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Flaim, Williams, and Ahlquist

How Statelessness and Outmigration are Driving Rural Inequality in the Highlands of Thailand

Background
Research demonstrates a number of ways in which the outmigration of adult children can affect the well-being of rural elderly who remain in sending communities. The scholarship on this topic tends to emphasize, on the one hand, the negative consequences of out-migration among the 'left-behind' elderly who lose agricultural labor and companionship, and must fend for themselves when their adult children leave (Zimmer and Knodel 2013; He and Ye, 2014; Zhuo and Liang, 2015). Another body of literature suggests that where migration decisions are implemented in order to benefit the entire family, the consequences of out-migration may be positive for all involved, especially in contexts with better transportation and communications options (Knodel et al. 2010; Zimmer and Knodel 2013). Where decisions are made collectively, out-migration often advances the welfare of both migrant and non-migrant family members, even when they live far apart (Liu, 2014).

Whether migration decisions are made individually or collaboratively, however, recent scholarship finds that returns to migration accrue disproportionately to some population subgroups. A growing literature traces some disparities along legal status lines, although very little research has attended to the way these inequalities transfer to elderly who remain in sending communities. The majority of extant knowledge regarding legal status and stratification focuses on Hispanic migrants in the United States and rural-to-urban migrants in China. Both provide useful comparisons for our assessment of the dynamics of legal status, rural outmigration, and elderly well-being in Thailand, and we plan to highlight these comparisons.
For example, like China, Thailand operates a national household registration system to locate and monitor its population; and, mirroring an international border regime, Thailand deploys an extensive network of internal checkpoints, ID cards, and other internal travel papers to surveil and restrict the mobility of resident "aliens" (Reddy 2015; Author). In rural China, migration provides economic benefits to members of all ethnic groups, but majority Han households receive much more in remittance income than do minority households (Howell, 2017). In addition, members of agricultural households who migrate to Beijing typically have a harder time finding work than do those who attain urban ("non-agricultural") registrations. They also earn significantly less, and have longer and costlier commutes (Wu and Treiman, 2004; Pengjun and Howden-Chapman, 2010).

Hypotheses
Following the literature, we test three hypotheses: First we posit that remittance receipt will be most common among more advantaged elderly, who are able to invest in migration and who will receive more remittances. The second posits that remittance receipt will be most common among elderly in greatest need. The third posits that those who are stateless, while often in great need,

will face greater barriers to migration overall. Elderly in those families are expected to receive remittances least often.

    (1) We expect those with more education and greater access to land to be more likely to receive frequent remittances.
    (2) We expect elderly in greatest need (older, female, disabled, lacking access to land, lacking co-resident child) to be more apt to receive frequent remittances.
    (3) We also expect that those whose family members face significant barriers to migration (those without citizenship and members of ethnic minority groups) to be least likely to receive frequent remittances.

DATA AND METHODS

Data for this study derive from a survey of more than 71,000 stateless and formerly stateless individuals residing in over 15,000 households in 298 villages along the Thai-Myanmar border. The survey, coupled with analyses of interviews and documents collected during two years of ethnographic research (2009-2011) and subsequent follow-up research (2016), provide heretofore unavailable insight into the ways in which differential legal status structures inequalities in both mobility and household wealth.

Variables

Dependent Variable

Frequency of household remittances is the key dependent variable in this study. It compares those who never received remittances over the past year (0) with those who received them only once or twice (1), and those who received remittances more frequently (2).

Independent Variables

Ethnicity

In our statistical models, ethnic Thais comprise the reference category who are compared against (1) highlanders ("hill tribes") and (2) other minorities like Chinese, Shan, and Burmese villagers who reside in highland villages. This simplistic analysis of the extremely complex region attempts to detect any differences in elderly well-being along lines of broad ethnic designations. As explained above, the government has long directed specific policies of exclusion and (re)settlement toward all groups designated as "hill tribes" (highlanders). The large numbers of Chinese, Burmese, Shan, and other minority groups not designated as "hill tribes" have also been subjected to exclusive registration policies, yet their residence in Thailand and claims to citizenship are typically adjudicated differently.

Legal Status

For legal status, the stateless (0), broadly defined, are compared against citizens (1). Individuals coded as ciitizens were confirmed as being in possession of a citizen ID card, whereas those coded as 'stateless' refer to people either in possession of a form of "alien" documentation (Laungaramsri 2014) or with no identification whatsoever. To be clear, HPS data cannot verify any individual's legal claim to citizenship in Thailand or elsewhere. Nevertheless, those who lack identification and those designated as "aliens" experience *effective statelessness* (Lawrance and Stevens 2017), whereby they are unable to enjoy the rights of citizens, make claims on the state, participate in markets and elections, and/or confer citizenship to their children.

