

Research Statement

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My dissertation research, supported by over \$15,000 in grants, attempts to explain the differential migration, remittance, and development patterns in 22 rural communities in Thailand from 1984 to 2000. During this period, Thailand's economic base shifted from agriculture to export processing, and migration took on added significance in Thai livelihoods. Due to the rapidity of economic and social change, Thailand provides an interesting setting to observe the maturation of migration streams, accumulation of migrant remittances, and initiation of development dynamics in sending communities. Thailand is also a unique setting due to the scope of the data available to researchers. The Nang Rong surveys, analyzed in the dissertation, contain information on individuals and households in 22 rural communities and on migrants in 4 urban destinations over a 16-year period. I supplement the quantitative analyses of survey data with qualitative insights from my fieldwork in Nang Rong, which involved 24 focus group interviews with a total of 160 participants.

In the first chapter, I investigate whether the accumulation of social capital (defined as information or assistance provided by prior migrants that can facilitate migrating for potential migrants) can explain the divergent migration outcomes observed in the 22 communities. Introducing a novel theoretical approach, I decompose social capital into resources (information about or assistance with migration), sources (prior migrants), and recipients (potential migrants). I find that individuals' migration choices are affected by the level, diversity and accessibility of social capital resources as well as individuals' strength of ties to social capital sources. Through simulation analysis, I demonstrate that even small initial differences among communities in social capital can have cumulative effects and generate dramatically different migration outcomes over time. The paper based on this chapter, "Social Capital and Migration: How Do Similar Sources Lead to Divergent Outcomes," has received the 2006 Best Graduate Student Paper Award from the *Population Section* of the ASA, as well as a recent invitation to revise and resubmit from *Demography*.

The second chapter of the dissertation investigates how prior migration experience in a community moderates the effect of social, demographic, and economic factors on migration. I propose a new measure of community migration experience, adapted from the economics literature, which captures both its level and distribution. Classifying communities according to this measure, I identify different 'phases' of migration, and find that the factors that influence migration in its initial phases are different than those that are influential in the later phases. A manuscript based on the ideas of this chapter is currently being prepared to be submitted to *Demography*.

Finally, in a recently completed third chapter, I consider the implications of the differential migration patterns for remittance flows between migrants and their households. Inspired by a recent upsurge of 'unified explanations' in the context of war onset and escalation in the political science literature, I propose to integrate analyses of migration and remittances. Theoretically, I argue that explanations for remittances entail

implicit assumptions about individuals' motives for migrating, and similarly, theories of migration posit expectations about prospective remittance behavior. I find that conceptualizing migration and remittances as interdependent processes not only sharpens the theoretical explanations, but also modifies the empirical conclusions in the Thai context. This paper has been submitted to *Social Forces*. Currently, I am working on the fourth and final chapter of my dissertation, which will explore the developmental consequences of migration and remittances patterns in the sending communities.

The survey data I use in my dissertation presents methodological challenges, as it contains longitudinal and multi-level information on individuals, households and communities. In connection with the analyses in my dissertation, I have been working with Bruce Western on a methodology paper, in which we evaluate Bayesian hierarchical models in analyzing multi-level survey data. In the specific application to Thai migration data, we find that the Bayesian framework proves useful as it allows for an empirical approach to model selection. This collaborative work has resulted in a manuscript that will be submitted to *Sociological Methodology*.

My second line of work, in collaboration with Sara Curran, analyzes how gender relations and institutional contexts affect migration behavior of men and women in Thailand. In January 2006, we received an NSF grant (\$250,000) to collect additional data. We also have an NIH grant under review that aims to collect data on histories of institutions (e.g., factories, schools, development projects) related to migration. Two papers from this project are already in print in *Social Forces* and *International Migration Review*, respectively. The first paper merges insights from gender studies and cumulative causation theory of migration, and finds that differential information-sharing patterns of men and women lead to different cumulative migration patterns. The second paper evaluates the quantitative migration scholarship in terms of attentiveness to gender, and finds that only one-fifth of the studies published in the leading sociology journals treat gender as a constitutive element in their analyses. In a new manuscript that we are preparing to submit to *ASR*, we evaluate the effect of the labor market context on gendered migration patterns in Thailand.

In another collaborative project, with Paul DiMaggio, we characterize internet adoption as a process with specific network externalities (i.e., the more people adopt in one's network, the more attractive the technology), and suggest that variation in trajectories of adoption among socio-economic groups can be explained by network homophily. More generally, by combining the economic concept of network externalities with structural characteristics of networks, we aim to identify a general process through which certain inter-group inequalities become enduring. For this project, I have adapted a mathematical model of network externalities to characterize internet adoption. I have then employed agent-based computational models to simulate diffusion outcomes under different network homophily scenarios. Extensions of this project will include a manuscript detailing the technical approach of the paper, and an empirical application to internet adoption and disadoption in the U.S. for a manuscript co-authored with Paul DiMaggio and Coral Celeste.

After finishing my dissertation, I am planning to start a project that will attempt to integrate formal diffusion models into the study of migration dynamics. While they have been used to explain the spreading of ideas, innovations or contagious diseases, diffusion models have not been applied to understand the perpetuation of migration flows. Formalizing migration as a diffusion process, I will be able to estimate a general model in different contexts (e.g., Thai, Mexico-U.S.) and identify the differences and similarities across cases. Another idea is continuing my work on social capital and modeling how the accumulation of social capital may generate or sustain inequalities among groups. For this project, I am planning to merge insights from the cumulative advantage literature with the social capital theory, and possibly use migration, education or health outcomes as empirical applications.

A future project related to my work on remittances is using Zelizer circuits (networks defined by a boundary, constantly negotiated interactions, distinctive cultural materials and particular forms of transfer and media) from economic sociology to provide a more refined cultural and relational understanding of remittances. Specifically, prior work typically treats remittances between migrants and their households as purely economic exchanges, neglecting the web of relations that are required to sustain these flows. Because Zelizer circuits highlight the structural configurations of relations, as well as the processes that create and sustain those relations, they provide a perfect analytical tool to understand and theorize about remittance exchanges.

In connection with these projects, a long-term goal is to extend my research on migration and remittances in space and time, through initiating new data collection efforts. A logical first step is combining worldwide macro-level data on migration and remittance flows (using already existing sources such as ILO or World Bank) and conducting comparative statistical analyses in order to identify interesting cases for future micro-level data collection. Methodologically, related to comparative analyses of macro-level data, I have been experimenting with the maximum entropy approach in econometrics, which is especially advantageous when data available to researchers are limited. This methodology, which has not been applied in sociology, could prove very useful for a variety of problems, as researchers typically deal with partial, aggregated or incomplete data. I am planning to apply this methodology to analyze macro-level migration and remittance patterns across countries, and also work on a methodology paper in the future.