Urban migration in the late medieval and early modern period: European and Chinese experiences in comparative perspective

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This chapter deals with the demographic, spatial, social, economic, political and cultural dimensions of migration to late medieval and early modern cities. It will examine European experiences from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and explore parallels and contrasts with Chinese cities from the Song to Qing dynasties. Source limitations and language barriers hinder the systematic pursuance of a truly ‘symmetrical comparison’ as advocated by Bin Wong. Instead, the chapter undertakes a first comparative exploration informed by insights derived primarily from European experiences. After discussing the overall demographic importance of urban migration, the chapter turns to comparing and juxtaposing different types of migration, before considering aspects of migration regulation and overall implications for patterns of urban integration. Notwithstanding its methodological limits, the comparative approach may inform new perspectives for looking at migration patterns in other parts of the world, for instance in the Middle East, during the pre-modern era.

A vital component of urban life

Migration was vital to urban development and urban growth in preindustrial Europe and China alike. In the wave of urban expansion that characterized Western Europe in the first three centuries after the turn of the first millennium of the current era, the establishment and growth of settlements was fed by the immigration of new town dwellers. Likewise, active recruitment policies were mobilized to people the newly founded cities in the wave of eastward expansion in Slav and Baltic territories. Even after amassing a certain critical mass, medieval and early modern European cities required a permanent replenishment of their populations. With death rates as a rule exceeding birth rates – a phenomenon associated with the so-called urban graveyard effect – cities depended on a constant influx of new inhabitants to maintain their populations, and multiple that to grow. With the precarious demography of preindustrial cities at times devastated by catastrophic drops in numbers due to epidemics or other mortality crises, influxes of new residents from the countryside
represented nothing less than the lifeline for their continued existence. According to calculations by Jan De Vries, any unit increase of the total urban population of early modern northern Europe required on average twice as many people permanently moving from the countryside to cities, which frequently took place in trajectories of stepwise migration via smaller centres. Since most moves to town were in fact temporary, a much larger number still was involved in patterns of urban migration at some point in their lives. It is for instance estimated that up to ten percent of the rural adult population eventually got a taste of city life in seventeenth-century northern Europe. Conversely, substantial urban decline, as in Cordoba after the Spanish Reconquista or in Antwerp after 1585, was generally associated with substantial emigration.

Even in an early modern city with a relatively stagnant population, therefore, on average around thirty percent of its inhabitants was born outside the city boundaries. Conversely, rapidly growing cities, such as seventeenth-century Amsterdam, were made up predominantly of recent immigrants. Obviously, in such conditions the composition of migration streams in terms of age, gender, family composition, religion or schooling, had a decisive impact on the structure of the urban population at large. Since most urban migrants tended to be young, single adults in their late teens and twenties, their stay in town inflated the middle range of the urban age-pyramid and stirred the urban marriage market. Although many left again after completing their training or saving up enough money to set up their own households, immigrants still supplied more than half of all urban marriage partners and regularly married local spouses – albeit at a slightly later age than local-born counterparts – which with a time-lag also contributed to urban fertility rates, and eventually death rates.

Source particulars make it more difficult to assess urban demographic regimes in preindustrial Chinese cities. Because population registration took place at the level of districts, compounding urban and rural populations, it is often not possible to systematically differentiate and compare urban and rural growth, fertility and mortality rates nor to assess overall migration rates. Frequent references to the presence of sojourners – residing outside their ‘native place’ – in late imperial cities indicate that migration was a familiar experience, but because the status grew hereditary this also included descendants from earlier immigrants. Existing data in any case demonstrate that migration played a vital role in realizing geographic shifts in the distribution of the Chinese population, and in enabling urbanization spurts. The urban growth spurt in the lower Yangtze valley in the period from late T’ang to Song, for instance, was associated with a large-scale migratory movement of population from the northern plains to the mountainous south and the southeast coast. The presence of sojourners also clearly moved in tandem with the demographic and economic fates of cities: dominant in booming centres such as late imperial Shanghai, modest in
cities experiencing a downgrading of their economic importance such as Lin-ch’ing and Yangchow in the same period.\textsuperscript{v}

Both in Europe and China, then, migration and mobility was a pervasive characteristic of urban life, and a prime factor in determining the ups and downs in the population curve of individual cities. Comparing the overall incidence of urban migration for both regions is however a complicated matter. While direct data on gross migration dynamics are absent for the pre-modern era, even urban population figures and vital statistics – the best indirect measures available – are of an approximate nature at best, of unequal quality, and not easily comparable through space and time. Available estimates suggest that the first centuries of the second millennium of the current era set the scene for marked urban expansion in both China and Europe, resulting in what appears to have been roughly comparable aggregate levels of urbanization of around 10 percent by the thirteenth century – when using the benchmark of 5,000 inhabitants to define a city – although China counted more big cities (with more than 100,000 inhabitants) than Europe. While Chinese urbanization might have progressed somewhat further, from the sixteenth century onwards the urban proportion of the population started to decline, to reach a level of only 5 percent by the early nineteenth century, by which time the comparable figure for Europe stood at 13 percent. The relative decline in Chinese urbanization during the late Ming and especially Qing periods went hand in hand with a very strong expansion of the overall population, concentrated mainly in rural and frontier areas, and did not imply any decrease in the absolute size of China’s urban population.\textsuperscript{vi}

