available in modern forms. Historical demography restores individuals' data in a massive quantity, and applies statistical methods to illuminate demographical changes over different periods. But one problem of historical demography is the fact that only limited number of areas have relevant materials answerable to the methods of historical demography. For areas which do not have proper materials like European parish registers or Japanese *Shumon aratame cho*, it is difficult to apply the same methods. The object of my paper is to inquire into that possibility, whether the Korean population history research can be done through the methods of historical demography.

2. Present situation of Korean population history

In Korea, the field of population history has a certain history and has accumulated certain results. But to be honest, the research based on the methods of historical demography has just begun.

This paper does not intend to outline the history of population history research in Korea, but is concerned with the population history research of the Chosŏn dynasty. Two research methods have been used in the population history research of the Chosŏn dynasty until now, as Ch'a Myŏngsu (2003) pointed out. The one is to estimate the nation's whole population at a given period by tracing backward from modern national census statistics. The other is to estimate population sizes and population changes on the basis of the household statistics investigated by the Chosŏn government. It can be said that Sŏk Namguk's (1972) research is the representative result of the former, and Kwŏn T'ehwan's (1977) and Sin Yongha's researches are the successful result of the latter. Especially, the studies of Kwon and Sin occupy the position of an established thesis as the most credible achievement in population history research of the Chosŏn dynasty, being quoted widely in Korean scholarly circle.

However, the studies of Kwŏn and Sin based on the household statistics of the Chosŏn government need to be reexamined fundamentally, as Ch'a Myŏngsu (2003) pointed. Their assumption that the basic policy for compiling the household registers had remained unchanged throughout the whole period of the Chŏson dynasty - therefore the unlisted ratio in the household registers

had been always the same - came under serious criticism. For example, according to Kim Kuentae's (2001) research based on the data base of the household registers from *Tansŏng hyŏn*, Kyŏngsang province, the sex and age distribution listed in the household registers changed greatly between the 17th century and the 19th century. So, it is not possible to suppose that the Chosŏn government intended to compile the household registers under the same policy throughout the late Chosŏn period.

Not only the studies of Kwon and Sin, but almost all researches on the population history of the Chosŏn are based on the statistics of the government's household registers, thus having the similar problem. I think the population history research would only repeat the guessworks, unless it is done with the critical evaluation of its basic sources, namely, the household registers. As I mentioned before, in historical demography, reconstitution of individuals' vital events needs to be done in large number. So far in the Korean population history research, this essential work has not been done. In other words, the Korean demographic study still remains at the stage of population history, not using the methodology of historical demography.

But recently, historical demography has begun in Korea. Many researchers began to use various genealogies (*chokpo*) rather than household registers. Pak Hŭijin (2002, 2003), and Ch'a Myŏngsu (2003), utilizing the results of the demographic research based on Chinese genealogies, processed data of genealogies in statistical way, and figured out the trends in the population by investigating the periodical change of male population index. This method is not the family reconstitution method used by European and Japanese historical demographers. But it can be included in the methodology of historical demography, reflecting the characteristics of genealogical data. Thus, it can be said that Korean historical demography has just taken a step.

3. What can be learned from the historical demographics of Western Europe, Japan and China?

(1) Thesis of West European historical demography

Centers of historical demography in the West, namely, University of Cambridge in England and Princeton University in the U.S. produced a number of remarkable works on demographical changes in Europe. Among them, the studies done by so called Cambridge Group are based on comprehensive data collected from parish registers, and they bring major revision to conventional theories, and also provide great stimuli for related fields. For example, the

Group's studies give rise to new interdisciplinary approaches that relate demographic changes with economic indicators like prices and wages or with familial histories.

The most important achievement by West European historical demography is the discovery of West European unique marriage pattern and its population control mechanism.

In *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, a classic in demography, Malthus mentioned positive check and preventive (or moral) check as population control methods, and took England as an area showing an example of the latter. Moreover, John Hajnal discovered that the unique marriage pattern marked by the high ratios of late marriage and single life had existed on the west side of the line that connected St. Petersburg through Trieste, in his famous thesis published in 1965. Hajnal's thesis has been proven true by later historical demographers. In Western European society, late marriage was a general tendency among males and females. There were quite a few unmarried singles. These phenomena constituted a preventive check as Malthus referred. It has been also discovered that population control was done in connection with marriage age as well as economic indicators such as prices and wages. In contrast to the real or presumed customs of early marriage and universal marriage outside of Western European area, such marriage pattern of Western Europe was considered unique and understood as a factor facilitating modernization earliest in the world.

