

Study on the Social Integration of Chinese in the Russian Far East Region

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the historical, geographical and demographic reasons for the backward economic development in the Far East, and discusses the role of Chinese people on the economic development in the Far East region in different periods of czarist Russia, the former Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. This paper also analyzes the necessity of economic and trade cooperation between the Far East region and China, and the prospect of the Chinese people in the Far East region.

1. Introduction

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the independence of Russia in the early 1990s, the Far East began to open to the outside world and the Chinese reappeared in the region. The arrival of Chinese has brought commercial prosperity to the Far East and contributed to the local economic development, but at the same time it has also brought some problems, resulting in negative remarks such as the "Yellow Peril" theory aimed at the Chinese people. However, with the passage of time, more and more leaders and residents of the Far East realized that the advantages of Chinese people outweighed the disadvantages, and the development of the Far East region was bound to be inseparable from the role of the Chinese people.

2. Reasons for the Backwardness of Economic Development in the Far East

Although the Far East has a vast territory and abundant resources, its economic growth rate lags behind the average level of the whole Russia, and the actual standard of living in the region is lower than the Russian country average. Although in 2002, the per capita income in the Far East exceeded the Russian average by 5 per cent, the ratio of cash income to minimum subsistence of the inhabitants of the region was lower than the national average because the high prices of necessities for life in the region. Therefore, the actual living standards of the residents of the Far East are still relatively backward. The low standard of living caused an exodus of people in the region, and millions of Far Eastern residents moved to the western part of Russia in the past decade. The loss of population with the decline in the natural birth rate led to a sharp decline in the population of the Far East. In 1990, the Federal District of the Russian Far East registered a population of 8.04 million, but by January 1, 2005, the population was 6.59 million, a decrease of 1.45 million in 15 years and a population loss of nearly 20%. [1]

The depression in the Far East did not begin today with complicated historical reasons. During the period of planned economy in the former Soviet Union, the Far East was always the base of military industry and the origin of raw materials of the whole Soviet Union, and the economic structure was relatively simple. The main industrial sectors were energy, forestry, fishery and military manufacturing complex. Since 1999, with the recovery of the Russian economy, the economy of the Far East Federal District has also shown a steady growth trend. Although the economic development of the region is relatively stable in terms of macroeconomic status, the region still faces difficulties in economic development due to its unreasonable economic structure, out-dated infrastructure and the aging of equipments.

Geographically speaking, Russia's economic focus is in the western region, which is close to Europe. The Far East is located in the eastern border of Russia, far from the economic center of

Moscow, and more than 9,000 kilometers apart. Before the reform, part of the raw materials and most of the technical equipments and spare parts needed for the development of industry in the Far East came from the western region. After the reform, due to the increase of transportation costs, the cost of goods imported and exported from the western region to the Far East has increased greatly. Therefore, the economic ties between the Far East and the western developed areas became more and more alienated, and the share of the domestic market in the Far East economy continued to decline.

Population scarcity and labor shortage have always been important factors which restricting the economic and social development of the Far East. The region is the largest federal area in Russia, accounting for 36.4% of the total country. However, the population of the Far East is the lowest, only 7.0375 million people (in early 2002), accounted for 4.9% of Russia. The region is also the lowest population density economic zone with in Russia. [3] Socio-economic development is based on a certain scale of population. The production, circulation, distribution, consumption and other social and economic links are inseparable from a certain population size. Insufficient labor force in the Far East inevitably leads to insufficient domestic demand, which undoubtedly affects the scale and level of products and services in the region, and to hinder economic development, which definitely affects the living standards of local residents.

3. The Role of the Chinese in Economic Development of the Far East

In the second half of the 19th century, the tsarist Russian government began to develop the Far East on a large scale. In order to solve the problems of population scarcity and lack of labor, the tsarist Russian government promulgated the first immigration law since the serfdom reform in 1861 - "Settlement Conditions for Russians and Foreigners in Amur and Primorye Province", which mainly included preferential policies to attract domestic and foreign residents to migrate to Amur and Primorye province in the Far East, and allowed foreigners to resident in these two provinces. [2]

Since the mid-1980s, bilateral relations between the two countries had eased and the cooperation in some specific areas had begun to resume. In 1986, Sino-Soviet labor cooperation began. In the late 1980s, Soviet enterprises acquired the rights to establish direct contacts with Chinese enterprises and to import labor services from China. As a result, the number of Chinese labor force working in the Far East began to increase, reached as many as 20,000 workers per year. Most of these workers came from border cities and counties in the three northeastern provinces. At this period of time, Chinese workers were mainly employed in construction and agricultural planting, and their activities were under the strict supervision of the relevant Soviet authorities. [4]

In May 1989, Gorbachev visited China and the relations between the two countries were normalized. The arrival of the Chinese people not only brought commercial prosperity to the Far East, but also promoted the economic development of the region:

1) Filled up some jobs vacancies. 2) Satisfied the local market supply and prospered the local business to some extent. 3) Stimulated the growth of the Far East economy and expanded employment.

4. The Necessity of Economic and Trade Cooperation between Far East Region and China and the Prospect of Chinese People in the Far East Region

Because of the small population in the Far East, the contribution of the local market to the economy of the region is limited. On the other hand, due to the distance from the more developed western regions of the country, the role of the market in the western region in promoting the economy of the Far East is also limited. Therefore, the population situation and geographical location of the Far East determine that the economic development of the Far East cannot be targeted to the domestic market, but to the external market.

Meanwhile, with the economic recovery and infrastructure construction in the Far East, the problem of labor shortage will become increasingly prominent. In order to meet the needs of

economic development, it is necessary to attract external labor force. From the domestic circumstances, it is impossible to attract labor force from the western region because the lack of labor force in western region itself, as well as the impossibility of competing with the Central Federal District for labor force.

The Prospect of Chinese People in the Far East Region

It is undeniable that while stimulating the local economic development, the Chinese people might also bring some problems to the local society such as illegal immigration, social order and the resulting ethnic conflicts, etc., and these caused "China Threat Theory" and "Yellow Peril Theory" in the Far East,. [5] But in the fact, the existence of the Chinese does not form a threat to the Far East.

In truth, the number of Chinese people in the Far East is not as many as some media reported, and they are not permanent residents. According to Dr. Victor Larin, Director of the Institute of History, Far East Department of the Russian Academy of Sciences, in 2002, there were only 250,000 to 300,000 Chinese in the Far East. In response to questions from reporters on April 26, 2004, Constantine Prikovsky, the Plenipotentiary of the Russian President in the Far East Federal Region at that time, said that there were about 200,000 Chinese citizens living in the Russian Far East. Dr. Viktor Larin's research also proved that Chinese workers did not account for a high share of the labor market in the Far East, which was estimated to be less than 0.2% by relevant authorities, together with Chinese tourists engaged in small business activities, the total share was no more than 0.5%, far from being able to seize the market. [6]

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