

Migration and Collective Action: Evidence from China**Eduardo Araral***

Over the past three decades, scholars have studied the effects of more than three dozen factors on collective action in the commons but little is known about the effects of rural to urban migration. We examine this question with the case of China, which has the world's most extensive levels of rural to urban migration. Using OLS, Logit and Probit models and data from a survey of 1,780 households from 18 provinces, we find that migration has a statistically significant adverse effect on collective irrigation controlling for a large number of theoretically relevant variables. The effects of migration on collective action in the commons are possibly mediated by a number of factors frequently identified in the literature, including leadership, social capital, sense of community, economic heterogeneity, and dependence on resources. We speculate that massive out migration partly explains the significant drop in the use of collective canal irrigation and exacerbated the significant increase in groundwater irrigation since the start of reforms in 1980s. These findings have important policy implications for commons governance in China given that massive rural to urban migration will continue in the next decade. Because of the increasing rural to urban migration worldwide especially in developing countries, the findings could also partly explain the deteriorating state of rural village infrastructure, natural common pool resources and ecological systems in many developing countries.

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