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Population growth and transnational migration to Thailand in a rural village in Laos

Shinichi TAKAHASHI (Japan)

Population growth and transnational migration to Thailand in a rural village in Laos Shinichi TAKAHASHI (Niigata Sangyo University, Japan) PRELIC (Population dynamics, reproduction and livelihood changes in small-scale communities of Laos) Rural Laos has experienced relatively high population growth for long time. Our PRELIC project has investigated the relationship among demographic, economic, and social changes in a village depending on rain-fed paddy production. This study examines why population growth occurred, and how the population growth gave impact on the increase of labor migration to Thailand. Population growth in the village was caused by decline of mortality rates and continuance of high fertility rates. Infant mortality rates declined from over 200 per thousand births of mothers aged 60s to 30-50 per thousand births of them aged 30s. On the other hand, fertility rates of mothers in aged 40s and over have been 5 or more, though these of young mothers are now declining. The village people coping with such population growth firstly adopted to reclaim forests for paddy land. However this almost ended in 1980s, and at the same time paddy land area per farm house decreased. Furthermore, market economy began to penetrate in the village. These changes drove many young villagers to go to Thailand as temporary workers. As a result, they could build new houses and buy paddy lands for living in the village. At the same time migration to Thailand caused to the decline of fertility rates of young married people because they could not have babies during staying in Thailand. Now many young couples plan to have 2 to 3 children and practice birth control.