

Christer Lundh, Satomi Kurosu, et al. (eds), *Similarity in Difference. Marriage in Europe and Asia, 1700-1900* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014) 544 p. ISBN 9780262027946.

Ever since Thomas Malthus' work many historical demographers study and acknowledge the differences in patterns and mechanism of marriage in Western-Europe and Asia. Marriage patterns are important because in many societies cultural norms dictated that sexual intercourse could only take place within the marriage. The timing of marriage therefore influences fertility and in turn population growth. Moreover, some scholars even go a step further by arguing that marriage patterns can also be linked to historical economic developments such as the Great Divergence. High ages of marriage and a large percentage of the population being unmarried could, for example, cause women to be more independent and encourage individualism and investments in production. In this third volume of the Eurasian Population and Family History Project (EAP) the editors bring together results from an ambitious international collaboration of historians, demographers and other social scientists to investigate marriage patterns in both pre-modern Europe and Asia. As in the other volumes, the framework of this book builds on detailed individual longitudinal data from several rural communities in Sweden, Belgium, Italy, Japan and China, which are analysed using the same kind of event history analysis.

The volume *Similarity in Difference* is structured like the other two volumes. The first section consists of three chapters which cover the used general conceptual framework, sources, methods, and models. The second section consists of three chapters in which all study areas are compared by focusing on life course trajectories, the influence of economic factors on first marriages, and widows and widowers. The third section consists of five chapters, in which the particularities of patterns and mechanisms of marriage in each of the study areas are discussed. The most important results show that the definition of marriage in a certain historical context is essential for understanding its timing and frequency. This is significant because the definition of marriage determines the way in which marriage is connected to fertility: in Europe marriage and reproduction were closely linked, while in Asia marriage could best be seen as the promise of future reproduction.

Despite the fact that the authors conclude that there were major differences in the levels of timing and incidence of marriage between Europe and Asia, this difference became substantially smaller when investigating the moment when the first child was born. Marriage behaviour in China and Japan, for example, was in some aspects closer to that of Italy than to the Belgian and Swedish populations. In addition, everywhere women married on average earlier than men, but the gender differences were not as big as previously assumed. The spousal age gap

was only between 2 and 4 years in all populations. The chances of getting married were higher for those men and women that were young, signalling working capacity for men and childbearing capability for women. The authors also found many similarities in the effects of social-economic status on the timing of the first marriage for men in particular, and the influence of household composition on individual marriage chances in general. In sum, these findings demonstrate that the presumed east-west dichotomy regarding marriage behaviour is far too simplistic because: 'we found the East in the West and the West in the East, and even more important, we uncovered similarity in individual and family behaviour that has previously been neglected in comparative studies of pre-modern Europe and Asia [460]'.

Although the argumentation throughout the whole volume is consistent and compelling, the economic approach and focus on similarity leave room for some critique. The main shortcoming of this work is that no alternative theories are presented to really explain the variations in marriage behaviour that remain after accounting for the existing resemblances. For example, the framework of the project is often not detailed and inclusive enough to really include argumentation based on cultural differences throughout time and place. What is missing is a multi-level conceptualisation and operationalisation of culture at the community, household and individual level. This is important because culture influences value systems that guide individual and group behaviour, including how family relationships are shaped. In addition, regional variations could not be taken into account because most datasets only cover a relatively small area of a certain region. It would be interesting to see how and why marriage behaviour may differ within areas because this is probably closely connected to the specific historical context in which people actually lived their lives. Yet, there is no doubt that the approach of the EAP does an outstanding and innovative job in uncovering the similarities between East and West, which were previous invisible and unknown to many researchers. In the end one can only conclude that the editors not only claim to 'challenge the East-West dichotomy by going beyond binary taxonomies of marriage patterns and family systems [3]', but also keep their promise in doing so.

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