(2) Thesis of Japanese historical demography

Outside West European, Japan was the first to start historical demographic research. Hayami Akira learned the methods of historical demography during his study in Europe, and applied the methods of family reconstitution to his study on *Shumon aratame cho* compiled by Japanese feudal officials during the Edo (i.e. Tokugawa) period to keep religious and personal records of residents under their jurisdiction.

Compared with the parish registers in Europe, the *Shumon aratame cho* has a weak point that the deceased within one year of birth are not listed. But the listing is based on family unit, and includes much information about individuals' immigration and economic means. Japanese scholars have been active in developing historical demographic methods which accommodate the characteristics unique to *Shumon aratame cho*.

Importantly, Japanese historical demography has found that Japan had low birth rate like Western Europe, though its early and universal marriage pat-

tern was much different from that of Western Europe. The marital fertility of Japan is supposed to be lower than that of Western Europe, thus indicating that preventive check had been done widely in Japan like in Western Europe. In *Family and population in East Asian History* edited by Hanley, B. Susan and Arthur P. Wolf in 1985, it is argued that the two contrasting patterns of population between Western Europe/Japan and Eastern Europe/China can be defined by the criterion of preventive check in population control.

(3) Development of Chinese historical demography and Chinese thesis

Before the birth of historical demography, the pre-modern society was supposed to have high birth and death rates, and the positive check was thought to be the only method to control population increase. With the birth of historical demography, this common concept was subject to revision at least in cases of Western Europe and Japan. Still, other pre-modern societies like China were thought to have high birth and death rates. Chinese historical demography began in earnest from 1980s.

The sources used in Chinese historical demography so far are genealogies and special population registers. The researches based on the data related to the general public like those from the parish registers of Western Europe and the Japanese *Shumon aratame cho* have not been made yet.

In using genealogies, the studies of Lui Cuirong and Stevan Harell are remarkable. Lui Cuirong found various demographic indicators over long period by investigating vast collection of genealogies. Harell, using scanty information about women in genealogies, developed an interesting methods named 'Male Population Index (MPI)' devised to calculate male survival rates. This method was also used by Pak Hüijin and Ch'a Myöngsu in Korea. Moreover, a group led by James Lee found many interesting demographic realities by examining the genealogies of the royal Manchu families in the Qing dynasty. Considering a great number of genealogies compiled in Korea, Korean scholars may benefit from the methods developed by Chinese scholars in the course of their research on Chinese genealogies.

Another remarkable achievement by Lee and his group is about a special segment of population recorded in *Household and Population Registers of Han Chinese Eight Flag Soldiers*. This document is a kind of census register compiled every three years for the purpose of securing elite eight flag soldiers among Han Chinese. The areas covered by this register are limited to special localities, but the register contains valuable demographic information such as birth dates (even the time of birth) of residents is listed. This is a better source

for demographic research than genealogies.

James Lee and Wang Feng co-authored *One Quarter of Humanity*, in which achievements and limitations of Chinese historical demography is clearly shown. The book emphasizes the fact that there had existed more complex population control system in China than that of Western Europe based on regulation of marriage age. This system comprised four basic components; high rate of female infanticide, low rate of male marriage, low marital fertility, and high rate of child-adoption. Although Lee and Wang admitted Malthusian thesis that early and universal marriages were prevalent in China, they argued that the Chinese could circumvent a Malthusian trap of population growth by combining above four components of population control. Thus, Chinese historical demography has made fast progress. Although many aspects remain unexplored due to the lack of both adequate materials and methodologies, it still can provide inspiration to Korean scholars in data processing skills and in illuminating population control mechanism.

Based on the above brief survey of historical demography in Western Europe, Japan, and China, Korean scholars may get inspiration from the methodology of foreign historical demography and engage in two promising studies which may illuminate demographic realities in the Chosŏn dynasty; the one is to investigate the population changes in long terms, and the other is to find out population control mechanism, if any, comparable to those found in Western Europe, Japan, and China. The studies done by Pak and Ch'a are important, because they were the first to introduce the methods of historical demography in analyzing population data of the Chosŏn dynasty. But their conclusion about the decrease of population in the 19th century doesn't seem very reliable and was related to economic crisis of that period which needs to be re-examined, because it is based on the assumption that there existed only positive check on population growth in the Chosŏn period. That assumption has not been proved yet, therefore it constitutes a big challenge to Korean would-be historical demographers.