Furthermore, important regional differences existed – with urbanization in the most developed European and Chinese regions surpassing levels of 30 percent. Yet given that migration was vital to urban population development in the pre-modern era, the divergent trends noted from at least the sixteenth century onwards suggests that the overall proportion of people involved in urban migration was lower in Ming-Qing China than in contemporaneous Europe.

The long-term increase in the proportion of Europeans living in cities implies a structural shift in the relative attractions of urban versus rural income opportunities, a shift driven by long-term dynamics of peasant marginalization and increasing wage dependency. While only part of the resulting labour mobility was directed towards towns, and many moved from cities back to the countryside, the net result of these shifts was a cumulative increase in the absolute and relative importance of urban residents vis-à-vis rural dwellers over the longue durée.\textsuperscript{vii} The overall smaller proportion of urban dwellers in China throughout the early modern period, indicates that structural dynamics fostering long-term shifts in population distribution from the countryside to cities were less at play, as Chinese agriculture remained dominated by small-scale independent peasant households to a much larger extent than in Europe.\textsuperscript{viii} This does not imply that Chinese society was less mobile: rather, state-supported dynamics of territorial expansion and internal colonization
provided important rural migration alternatives for the build up of lowland population pressure. Yet while long-distance colonization patterns might have functioned efficiently as labour allocation mechanisms, there was no trend comparable to the increasing proletarianization observed for Europe, with its implications for rural-urban migration patterns. Moreover, the types of migrants involved, the routes taken by them, and the degree of concern or regulation induced by their movements could differ substantially.

Forced and voluntary migration

While migration was a pervasive characteristic of preindustrial urban life, migrations could differ considerably in terms of purpose, distance, intended duration, or the types of migrants involved. The distinctions involved are however rarely clear-cut, and rather than as dichotomies can often better be considered as poles of a continuum. A case in point is the oft-made distinction between forced and voluntary migration. Warfare, persecutions, personal unfreedom and deportations could seriously limit if not completely curtail the room for free choice, as in the most extreme case of the slave trade. Yet even migrations instigated by force, could harbour elements of choice, for instance in deciding on eventual destinations. When the Marranos were persecuted and all but expelled from the Iberian peninsula in the sixteenth century, their preference for commercial hubs such as Florence, Venice, Milan, Constantinople, Saloniki, Antwerp, Amsterdam and Hamburg as destinations demonstrates the importance of economic considerations in their migration decisions. Another illustration of this ambiguity was the large-scale northward movement of an estimated 100,000 residents from the Southern Low Countries in the course of the Dutch Revolt, where they ended up peopling the mushrooming cities of the Dutch Republic and providing an important stimulus to textile industries and commercial undertakings. While military upheaval and religious persecutions obviously were an important instigator of their move, existing research has demonstrated that the pursuit of better economic opportunities was often also a stimulating factor. Conversely, even migration decisions made in less pressing circumstances were often severely limited by incomplete information or limited income opportunities.

Although it is therefore difficult to categorize moves as either voluntary or forced at an individual level, disparities in the incidence and nature of warfare as well as of personal unfreedom fostered differences in aggregate migration volumes and patterns. In medieval and early modern Western Europe, large-scale displacements occurred mainly in the context of religious persecutions and warfare, as during the late medieval crusades or the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the context of Europe’s competitive state system, cities and governments elsewhere were often quick to seize the opportunity of attracting wealthy or skilled refugees, who in many cases ended up reinforcing mainly urban populations, adding to the ethnic diversity of cities –
such as the Huguenots in Prussia, or the Iberian Jews in Venice. In Eastern Europe, however, the ubiquity of personal unfreedom in the context of ‘second serfdom’ acted as a brake on urban migration. In pre-industrial China, large-scale population movements and deportations often took place in the context of military upheaval and regime changes, as with the large-scale move southward in the wake of the takeover of northern China by the Jin dynasty, or the repopulation of Sichuan after the massacres during the late Ming. Imperial expansion in turn went hand in hand with colonization and settlement policies involving large-scale migrations to frontier regions and the forced removal, concentration and/or dispersal of ethnic groups over sometimes great distances. While the incidence and efficiency of co-ordinated and forced movements varied considerably through space and time, state intervention appears to have played a more important role in realizing large-scale displacements in China than in Europe. Only in Russia do we see large-scale deportation and forced settlement, particularly to the new towns established on its eastern borders.

