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 (chakp'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 Choson 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 Choson 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, Louis Henry and Pierre Gougert, 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 Choson dynasty. Two research methods have been used in the population history research of the Choson dynasty until now, as Ch'a Myongsu (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 Choson government. 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 demographies of Western Europe, Japan and China?

(1) Thesis of West European historical demography

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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