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RUSSIAN FAR EAST AND MIGRATION FLOWS OF THE MILLENNIUM

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Abstract

The Modern Russian Far East is involved into many major international political and socio-economic processes. The region faces an important geostrategic positions related to strengthening the country's position in the Asia-Pacific region, expanding a comprehensive dialogue in various formats and at different platforms. Achieving the intended task is possible through the consistent solution of a complex of socio-economic and military-political issues. The demographic issues in the Far East of Russia remain still crucial. The region pursues a policy aimed at both preserving the population and its increasing by attracting labor resources. This makes the Russian Far East to fight with a demographic challenge for the past 30 years. At the beginning of the XXI century. The problem of the shortage of human resources in the Far East was solved mainly at the expense of the inhabitants of China. At the same time, there was an increase in the number of migrants from Central Asian countries mainly due to the economic factors. The study analyzes the causes of the changes in the Far East in ethno-migration flows that unfolded at the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries in the Far East of Russia. The study suggests the consequences that may be relevant in the event of an exacerbation of labor shortages in the region. Along with various economic issues, there is a decrease in the general level of culture among the population, which causes the destruction of the regional identity of the Russian Far East.

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Keywords: Migration, Islam, labor, demography, regional identity, Russian Far East.



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1. Introduction

Russian Far East experiences a demographic crisis, though Russia predicts bad results in solving the demographic issue in this area. Until 1989, the population of the region was growing steadily. Statistics show a steady and dynamic population growth: 1926 – 1 million 572 thousand people, 1939 – 2 million 976 thousand, 1959 – 4 million 834 thousand, 1970 – 5 million 780 thousand, 1979 – 6 million 845 thousand, 1989 – 7 million 950 thousand people (Goskomstat, 2003). The region reached a peak in population in 1991, when, according to official statistical estimates, 8 million 66 thousand people lived in the region (Goskomstat, 2003). However, then the demographic pendulum swung in the opposite direction. By 2017, the population of the region amounted to 6 million 165 thousand people (Goskomstat, 2003). For 26 years within 1991–2017 the region lost 1 million 901 thousand people. Until 1991, demographic growth was ensured due to the migration influx of the population. Russian Far East have been known as a demographic recipient for hundreds years. The main demographic donors for him were the territories of European Russia and Siberia. However, in the 1980s Russia (RSFSR) was in need of labor resources. Further the demographers revealed an alarming fact: during the first half of the 1980s the increase of labor resources in Russia has stopped. By this time, the USSR had exhausted all available sources of labor force growth, including employed in household and personal subsidiary plots, the traditional reserve of replenishment of labor resources in the form of the rural population has dried up (Belkin & Sheregi, 1985). In these difficult conditions, the USSR managed to stimulate migration growth. Over 15 years (within 1971–1985), 4.3 million people arrived in the eastern regions of the country, and 3.9 million came out. Thus, combined with natural growth a total increase of people indicated the number of 1.7 million (Horev, 1989). According to Soviet demographers and economists, there is no solution for the problem of human resources shortage in the Far East by increasing Russia's internal migration reserve. However, the collapse of the USSR, the cardinal transformation of the economy of the former Soviet republics, and the proximity of countries with excessive labor reserves opened up the backlash of opportunities for the Russian Far East. Together with the opportunities to partially correct the demographic deficit, the region also faced new problems, some of which were well-forgotten old, but others had a new and completely unique nature for this region.

2. Problem Statement

The problem of ethnic labor migration in Russian Far East is considered one of the most crucial issues. The ethnic labor migration, explaining the reasons for its occurrence and reproduction has both theoretical and practical consequences, as well as provides opportunities for a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of ethno-religious migration to the region and provides tools for its practical change.

The theoretical basis of the ethno-religious migration problems is quite immense. Modern theorists attribute ethno-religious migration to a complex of cultural, economic and legal phenomena (institutions) and ignore its socio-economic nature and determination. Labor migration is interpreted simply as a certain natural (or unnatural) reality of legal, cultural or economic life, devoid of internal socio-economic causality and determination. Therefore, it seems scientifically justified to conduct a political and

economic study of the nature of ethnic migration to Russian Far East. It suggests its consideration as a phenomenon caused by socio-economic contradictions of a modern (capitalist) society.

A scientific approach of the study can lead to practical conclusions, with the help of which it will be possible to develop applied recommendations aimed at creating a favorable environment for attracting labor resources to a demographically empty region.