The urban migration pyramid

Another helpful cluster of distinctions to differentiate among urban migration patterns concern the duration and distance of the moves involved, which tended to correlate with the social background of the migrants involved. Existing research for ancien régime Western Europe has uncovered the existence of distinct migration circuits, whereby the direct hinterland was often the main supplier of apprentices, domestic servants, day labourers and other relatively unspecialized labour, while specialized artisans and white-collar workers generally moved between different cities and over greater distances. The migration flows from the surrounding countryside formed part of a set of broader social, economic and political relationships and interactions linking a city to its hinterland – including market relations, land ownership, and jurisdiction, which in effect functioned as the main purveyors of migration information for most country dwellers. Migrants recruited from beyond a city’s rural hinterland were generally more likely to move along the networks of trade and administration connecting different cities. Generally higher skilled and/or socially superior to their rural counterparts, they were engaged in more exclusive social networks providing them with migration information of a more selective and efficient nature and a wider spatial scope, such as artisans’ associations, merchant networks or state bureaucracies.

Schematically, then, migration to cities resembled a pyramid. The broad base consisted of rural migrants with few skills covering relatively short distances. By supplying the hands necessary for carrying out the unspecialized labour-intensive activities, hinterland migration was vital to the functioning of urban economies. This was because in a pre-industrial setting based on organic energy even specialist activities required a multitude of unspecialized hands for auxiliary tasks such
as hauling, packing, unpacking, maintaining fires or turning wheels. Even a modest bakery in seventeenth-century London provided work for six pairs of hands, several of them unskilled. In addition, rural migrants could often exploit comparative advantages in basic activities such as food processing industries, retailing or carpentry, and often possessed sufficient skills for lowly specialized trades such as spinning, knitting, tailoring or construction work. Social networks and recruitment carrousels could help them gaining access to the urban labour market and establishing certain occupational niches. While many moved in seasonal and temporary patterns of migration, a substantial proportion of hinterland migrants ended up marrying and settling in their city of destination, providing a vital contribution to the urban population – hence the dubbing of their recruitment area as the city’s ‘demographic basin’. The observation that the spatial contours of demographic basins were characterized by long-term continuity, attests to the strong social ‘embeddedness’ of migration channels between a town and its hinterland.

The top of the urban migration pyramid, in contrast, consisted of specialist and upmarket migrants travelling between cities over longer distances. Not bound to a specific destination and oriented towards specialist income opportunities, long-distance migration patterns were less durable than those over short distances: swift to emerge when new opportunities opened up, but equally swift to disappear when perspectives elsewhere proved better. Merchant, artisan and ethnic networks often provided important institutional frameworks for channelling their movements, as with the medieval Hanse, the Italian merchant associations, the French compagnonnages or the Huguenot diaspora. Keen to exploit the scarce skills and resources of specialized artisans, merchants and rentiers, urban authorities often competed with one another over attracting and retaining these groups by granting them special privileges, protection and benefits. More than these policies of attraction, which by themselves produced short-term effects at best, the density of commercial and inter-personal connections tying a city to an urban network appears to have determined the durability of inter-urban migration patterns. The textile producing urban network of late medieval Flanders, for instance, fostered the emergence of a durable inter-urban migration circuit of skilled textile workers up until the Dutch Revolt, which was subsequently expanded and to a certain extent displaced to the textile cities of the Dutch Republic and England. The importance attributed to their presence by urban authorities, their higher social standing and their higher degree of ‘exotism’ due to the covering of longer distances, help to explain why long-distance migrants have often received considerably more attention in historiography. Notwithstanding the crucial role they sometimes played in the diffusion of new industrial and commercial technologies and the integration of urban networks, however, their quantitative importance remained limited when compared to hinterland migrants, and by definition played no part in the observed long-term increase of total urban population. A particular place in the urban
migration pyramid was taken up by landowners, whose immigration to the cities proved an important dimension to late medieval urbanization patterns, and who increasingly erected town houses for temporary residence all over Europe – especially in capital cities.xx

Women occupied a particular position within the urban migration pyramid. On the whole, the longer the migration distance, the lower the proportion of women. Single women’s migration occurred primarily within circuits of unspecialized hinterland migration, recruiting young women to work as a domestic servant in urban households for a few years. Given the labour-intensive nature of household chores, the sizeable demand exerted by urban middle and upper class families for female domestic servants often caused women to outnumber men at the bottom of the migration pyramid. Conversely, most female immigrants entered the city as a domestic servant.xxi Many if not most left the city again after working and saving for a few years, but a significant proportion ended up marrying and settling in the city, moving on to unspecialized jobs that were compatible with a married status, such as laundrywoman, spinster, innkeeper or shopkeeper. In addition, vulnerable women such as widows or single mothers were attracted by greater possibilities for combining different income strategies, including charity, in urban settings. Another group contributing significantly to the presence of female immigrants in cities, was that of prostitutes – who often moved between different cities.xxii On the whole, however, women were underrepresented in inter-urban migration circuits, and those women present at the top of urban migration pyramid often belonged to the households of artisans, merchants, landowners or officials.