4. Is Korean historical demography possible ?

A substantial amount of household registers from Kyŏngsang province are still extant in Korea. And genealogical records are abundant, too. In particular, the proportion of population appearing on genealogical records after the 18th century is probably highest in the world. Thus, Korean historical demography by no means lack relevant materials, but it is still underdeveloped mainly because of the lack of the methodology to use such historical demographic

materials as household registers and genealogies. In establishing Korean historical demography, the critical evaluation of materials on the one hand, and the development of the methodology to use them on the other are required. I will make some suggestions on these matters in the proceeding paper.

With regard to household registers, the data base work done for Tansŏng area must include other areas. In the process, it is important to grasp unique characteristics of household registers by period. It is widely known that household registers are by no means total listing of whole residents in given localities. During the data base processing of Tansong household registers, it has been discovered that omissions in the registers were caused by differing reasons from one period to another. Hence, it is important to investigate the changes in the central government's household registration policy over time, and to examine local processes of listing under such central policy.

Carrying out this dual task is not an easy task but the household registers from Cheju island may provide some guidance. As is well known, for Cheju island, interim drafts of household registers (*hojŏk chungch'o*) in the 19th century are still extant. Moreover, civil population registers (*minjŏkbu*) compiled from 1910s through to 1930s, are preserved there for the lowest *ri* administrative units. The civil population registers from Cheju island carry information about whole *ri* residents in a given registration year. The civil population registers compiled in the early colonial period can be compared with those compiled in the last decade of the Chosŏn dynasty. A research team of Sungkyunkwan University is currently carrying out a comparative work between these two documents to identify the differences by period in the process of population registration, and will be able to publish the results to academic circle in the coming time.

And it would be a meaningful work to use data from household registers for historical demographical analysis. Yet, needless to say, the advantages and disadvantages of household registers as historical demographical sources should be identified prior to such analysis.

With regard to genealogies, Korean scholars may learn many things from the processing methods of Chinese genealogies. But there are many similarities and differences between Chinese genealogies and Korean ones. Although we don't have much room to argue here, the crucial point is that Korean genealogies had much more external and stronger social functions than their Chinese counterparts. There are two basic functions in genealogies. The one is to strengthen clan members' internal cohesion, and the other is to heighten prestige of clan to external world. The former function was emphasized in Chinese

genealogies, but Korean genealogies focused on the latter one. For example, marriage ties were regarded much more important in Korea than in China. This fact can be also understood in relation to the external function of Korean genealogies.

These characteristics of Korean genealogies pose serious problems, when historical demographers choose them as source materials. As Pak and Ch'a remarked, the discrimination against illegitimate descendents poses one serious problem, because some Korean families excluded them from their genealogies all together (especially during the late Chosŏn period). This omission constitutes a serious obstacle in gaining macro data for male population. Furthermore, even legitimate descendants were sometimes omitted from genealogies, when they were considered to be in low social position. This kind of censoring in genealogies was done apparently to keep the prestige of clan in the eyes of outsiders. Although this problem was not addressed by Pak and Ch'a it is crucial to draw attention to it in adopting genealogies as source materials for Korean historical demography.

Korean genealogies overall include many more people than household registers, so they are undoubtedly promising sources for Korean historical demography. Nevertheless, we have to use both genealogies and household registers in a complementary way. For instance, Kim Kuentae argued that one is able to calculate the average first marriage age of women listed in household registers, and that it is possible to estimate ages of women in their first pregnancy. In this way, the lack of information about women in genealogies can be supplemented by using household registers.

Korean historical demography faces enormous and hard tasks, but it is a promising field with abundant materials, which in turn need rigorous evaluation. In general, historical demography is a field which requires collective rather than individual research, considering the fact that well-coordinated research system has produced valuable results in other countries. In addition, other many fields are inter-related to historical demography such as history, demography, sociology, economics, literature, medical history, folklore, cultural anthropology. The researchers from these fields may organize cooperative research projects together with historical demographers.

Glossary

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|--------------|-----|------------------|------|
| Ch'a Myŏngsu | 車明洙 | hojŏk | 戶籍 |
| chokp'o | 族譜 | hojŏk chungch'o, | 戶籍中草 |
| Hayami Akira | 速水融 | hyŏn | 縣 |

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|-----------------|-----|---------------------------|------|
| Lui Cuirong | 劉翠溶 | <i>Shumon aratame cho</i> | 宗門改帳 |
| minjŏkbu | 民籍簿 | Kim Kuentae | 金建泰 |
| Pak Hŭijin | 朴熙振 | Kwŏn T'aehwan | 權泰煥 |
| ri | 里 | Sin Yongha | 愼鏞廈 |
| Shikata Hiroshi | 四方博 | Sŏk Namguk | 石南國 |

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