THE MIGRATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE URBANIZATION PROCESS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Since the adoption of the opening-up policy, China has undergone a tremendous migration tide from rural to urban areas, Midwest to East, and East back to Midwest. As the conspicuous demographic phenomenon in Chinese socio-economic development, migration is the inevitable outcome of a market-oriented economy, which in turn impacts the process of socio-economic development. While promoting the development of rural and urban economies and exchanges between members of different ethnic groups, the dramatic increase of ethnic minorities in the floating urban population intensifies the complex urban ethnic relations. By closely examining these problems, the author puts forward his suggestions on the issue.

提要

改革开放以来，中国正在经历一个从农村到城市，从中西部到东部，再从东部到中西部的巨大人口流动潮。人口流动已成为中国经济社会发展在人口领域的显著现象，它既是市场经济的必然产物，又反过来影响经济社会发展进程。城市流动人口中少数民族成分和数量的急剧增加，促进了城乡经济的发展和各民族成员的相互交往，同时,也使城市中的民族关系日益复杂化。在此，拟对这些问题进行分析,并提出建议。

POSITIVE IMPACTS OF THE MIGRATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

With the deepening of the reform and of the opening-up policy and the quickening of the urbanization process, more and more ethnic minorities are migrating from mountainous, rural and pastoral areas into more economically developed medium-sized and large cities. According to the 2000 census, the number of nation-wide floating ethnic minorities reached 30,000,000, 10 times the number of 1990. Among them, 70% flowed into the cities in southeast coastal areas and the central region, with a minimum number of 10,000 people and a maximum of 100, 000. Rational migration is vital for healthy socio-economic development, and is an effective way to realize common development and progress among ethnic groups. The present migration of ethnic minorities has the following positive impacts:

1. Promote the urban economic development. On the one hand, the in-flow of cheap labor force, including ethnic migrant workers, is the result of socio-economic development, which demands a large supply of urban labor force. On the other hand, it stimulates urban consumption and promotes the urbanization process and urban economic development.
2. Intensify a multinational and multicultural trend in cities. With the large presence of ethnic minorities in cities, ethnic food, costume, music, dance and language have become more accessible, which has a profound impact on people's ideas and behaviors. Accompanying the changing urban national landscape, the burgeoning cultural diversity adds more impetus to the urban development.
3. Promote the rural socio-economic development. While having their living standard improved through migration, ethnic migrants also acquire scientific technology, production skill and management experience. Moreover, the urban life and market economy not only broaden their views, but also upgrade their ideas on civilization, modernization, laws and regulations. Their modeling effect promotes the socio-

economic development back in their homelands and helps upgrade the overall standard of ethnic minorities. The migration of ethnic minorities promotes frequent exchanges and cooperation between ethnic groups and enhances mutual understanding and feelings, which contribute to the building of equal, solid, mutual and harmonious ethnic relations.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF THE MIGRATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

1. IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF URBAN MANAGEMENT:

- Pressures on the urban management system. Firstly, the migration brings about huge pressures on traffic, public infrastructures and environmental sanitation which are already overloaded. Secondly, the conflicts induced by different ethnic cultures, living habits and language barriers have been on the rise. Thirdly, the ethnic migrants tend to undertake jobs and run businesses without fulfilling related procedures, such as temporary residence permits and business licenses. Fourthly, the birth-control policy is difficult to carry out on the floating ethnic population.
- Insecurities in urban society. Due to language barriers and new surroundings, ethnic migrants are easily exposed to deceptions, bullies, difficult school enrollment, etc. The unskilled ethnic migrants are also likely to engage in theft, gambling, drug abuse, trafficking, and other illegal activities.
- Behaviors damaging ethnic relations and social stability. The problem is intensified by disrespectful behaviors toward ethnic customs and infringements of ethnic interests; for example, the disputes caused by disrespect toward ethnic foods and funerals, the distortion and smear of ethnic images in publications and literature, and incidences of disrespect toward ethnic religions.
- Difficulties in the management of religious activities. The migration of ethnic minorities highlights the conflict between religious activities and the inadequacy of sites providing such activities. The entanglement of national and religious problems further complicates and sensitizes normal economic disputes.

2. IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTEREST PROTECTION

- Hard work, low income and no livelihood security. The right to live is a basic human right; however, ethnic migrants face a series of problems in the wake of migration. The 3D (dirty, dangerous, difficult) jobs they they undertake are particularly problematic. Theses are mainly restaurant, wholesale business, construction and security guard jobs. Although they work very hard, the migrants' income remains extremely low. It is an issue of concern and a speedy solution is needed.
- Employment discrimination. Ethnic migrants, mainly educated at primary and secondary school levels, get employed with help from relatives and friends. Their conspicuous ethnic appearances also prevent them from getting better employment.
- Poor housing conditions. Most migrant workers live in the dormitories provided by the employers, which are always crowded, dark, humid and stuffy. Some even live on the work sites, where beds are set up in the evening and folded in the daytime.
- No steady ethnic food supply. Ethnic food is seldom paid attention to in urban life.
- Difficulties in school enrollment. Some ethnic migrants settle down with their families after years of hard work in cities, and what troubles them most is the school enrollment for their children. Not only must they pay a large sponsorship fee, but the enrollment procedure is also very complicated.
- The lack of ethnic culture. Ethnic migrants have to abandon their languages and customs to fully integrate into urban life, which means they risk losing their unique cultures.
- Limited social interactions and weak social supports. Some scholars describe the floating population as being in the fringe of the city; they mainly live in the borders between rural and urban areas, which separates them geographically from the city. During the day, they work in every corner of the city; in the evening, they return to this corner and know no more interactions with urban dwellers. Their social activities are confined within the circle of fellow villagers and ethnic members. They are both materially disadvantaged and psychologically frustrated.

SUGGESTIONS

Migration injects impetus and vitality into the urban economic development and social prosperity. The outdated view that migration is "a burden which must be kept under constraint and control", should be updated as "a fortune which deserves respect and service". Compared with Han nationality's migration, the migration of ethnic minorities reflects not only the migration between urban and rural areas, but also the exchanges between ethnic groups, and in particular, the issues on ethnic interactions and cultural identity. While maintaining their unique cultural traditions, the ethnic migrants experience frequent contacts and collisions with Han's cultures, which complicate their adaptation to the urban life. By readjusting in areas of technical skills, values, ways of life, social interactions, ethnic psychology, customs and cultures, the ethnic migrants can fully integrate into the process of urbanization and modernization, otherwise they will be marginalized in the urban life and mainstream cultures.

Concerning the above-mentioned problems, the author tries to put forward the following suggestions:

Firstly, nurture a social environment which shows concern toward the ethnic migrants. Specifically speaking, the media's viewpoint should be corrected. The media plays an important role in shaping public opinions and building psychological hints. The lopsided tendency which views ethnic migrants as "third-class citizens", "the fringe of society", etc., should be averted to establish positive images in the society. The management of ethnic migrants should be integrated into the urban community systems by creating social interactions between urban dwellers and migrants to dissolve mutual misunderstandings and prejudices.

Secondly, change the binary segmentation systems to facilitate the adaptation of ethnic migrants. An innovation in the employment system is suggested to break the barriers and segmentations in the labor market by introducing an open and unified system. A network facilitating job application, employment information and competition for employment, combined with the efforts of strengthening and regulating functions played by intermediary organizations in communication, training and recommendation, will bring the disorderly migration into control and help facilitate the migrants to find suitable jobs. An innovation in school enrollment is also strongly recommended. The lack of schools for migrant children should be addressed, followed by an emphasis on the quality of education. Both government-run and private schools should be open to the migrants' children, with the former canceling the sponsorship fee exerted on the migrant population and the latter being incorporated into the municipal network of educational planning, regulating and services. An innovation in household registration systems should be carried out step by step to achieve the final goal of abolishment.

Thirdly, educate the ethnic migrants. Occupational and continuing educations, centering on skill acquirement, should be promoted in the rural ethnic minority areas. Likewise, on-the-job, professional and employment training should be provided to the unskilled migrants. The thirst for knowledge in the ethnic cultures and religions should be emphasized to eliminate poor cultural awareness. All governmental, non-governmental, and social bodies and organizations aiming to help ethnic migrants should work together to set up an effective mechanism of assistance, consultation, aid-relief, social interaction, adaptation, cultural maintenance and exchanges; to safeguard the implementation of interest protection during the urbanization process; and to promote the building of equal, solid, mutual and harmonious ethnic relations.

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