3. Research Questions

The subject is the essence and causal interdependence of ethno-religious labor migration as a socio-economic phenomenon.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study of the reasons for the reduction of migration flows from China to Russia, as well as the parallel increase in labor migration from Central Asian countries to Russian Far East.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the study is considered an institutional analysis, the theory of rational choice and underlying materialistic dialectics. The methodology of institutional analysis and the theory of rational choice was used to study ethno-religious labor migration not only as an economic issue, but also as a socio-economic phenomenon.

6. Findings

Perestroika in the USSR and the declaration of independence of Russia made the borders of Russian Far East available for Chinese labor migrants. They were immediately involved into the economic life of the region, but their arrival updated the alarmist mood in the region. Even the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, did not ignore the yellow threat. During the government meeting regarding the development of the Far East and Transbaikalia in summer of 2000 the President of Russian Federation stated the bother on the future of Far East population speaking Japanese, Chinese and Korean (Kosyrev, 2000). There is a real threat of the regional identity destruction in Russian Far East. Identity destruction meant the destruction of the values of the regional culture, the indigenous people have a sense of belonging to the territory and the emotional connection between the place of birth and residence and the individual (Petrunina & Shusharina, 2019). Experts and representatives of the local political establishment throughout the 1990s and in the early 21st century actively exploited the Chinese problem. Problems of Chinese migrants were compounded by the unknown statistics of the Chinese migrants in the region. This greatly confused the solution to the issue of Chinese migration and its interpretation (Semenov, 2016). According to the Chinese migration specialist in Russia, Gelbras (2016), there was no exact data about the number of Chinese entrepreneurs in Russia. While political elites were fueling anti-Chinese sentiment in Russia, global economic giants competed to attract Chinese labor and intellectual resources. The German politician and member of the German Federal Bank Leaders, Tilo

(2016) stated the fact of FRG's struggle with the United States to attract migrants from the Far East. The yellow issue which lasted hundreds years was resolved in Russian Far East with no consequences, going beyond the boundaries of the migration and demographic field into the sphere of interstate interaction.

The problem of Chinese migration to the Far East of the Russian Federation was solved due to the growth of the welfare of Chinese society. During the first two decades of the 21 century the standard of living of Chinese citizens has steadily increased, while in Russia it has been slowly declining. Real wages (in US dollars) in Russia and China have changed significantly:

In 2011 – \$ 795 in the Russian Federation,

\$ 539 in China;

In 2015 – \$ 558 in the Russian Federation,

\$ 830 in China;

In 2016, \$ 547 in the Russian Federation,

\$ 847 in China.

The economic backward of Russia, the decline in the growth of the well-being of Russians created unfavorable conditions for Chinese labor migration. It has become more profitable for Chinese citizens to work inside China instead of looking for low-paying jobs in Russia. Economic weakness and a decline in the level of well-being have become a barrier to the advancement of Chinese labor resources in the Far Eastern region (ESA UN, 2013).

The well-known politician Chubais (2018) gave an interview to the Snob Magazine. According to him, Russia will be lagging behind Greece, Kazakhstan and Turkey in terms of education and healthcare. The country (Russia) is putting itself in the losing script leading to an increase in Russia's backlog from the rest of the world (Snob, 2018). Moreover, the indicators are considered not in the scale of the economy, but by the standard of living, human capital and culture.

Despite the common border and high population density in the bordering north-eastern provinces of China, the migration presence of Chinese in the Far Eastern territories of Russia is modest and disproportionately small compared to immigrants from other countries. According to statistics from the early 21st century, the number of China residents arrived to Russia in 2000 was 1121 people, in 2010 – 1380, in 2014 – 19563, in 2015 – 9043, in 2016 – 8027 people (Goskomstat, 2018). Though, there is no fact that they all live in Russian Far East. At the same time, the number of migrants from more demographically scarce and geographically distant regions proportionally shows large numbers (ESA UN, 2015; Goskomstat, 2018).

Citizens of the former union republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus arrive in large numbers on the territory of the Russian Federation. This flow is due to the relatively low level of income in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Russia is considered to have more labor opportunities than the regions of Caucasus and Central Asia. Migrant remittances to their homeland account for a significant percentage of the GDP of labor donor countries.

