

Gender Divisions of Labor and Structural Transformation: Industrializing Japan

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Abstract

Gender differences in labor opportunities can accentuate urban-rural wage gaps if laborers are married and must co-move. We study the effects of a silk boom which increased demand for silk cocoons, predominantly produced by women in farms, on migration in Japan, 1910-1920. We use large variation in silk cocoon prices, due to its perishability, and an IV approach to show areas with higher prices experienced lower migration among men and women. Men remained despite less opportunities to maximize household incomes. These findings show that gender divisions of labor can slow down industrialization.