We are less informed on the variety of migration patterns in the Chinese case. Due to the nature of population classification and registration at district level, migration from the surrounding countryside to a city was often not recorded as a move at all, and was not necessarily considered as such by contemporaries. Therefore, direct evidence on the volume and nature of hinterland migration is scarce, hindering detailed comparisons with European urban migration patterns. Most references to urban migration encountered in contemporary sources and historical literature in the Chinese case refer to migration of a more ‘exotic’ kind, involving migrants moving over relatively long distances, originating from beyond administrative boundaries, speaking specific dialects or languages, and carrying with them their distinct beliefs, habits and customs. Many of them displayed forms of occupational specialization along native-place lines, as the observations of a Presbyterian missionary on late imperial Hangchow attest:

Practically all the carpenters, wood-carvers, decorators, cabinetmakers, and medicine dealers are from Ningpo. The tea and cloth merchants, salt dealers, and innkeepers are from Anhui. The porcelain dealers are from Kiangsi, the opium traders from Canton, and the wine merchants from Shaohsing. Many of the bankers and money-changers are also from
Shaohsing, as well as many of the blacksmiths; ... Soochow furnishes a large number of the official class, the ‘sing-song’ girls, and restaurant keepers.xiii

That most of these migrants belonged to the circles of merchants, artisans or officials, corresponds to migration patterns encountered at the ‘top’ of the migration pyramid identified for European cities. An equivalent to the immigration of landowners to European towns can also be found. As in Europe, the migration of artisans and merchants between Chinese cities over long distances seems to have played an important part in the spread and integration of inter-regional markets and the diffusion of new technologies. Likewise, diasporas and migrant networks could provide a successful institutional framework for the development of inter-urban merchant and artisan networks bound by kinship and ethnicity, as with the salt merchants from the Shanxi and Shaanxi regions in the city of Yangzhou.xxiv In many cases, the urban merchant guilds of the late Qing period can be traced back to the establishment of fraternal native-place associations (hui-kuan) among migrants in the early Ming, although other and longer-standing origins have been attested in the literature.xxv Differences in local autonomy and migration policies, at the same time implies that urban ‘attraction policies’ played a considerable smaller part in channelling upmarket migration patterns than in the European case.

The scale and specificities of the Chinese urban network implies that inter-urban migration channels operated at different levels than in Europe. Whereas Jan De Vries observed an increasing integration of the European urban network in the course of the early modern period, exemplified by a transition from a polynuclear to a single-centred system, Skinner argued that China’s urbanization took place in the context of a number distinctive macro-regional economies.xxvi Even most of the ‘exotic’ migrant groups identified by Cloud in late imperial Hangzhou had travelled a few hundred miles at most. While some migrants moved between different regions and the capitals attracted migrants from all over the empire, most inter-urban migration in China probably occurred within the boundaries of macro-regional urban systems. Although difficult to quantify and important exceptions notwithstanding, median distances of inter-urban migrations were therefore not necessarily larger than in Europe. Yet whereas they generally took place within one empire, in Europe the most mobile and upmarket inter-urban migrants frequently transgressed state boundaries.

Although Chinese sources are more sparse, it seems likely that labour contracting systems, apprenticeships and personal networks functioned as migration channels linking city and countryside, and point at the existence of hinterland recruitment patterns similar to those tying European towns to their ‘demographic basins’.xxvii Given the above observations on the overall incidence of rural-urban migration over the longue durée, however, they probably operated on an overall smaller scale than in Europe. Another apparent difference, related to the former, was the
lower participation of women in patterns of migration and labour mobility, which was in turn related to women’s nearly universal and earlier marriage in China than in Europe – late teens rather than late twenties. With no life phase like that of ‘early adulthood’ in Europe, the Chinese case shows no institution comparable to that of female domestic service so decisive for women’s migration in Europe. More broadly, female labour outside the house was considerably less customary. Although the pleasure districts of major cities attracted female prostitutes, entertainers and courtesans, overall urban migration of single female migrants appears to have taken place at a much lower scale, and often only as a pendant of male or family migrations.\textsuperscript{xxviii} With family and male migration comparatively more important, migrants’ impact on urban nuptuality and fertility patterns must have in turn been mitigated.

