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Marriage, Migration Policy, and Migration: Evidence from the Hukou Reform in China

RÉSUMÉ

Do marriage prospects affect migration decisions? To what extent do marriage prospects shape the migration responses to merit-based migration policies? By migrating, migrants benefit from direct economic gains and marriage prospects—including benefits from marrying locals and marital gains from local status. By embedding marriage choices in a migration model, I show that merit-based migration policies have a substantial indirect impact on actual migrants through marriage markets, theoretically and empirically. I estimate a dynamic version of the model using Chinese data and conduct two counterfactual exercises. First, I show that in the absence of intermarriages, the number of migrants aged 20-35 in large cities would drop by 5.6% for men and 12.8% for women in 2000. Second, I analyze the counterfactual policy of granting migrants local status immediately after migration. Neglecting the indirect policy impact through marriage markets, we would underestimate the migration of men by about 30% and of women by 40% in large cities. Furthermore, we would underestimate the number of low-skill migrants in large cities and overestimate the number of high-skill migrants.

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