In 2018, there was a negative trend towards a decrease in the flow of migrants from Central Asia to the Russian Federation. For the first time in several decades, demographic donors have ceased to compensate even for the natural decline in the population. At the end of 2018, the population of Russia as a

whole decreased by 78.7 thousand people. The natural population decline over 10 months amounted to 180.5 thousand people, and migration growth – 101.8 thousand, that is, the influx of migrants compensated for the decrease only by 54.4 %. Migration growth in 2018 compared with 2017 decreased by 43 %, or by 76.6 thousand people. Most of all, human inflows decreased from Ukraine (a decrease of 74 %), Uzbekistan (by 70 %) and Kyrgyzstan (by 40 %). It can be said that the migration flow still compensates for the decline in the population of the Russian Federation, but it bypasses the Far Eastern macro-region. Only from January to May in 2018, the population in the Far East of the Russian Federation decreased by more than 20 thousand people. The anti-leaders in terms of migration decline are Khabarovsk Territory and Yakutia. There are 1340 people left Khabarovsk within 4 months, as for Yakutia this number amounts is 1290. The Amur Region, which in 4 months amounts only 775 people left due to migration, Primorsky Territory – 513, Jewish Autonomous Region – 458, Kolyma – 631 people (Regnum, 2018).

7. Conclusion

The CIS countries seem to have exhausted their demographic resource of the traditional migration inflow for Russia. Migration from Central Asia and the Caucasus is qualitatively different from migration from China and North Korea. If the inhabitants of China and North Korea considered the Far East of Russia as a region of temporary residence and did not make attempts to stay there for a long time, then immigrants from the Central Asia come for the purpose of a long stay in Russia. For these migrants, Russia is still a conditionally attractive country for life and work, but the Far East is considered a residual place. Researchers note that temporary migration remains the predominant form of international migration. A significant proportion of migrants subsequently return to their country of origin, and the main return falls on the first 5 years after emigration.

Arriving in the region, immigrants from the CIS countries reproduce the lifestyle characteristic of their homeland. The religious community and the diaspora of fellow tribesmen create an institutional environment for the successful adaptation of migrants in the new socio-economic and cultural environment.

Though, migrants brought with them specific problems that the Russian Far East had never encountered. The Islamic factor in the region has become a completely new and poorly studied phenomenon. The vast majority of migrants are active members of Muslim communities. Most of the major cities in the south of the Far East have mosque built. Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Blagoveshchensk and other settlements acquired cult Muslim places. The Muslim Ummah migrants satisfy their specific basic needs with the help of mosques in the region, migrants are provided with halal food (Birger, 2015).

Equipping their lives in the Far East, Muslim migrants are forced to solve everyday issues related to religiously acceptable clothing. Muslim men face less problems regarding their appearance than women. Muslim women usually order a hijab in their homeland, buy in mosques, or find in specializing centers and shops. So nowadays there are many women in hijab in the Far Eastern regions. Their religious clothing (hijab) is becoming quite familiar.

There is another issue appeared regarding religious topic – religious extremism. The suppression of the activities of Muslim radicals has become more frequent during the recent decades. A wave of

disclosures of the activities of international terrorist groups and communities swept across the Far East. In September 2018, an active member of the banned Islamic State in the Russian Federation was sentenced in the Khabarovsk Territory. The press service of the UFSB in the Primorsky Territory reported that law enforcement officers managed to uncover the extensive terrorist underground of the Islamists operating in the region since 2008 and organized by citizens of Uzbekistan.

The above examples can raise doubts about the continuity of the historical community of the indigenous inhabitants of the region, transmitted by the intergenerational common system of values. Regional identity is based on a stable positive feeling of love for their homeland, which is formed under the influence of the native language, traditions, culture and customs of the region. There is no doubts about the stability of identity leading to an outflow of the population to those regions (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

Due to the growing shortage of labor resources, the Russian Far East will have to attract even more migrants from Asia. However, promising demographic reservoirs for Russia are no longer the countries of the former Soviet Central Asia, but the countries of South Asia, which are experiencing large demographic overcrowding and a high level of poverty. These potential human resources are certainly not distinguished by a high level of culture and education, but unfortunately, this is the only possible labor resource for the rapidly emptying territories of the Far East. At the same time, the region is now facing an acute problem of finding ways to integrate migrants into the host society. Unfortunately, there are no mechanisms been developed for their adaptation in the Far East.

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