Hinterland migration, then, no doubt played an important role in maintaining urban population figures in China as in Europe, yet is more difficult to quantify and typify due to source problems. Overall, the long-term \textit{net} gains of rural-urban migration were smaller in relation to total population in China than in Europe. Structural causes may have lain in different rural and agricultural structures, while proximate causes probably included the lower participation of women and single migrants, lowering migrants’ direct and indirect contributions to urban demography. Migration circuits over longer distances are better documented and show clear resemblances to inter-urban migration patterns identified in Europe, involving mainly artisans, merchants and officials with relatively scarce skills and resources, connected by professional, ethnic or kinship bonds, and displaying patterns of occupational specialization. In Europe as in China, urban migration patterns were an important vehicle for the exchange and blending of cultural habits, customs and beliefs, the circulation of technological innovation, the supply of the urban labour market, and the renewal of ruling elites. While the inter-urban circulation of artisans, merchants and other migrants was a vehicle for the development of urban cosmopolitan culture in larger cities, the constant population exchange between a city and its hinterland was an important conveyor belt for the spread of urban mores.\textsuperscript{xxix} Urban migrants, whether short-distance or long-distance, young or old, male or female, were rarely on their own, but made use of social connections and interpersonal networks when contemplating and effectuating their moves.

\textit{Regulating urban migration}

Although migrants were vital to the urban economy and demography, they were not necessarily looked upon favourably by local or supra-local authorities, and several regulations were devised to limit, control or contain their movements. The motives for intervening in migration patterns were manifold and could vary considerably through space and time, but often centred around concerns over social and political stability, the protection of local resources, and the regulation of supply
channels and urban markets for labour, goods and services. Because migrants by reason of their mobility could complicate endeavours of registration and control, they could be considered hazardous to political order, especially in times of social upheaval or regime changes. Unregulated movements of ethnic minorities could challenge political projects centred on ethnocentrist or nationalist policies, while large-scale influxes of impoverished rural folk risked straining public services and resources such as poor relief up to breaking point. At the same time, migrants were vital supply channels: mobile merchants formed crucial trade links between cities and regions, travelling artisans were instrumental in diffusing new technologies and conquering new markets for urban products, and both short-distance and long-distance workers were vital to fuelling the urban labour demand. Migration policies were therefore often a mixed outcome of restrictive regulations designed to limit their potentially destabilizing effects in terms of social mobility and the protection of local resources on the one hand, and supportive policies aimed at attracting the most ‘valuable’ migrants on the other hand: some migrants were clearly more ‘wanted’ than others. Because the costs and benefits of migration tended to be distributed unequally between different interest groups, however, the eventual outcome and definition of ‘wanted’ and ‘unwanted’ migrants depended upon local power relations as well as those between local and supra-local authorities.

Among regulations affecting urban migration patterns, we can distinguish three types: those limiting the overall freedom of movement, those restricting entry, and those regulating the settlement process proper. Major differences in all three types existed between the regions discussed here, related to disparities with regard to the political autonomy of cities on the one hand and to personal freedom on the other hand. In Western Europe, the rise of cities set in during the high Middle Ages was intimately connected to the retrieval of personal freedom. While an uninterrupted urban residence of a certain length of time could literally free a former serf of his personal obligations to the feudal lord, the overall decline of serfdom in the wake of the fourteenth-century crisis removed the remaining feudal limits on personal mobility. Although specific categories such as those in receipt of poor relief could be required to stay put and certain minority groups were at times forcibly removed, most were legally free to move about in the early modern period. This freedom of movement contrasted with the limits to personal mobility imposed by the concomitant rise of ‘second serfdom’ in Eastern Europe, curbing urban growth dynamics. In Ming-Qing China, freedom of movement was contained by the imperial household registration system, assigning each household to a specific district. Stringent under the early Ming, however, migration restrictions were subsequently relaxed and transfers of registration facilitated.

When we move on from restrictions of overall freedom of movement to those pertaining specifically to urban immigration, again important differences emerge. In Western Europe, the political autonomy and ‘freedom’ most cities enjoyed implied that they could pursue their own
policies of attraction, restriction and expulsion with regard to immigration. Urban ordinances designed to stimulate the influx of those considered valuable and useful and to prevent the entry of ‘idle strangers’, are therefore a familiar and recurring theme to anyone studying late medieval or early modern urban policies. It is worth remarking that these often ran counter against the wishes and endeavours of central authorities, for whom considerations of social stability and political control tended to predominate over the economic considerations that prompted urban authorities. National restrictions on labour mobility in Tudor England, which were inspired mainly by concerns for societal stability, were for instance actively circumvented by urban authorities seeking to recruit an adequate labour supply. Conversely, the authorities of eighteenth-century Lyon sought to reserve the *Hôpital Général* for local silk workers during periods of unemployment, rather than having to accommodate the economically useless riff-raff as envisaged by royal policies that aimed to curb the incidence of vagrancy.