Citizenship in Thailand has been an ethnopolitical enterprise, and therefore we also construct an interaction between legal status and ethnicity to understand whether the combination of minority status and statelessness is associated with disadvantage among elderly in the highlands. Table 1 provides data on each ethnic group category with citizenship and without, and their relationship to the other main variables in our analyses. In our multivariate analysis, citizens who are ethnic Thais are the theoretically privileged category against whom all other subgroups are compared. These include the very rare group of stateless Thais (n=21), highlander citizens of Thailand, stateless highlanders, other minorities who are citizens of Thailand, and other minorities who are stateless.

Demographic Control variables
We include controls for age, sex, marital status, education, ethnicity, disability, co-residence with at least one child, and access to land. Age is recoded into four categories: 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, and 75 and older. Women are compared to men, and those who were married are compared to those who were single or divorced, those who were widowed but not remarried at the time of the survey, and those whose marital status was unclear. Educational attainment is low among elderly highlanders, so those who had completed some schooling are compared to those with no formal education. The disability variable, adapted from the American Community Survey (2008), collapses six categories of physical and mental disabilities to create a dichotomous variable comparing (1) those who are completely dependent on others to (0) those who are somewhat or completely independent. Because the impacts of outmigration are thought to be mediated by having at least one adult child who remains at home to help with farming and assist aging parents in other ways we control for co-residence. The co-residence variable is coded (1) if there is at least one adult child living in the household and (0) otherwise.

Migration variables
Our simplest migration variable compares those in households that reported having at least one working adult out-migrant (1) against those who had no adult out-migrant members (0). Our second migration variable compares households with no out-migrants against those that have at least one citizen out-migrant, and those who have at least one out-migrant but none with citizenship. Because we are interested in the ways that legal status mediates elderly well-being in light of significant rural outmigration, our third migration variable interacts the first migration variable (household has one working adult out-migrant, yes/no) with the respondent's citizenship. For this variable, citizens with no migrant household members, stateless elderly with no migrant household members, and stateless elderly with at least one migrant household member are compared against their theoretically more privileged counterpart, citizen elderly with at least one migrant member of their household.

Access to land
Our ethnographic work identified the importance of land for well-being in the highland context and we include access to land as a control, comparing those without any access to land (0) to those with regular access to land (1) and those whose access was irregular (2). These categories broadly account for the complex de facto land tenure systems that have been emerging in highland communities as they experience and shape the on-going agrarian transformations in the region (Sturgeon 2005, Authors DATE).

Multivariate Models

We begin our multivariate analysis with a basic model (Model 1) that controls for respondents' ethnicity, citizenship status, age, sex, marital status, education, disability, land access, and child co-residence. Model 2 includes the same control variables, but adds the variable that combines ethnicity and legal status in place of the separate variables. In Model 3, we add the variable for citizenships status of out-migrants. Finally, in model 4, we include the variable that combines the citizenship status of the elderly person and whether or not the household has out-migrants.

RESULTS

Table 1. Sample of Elderly in UNESCO HPS II: Legal Status and Ethnicity

	N Total=4,553	Citizen Thais n=772	Stateless Thais n=21	Citizen Highlanders n=2,300	Stateless Highlanders n=717	Citizen Other n=324	Stateless Other n=419	Chi2sig
Dependent Variable		%	%	%	%	%	%	
Remittances Received over Past Year (Never)	3,163	64.4	85.7	69.0	75.9	70.4	69.0	81.05***
Once or twice per year	1,040	23.7	14.3	25.3	17.6	22.5	17.4	
Frequently	350	11.9	-	5.7	6.6	7.1	12.6	
Demographic Variables		%	%	%	%	%	%	
Age (60-64)	1,850	35.5	38.1	40.9	23.5	46.3	43.0	37.10**
65-70	1,098	25.0	19.1	24.1	20.8	23.2	26.3	
71-74	757	18.3	23.8	16.2	21.7	16.0	12.7	
75+	848	21.3	19.1	18.8	34.0	14.5	18.1	
Sex (Male)	2,277	49.5	75.0	49.9	50.2	51.2	51.6	5.61 (ns)
Female	2,256	50.2	25.0	50.1	49.8	48.8	48.4	
Marital Status (Married)	3,253	72.5	33.3	74.4	68.1	68.8	63.3	138.96***
Single or Divorced	248	4.9	-	5.4	4. 5	7.7	7.2	
Widowed	833	17.2	19.1	17.0	20.1	20.9	22.4	
Other	219	5.3	47.6	3.4	7.4	2.5	7.2	
Disability (Independent)	4,242	96.2	95.2	92.5	95.3	85.5	93.6	48.34***
Totally Dependent	311	3.8	4.8	7.5	4.7	14.5	6.4	
Educational Attainment (None)	3,952	45.3	95.2	97.4	99.0	69.8	97.1	1.6e+03***
Some Primary	601	54.7	4.8	2.7	1.0	30.3	2.9	
Land Access (No Access to Land)	486	19.7	4.8	4.0	12.8	9.8	27.9	491.30***
Regular Access to Land	3,633	63.6	76.2	90.5	75.0	85.5	54.9	
Irregular Access to Land	434	16.7	19.1	5.5	12.1	4.6	17.2	
Co-Residence Variable								
Residence with Adult Child (None)	1,985	50.5	61.9	39.8	41.7	50.6	48.5	42.75***
Live with at least 1 Adult Child	2,568	49.5	38.1	60.2	58.3	49.4	51.6	
Migration-Related Variables								
Adult Migrant Member of HH (None)	3,532	78.4	76.2	74.4	82.0	83.9	80.9	31.69***
At least 1 migrant member of household	1,021	21.6	23.8	25.6	18.0	16.1	19.1	
No. of Migrants w Citizenship (No migrants)	3,532	78.4	76.2	74.4	82.0	84.0	80.9	481.91***
No migrant members are Thai citizens	143	0.01	-	0.6	9.8	0.3	14.1	
At least one migrant member is a Thai citizen	878	21.5	23.8	25.0	8.2	15.7	5.0	