Because cities did not enjoy any similar degree of political autonomy in China, and were often administered jointly with their hinterland at the district level of imperial administration, there was considerably less scope for autonomous policies of entry, while urban residence did not entail any particular personal freedoms or privileges. This helps to explain why migration policies devised by central authorities, often eschewing mobility, had considerably more impact on the fate of individual cities in China than in Europe. A case in point are the anti-migration and anti-urban policies pursued under the early Ming producing a setback in urban growth. Similarly, a higher degree of voluntarism characterized imperial policies to favour one particular city over other cities, producing significant shifts in population figures from one city to another – for instance when capitals were founded or transferred by a new dynasty or ruler, or when whole urban populations were transferred for political reasons. And whereas travel legislation was in principle uniform throughout the Chinese empire, Europe’s competitive state and city system allowed far more possibilities for voting with one’s feet.

Further regulations on urban migration pertained to issues related to settlement, specifying certain conditions for migrants’ residence in town: where they should live, whom they could live with, what type of work or activities they could perform, whether they enjoyed access to relief provisions, etcetera. The city government of sixteenth-century Ulm for instance specified in great detail that resident aliens had to work from the tolling of the work-bell in the morning until it rang in the evening, and were not allowed to keep dogs, to drink alcohol outside their own homes or to enter taverns or gambling during the workweek, and were prohibited from assembling after dark – at the risk of expulsion. Limits of policing and control however imply that stringent rules often functioned more as a stick behind the door to deal with problematic cases rather than as a universally implemented policy. Regulations pertaining to guilds and citizenship were among
those that could indirectly limit newcomers’ economic options: to the extent that certain activities were reserved for members of a certain guild and/or burghers of the town, the associated entry conditions – financial or otherwise – could represent differential barriers to migrants. Newcomers’ access to the carpenters’ guild in early sixteenth-century Ghent, for instance, was comparatively more difficult due to considerably lower entry fees for masters’ sons and local-born citizens. Ethnic minorities were at times relegated to specific sections of the city, as in the case of the Jewish ghetto in Venice.

In a similar way, a combination of urban policies, chain migration networks and occupational specialization produced the often ethnically differentiated neighbourhoods so characteristic for the morphology of early modern Chinese cities. The characteristics and functions of ‘guilds’ in Chinese cities differed from the producer-centred associations in Europe: developed out of native-place associations and grouping mainly officials and merchants, their social and commercial functions tended to predominate over any interventions in the regulation of product and labour markets. Yet native-place associations, merchant guilds and neighbourhood associations (hui) did fulfil important functions as to the socialization of migrant groups, assuring their compliance with local norms, settling disputes and acting as a political lobby vis-à-vis established groups.xxxvii

Integration

Variations in the duration of migration, the social background of newcomers, the channels of migration used, the types of regulations in force and the local opportunity structure produced distinct modes of integration and incorporation in the urban fabric. The notion of integration is often understood in daily language as referring to the assimilation of ‘alien elements’ into a relatively stable environment – but this misrepresents the challenges associated with early modern urban migration patterns. These can be understood better in the original sense of the concept ‘integration’ as the interdependences and interrelationships of different groups and individuals at various levels of social interaction: challenges that work in many directions, and are determined at least as much by the structure and dynamics of the urban fabric as by the agency of migrants themselves.

The question of integration in early modern European cities confronts an interesting paradox: while the ideological rhetoric associated with urban government stressed notions of local belonging to an urban communitas, exemplified by local citizenship, a large proportion of urban residents were in fact immigrants and non-citizens. Urban citizenship could often be acquired by marriage or purchase, yet remained out of reach and/or beyond the aspirations of many immigrants. Urban populations have therefore often been characterized as consisting of a stable core of citizen-residents on the one hand and a ‘floating population’ of temporary migrants on the other hand.xxxviii
Although many migrants stayed only temporarily, too strong a distinction between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ is misleading. Certain newcomers rapidly acquired a place among urban elites, while poor ‘locals’ were in many respects excluded from the political *communitas*. Migrants were not socially disconnected, but often embedded in social support networks that provided them with various connections to the urban fabric. Rather than distinguishing between local ‘insiders’ and migrant ‘outsiders’, then, more research is needed to lay bare the different intersecting modes and layers of integration and incorporation characterizing urban society as a whole.

The density of non-kinship ties connecting individuals to urban society has been identified an exceptional feature of early modern Europe, a result of the demographic characteristics of urban life. Because high mortality and migration rates produced many individuals with few family ties to rely on, voluntary associations developed to take over both affective and supportive functions of kinship networks. The density of fraternities, sororities, associations, clubs and societies in urban contexts not only provided newcomers with manifold entries to local social networks, but also fostered the development of civil society. There is no doubt that various social, political, cultural, economic and religious associations fulfilled important functions in integration trajectories, and in some cases were directly related to aspects of migration regulation, as with guild membership determining whether newcomers could carry out certain trades. At the same time, it is important to realize that membership of these associations was socially stratified and diverse, and that they employed different criteria of both inclusion and exclusion, both formally and informally. To gain entry to the Hospital of Saint Sixtus in late sixteenth-century Rome, for instance, one had to demonstrate a long-standing residence in town, while access to the butchers’ trade in eighteenth-century Antwerp remained quasi hereditary. Dynamics of exclusion could at times also favour immigrants: journeymen in seventeenth-century Amsterdam for instance complained that master cloth shearers, many of whom originated from Hamburg, preferred to hire compatriots, while the chimney sweep guild in eighteenth-century Vienna was completely dominated by immigrants.

Associations were complemented by less formal integration structures that were at least as important in structuring integration patterns, such as living-in arrangements, marriage patterns and neighbourhood networks. Because many immigrants were young, single adults, lodging arrangements – with their employers, other households or lodging houses – provided a first point of entry to elaborate social ties in their new environment. Although immigrants married at a slightly later age and more frequently with fellow-immigrants than their local-born counterparts, marriage was a powerful integration mechanism – one that often determined which young adults eventually settled in town and who moved on. When measured in terms of interactions with local-born residents, for instance with regard to lodging arrangements or marriage patterns, most research shows that hinterland migrants were more ‘integrated’ than the more upmarket migrants from the
higher regions of the urban migration pyramid. The latter were in turn involved more often in ethnic or supra-local networks extending far beyond the urban environment, such as merchant associations or religious diasporas. Because many intended to move on when better prospects opened up elsewhere, maintaining such distant contacts was often more important to them than developing local ties. In that sense, integration in the sense of ‘local embeddedness’ should not necessarily be taken as a measure of success, but rather as an indication of limited migration horizons.

Chinese cities did not cultivate a sense of urban *communitas* similar to that in Europe, where it was bound up closely with a notion of an autonomous political body. Yet urban and neighbourhood identities were nurtured by local customs and beliefs, such as the worshiping of the city god. This was complemented by a strong sense of local and kinship identities, exemplified and fostered by the great political, social and cultural importance of native-place registration and surname groups. Although it is difficult to adequately compare such different institutional structures, it appears that networks and institutions related to migrants’ geographical and ancestral origins were considerably more important for longer lengths of time than in the European case. While both formal and informal conceptions of local belonging in Europe tended to be based mainly on the place of birth, for instance, the institution of native-place and surname lineages in China implied that urban residents could still be considered part of a ‘migrant community’ even after living in town for several generations. Conversely, native-place associations often constituted newcomers’ most important point of entry into the urban fabric. It is telling in this respect that the origins of most Chinese guilds went back to native-place associations founded on a common ethnic background among urban immigrants, who felt the need to strengthen their position in town by asserting their geographical origins – endeavours present in the preamble to the statutes of the Ningpo merchants’ association in Wen-chou-fou:

*Here at Wenchow we find ourselves isolated; mountains and sea separate us from Ningpo, and when in trade we excite envy on the part of Wenchowese, and suffer insult and injury, we have no adequate redress.... It is this which imposes on us the duty of establishing a Guild.*

The greater continued importance of native-place and surname lineages among migrants in cities in the absence or underdevelopment of other urban-wide networks and services is therefore likely to have contributed to a far stronger cultivation and confirmation of origin-based differences in Chinese than in European towns.

**Conclusions**

Comparing urban migration patterns and trajectories in late medieval and early modern Europe with those in contemporaneous China, is complicated by dissimilar source materials, language barriers
and distinct historiographical traditions. While this chapter represents only a first comparative exploration, it has yielded a number of differences and similarities that may provide important leads for future research. A first crucial difference is that rural-urban migration appears to have been less important in China than in Europe, at least when measured by its net results in the long run and for the totality of the region, as is borne out by the tendency of Chinese urbanization levels to decrease and those in Europe to increase over the period in question. While systematic comparisons of hinterland migration patterns are hindered by the scarcity and variability of direct source materials, part of the explanation probably lies in the greater resilience of small-scale farming, the overall lower age of marriage for women, dissimilar household patterns, and rural migration alternatives, which reduced rural push forces and peasant marginalisation. Other important differences are situated at the level of intervention and regulation: in China the impact of central policies appear to have been greater and per definition more uniform, while the lower level of local autonomy and absence of different states precluded the type of urban competition for ‘valuable’ migrants often encountered in Europe. Large-scale transfers of population groups or general travel restrictions, in contrast, appear to have been realized more easily in the Chinese context than in Europe.

Similarities in migration patterns and trajectories are identifiable for upmarket categories of wealthy and skilled migrants, moving between cities along the top of what we have termed the urban migration pyramid. Both in China and in Europe, merchants, officials and artisans predominantly made use of professional or ethnic migration networks connecting different cities. While only detailed comparisons can provide conclusive insights on the matter, it appears that overall migration distances for these inter-urban migrants were not necessarily much higher in China than in Europe – although the capital of course attracted migrants from over the whole empire.