Wealth and Labor Variables								
Wealth Index (Poorest Quartile,)	1,087	1.8	4.8	29.2	43.9	4.0	17.4	*485.15****
Wealthier-Wealthiest (3rd - 1st Quartiles)	3,466	98.2	95.2	70.8	56.1	96.0	82.6	
Labor (Retired)	1,891	43.8	37.5	45.5	42.5	38.7	42.3	*395.98****
Subsistence Labor (3rd Quartile)	1,627	24.9	18.8	45.2	32.0	50.7	20.3	
Wage Work (2nd Quartile)	785	31.3	43.8	9.3	25.5	10.4	37.4	

p<0.001***, p<0.01**, p<0.05*

Table 2. Factors Associated with Remittance Frequency in Past Year

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3	MODEL 4
Control Variables				
Ethnicity (Thai, Ref)				
Highlander Groups	-0.04	-	-	-0.17
Other Minorities	0.05	-	-	0.09
Legal Status (Citizen, Ref)				
Stateless / Not Citizen	-0.22**	-	-	-
Interaction 1: Legal Status & Ethnicity				
Ethnic Thai Citizens (Ref)				
Stateless Thais	-	-1.01	-1.61*	-
Highlander Citizens	-	-0.01	-0.24*	-
Stateless Highlanders	-	-0.35**	-0.42**	-
Other Minority Citizens	-	-0.17	0.01	-
Stateless, Other Minorities	-	0.03	0.08	-
Interaction 2: Legal Status & Outmigration				
Citizens, At Least One Migrant (Ref)				
Citizens, No Migrants	-	-	-	-2.46***
Stateless, No Migrants	-	-	-	-2.54***
Stateless, At Least One Migrant	-	-	-	0.16
Age (60-64, Ref)				
65-69	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04
70-74	-0.23*	-0.22*	-0.08	-0.03
75+	-0.13	0.13	-0.07	0.08
Sex (Male, Ref)				
Female	-0.01	-0.00	0.00	0.06
Marital Status (Married, Ref)				
Single or Divorced	-0.38*	-0.38*	-0.12	-0.13
Widowed	-0.04	-0.03	0.05	0.19*
Other	-0.22	-0.20	-0.09	0.03
Disability (Relatively Independent, Ref)				
Totally Dependent	-0.22	-0.20	-0.02	-0.11
Education Level (None, Ref)				
Some Formal Education	0.29**	0.33**	0. 31*	0.29*

Land Access (No Access to Land, Ref)				
Regular Access to Land	-0.27*	-0.25*	-0.34**	-0.27*
Irregular Access to Land	-0.17	-0.16	-0.10	-0.10
Residence Arrangements				
Residence with Adult Child (None, Ref)				
Live with at least 1 Adult Child	-0.39***	-0.39***	-0.18*	-0.32***
Migration-Related Variables				
No. of Migrants with Citizenship (All, Ref)				
No migrant members in household	-	-	-2.78***	-
At least one migrant member is Thai Citizen	-	-	0.27	-
/Cut 1	0.51	0.58	-1.36	-1.26
/Cut 2	2.20	2.26	0.89	0.82
Model Measures	*PseudoR2: 0.01**** *LL: -3527.15*	*PseudoR2: 0.01**** *LL: -3522.52*	*PseudoR2: 0.21**** *LL: -2830.62*	*PseudoR2: 0.14**** *LL: -3069.09*

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