Patterns of incorporation and integration, however, again appear to have differed considerably. Striking in most Chinese studies and sources on migration is the great significance attached to origin and ancestry, nurtured by the imperial household registration system and exemplified by the important role played by native-place associations in Chinese cities. The latter were often the first point de repère for newcomers, providing economic, social, cultural and political support, overlapping with neighbourhood, occupational and religious associations, and catering both to migrants and their offspring for several generations. This contrasts noticeably with patterns of integration in European cities. Although ethnic minorities could in exceptional situations persist over several generations, the political concept of urban communitas, the abundant supply of formal and informal associations and integration mechanisms that were non-origin based, and the importance attached to place of birth in conceptions of belonging, all contributed to a far greater and faster blending of newcomers into the urban fabric of European towns.


viii Although many became increasingly involved in proto-industrial activities, Chinese peasants retained their ties to the land to a much greater extent than in Europe: Gang Deng, *The premodern Chinese economy: structural equilibrium and capitalist sterility* (Routledge, 1999), 36–121; Wong, *China transformed*, 47.


xiii Which does not mean that there was no overall mobility in Eastern Europe: Lucassen and Lucassen, ‘The mobility transition’, 372–373.

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xvi Marlou Schrover, ‘Immigrant business and niche formation in a historical perspective. The
xvii Poussou, ‘Mobilité.”
xviii Denis Menjot and Jean-Luc Pinol, ed., Les immigrants et la ville: insertion, intégration,
discrimination (XIIe-XXe siècles) (Paris: Harmattan, 1996); Hugo Soly and Alfons K. L Thijs, ed.,
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x x Peter Clark, European cities and towns, 400-2000 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44.
xxi Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, ‘Servants in preindustrial Europe: Gender differences’, Historical
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xxvi Skinner, ‘Regional urbanization”; George William Skinner, ‘Cities and the hierarchy of local
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2004), 78.
xxix Peter Clark and Bernard Lepetit, ed., Capital cities and their hinterlands in early modern
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xxxi David Nicholas, The growth of the medieval city: from late antiquity to the early fourteenth
xxii Rowe, China’s last empire, 92.
xxiii D. Woodward, ‘The background to the Statute of Artificers: the genesis of labour policy, 1558-
xxiv Edward L. Farmer, Zhu Yuanzhang and early Ming legislation: the reordering of Chinese
society following the era of Mongol rule (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 52, 89.
xxv See the examples in the contributions on pre-industrial Chinese cities in this volume.
xxvi Jason P. Coy, ‘Earn your penny elsewhere: Banishment, migrant laborers, and sociospatial
Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard et al., ed., Police et migrants en France, 1667-1939 (Rennes: Presses
xxvii Donald R. Deglopper, ‘Social structure in a nineteenth-century Taiwanese port city’, in
Skinner, ed., The City, 633–650; Kristofer M. Schipper, ‘Neighborhood cult associations in
traditional Tainan’, in Skinner, ed., The City, 651–678; Sybille van der Sprenkel, ‘Urban social


xliv Cited by Golas, ‘Early Ch’ing guilds’, 556.
A Brief History of Oxford city. Oxford was founded in the 9th century when Alfred the Great created a network of fortified towns called burhs across his kingdom. One of them was at Oxford. Oxford is first mentioned in 911 in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. According to legend, Oxford University was founded in 872 when Alfred the Great happened to meet some monks there and had a scholarly debate that lasted several days. In reality, it grew up in the 12th century when famous teachers began to lecture there and groups of students came to live and study in the town. But Oxford was a fortress as well as a town. In the event of war with the Danes all the men from the area were to gather inside the burgh. However this strategy was not entirely successful. In 1009 the Danes burned Oxford. And, most importantly, Oxford has been at the center of major scholarship since the Middle Ages, having made lasting contributions in the study of religion, classics, the arts, the sciences, and more. The history of Oxford in England dates back to its original settlement in the Saxon period. Originally of strategic significance due to its controlling location on the upper reaches of the River Thames at its junction with the River Cherwell, the town grew in national importance during the early Norman period, and in the late 12th century became home to the fledgling University of Oxford. The city was besieged during The Anarchy in 1142. See what's new with book lending at the Internet Archive. The Oxford handbook of political institutions. Item Preview. remove-circle. Share or Embed This Item. Publisher. Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press. Collection. inlibrary; printdisabled; trent_university; internetarchivebooks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Xiii+736pp., £95.00, ISBN 9780199585977. Teun A van Dijk was professor of discourse studies at the University of Amsterdam until 2004, and is at present professor at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona. After earlier work on generative poetics, text grammar, and the psychology of text processing, his work since 1980 has taken a more critical perspective and deals with discursive racism, news in the press, ideology, knowledge, and ... He is the author of several books in these areas, and edited The handbook of discourse analysis (4 vols, 1985) as well as the introduction Discourse studies (2 vols., 1997). He has founded four international journals, Poetics, Text, Discourse & society, and Discourse studies, of which he still edits the latter two.