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The Influence of Population Migration and Mobility on Culture Changes in Xijiang since the Foundation of PRC

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Abstract

Based on a research on the population migration in Xinjiang, this article analyzes the influence that the floating population has on culture changes. This influence is manifold, including that of Han culture on minorities as well as minority cultures on Han culture. In the present situation in which China's ethnic groups live together over vast areas while some live in individual concentrated communities in small areas, Han culture's influence on minorities is of dominance. When analyzing these culture changes against the background of "globalization", the difference between "assimilation by Han" and "modernization" should be distinguished clearly.

Keywords: Floating population, Culture changes, Race, Modernization

Situated in West China, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is a big family with 55 races (in which 13 races have lived here for generations). Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China, Xinjiang has witnessed unprecedented population migration peaks that it has become one of the regions with the largest number of immigrants and has undergone several peaks in population migration and mobility. Especially after the reform and opening up, with the involvement of market and the driving force of economy, the population migration and mobility in Xinjiang tended to be in large numbers. As a result, this large-scale population migration and mobility will definitely lead to increasing communications among races and changes in residence patterns as well as have influences on culture changes.

According to general demographic theory, the floating population is composed of the migratory population and floating population. Here population migration refers to the movement from one place to another, which can involve only a short distance and period or be a stable one covering a long distance and lasting for a long time. The latter is manifested mainly by the change of the party's permanent residence. However, population mobility emphasizes a dynamic and unstable process, which refers to a temporary or repeated floating population without any change of the party's permanent residence. (Guo, 2003)

Culture changes refer to the changes taking place in a race's culture caused by its internal development or the communications among different races. It is obvious that these changes are caused by two factors, one from its internal development, the other from its external communications with other races in which it has its culture changed to some degree by borrowing and innovating other cultures. Culture, especially excellent culture, is the common spiritual wealth shared by all human beings. Therefore, any race or region's cultural development can not be done in an isolated state but in the communications and crashes with its surrounding races and regions.

1. An analysis on the population migration and mobility in Xinjiang

1.1 An analysis on the ingoing population

Since the foundation of PRC, the whole process of Xinjiang's population mobility can be divided into 4 periods. Due to some similarities shard by all of them, it is impossible to split them separately. Therefore, such a division only gives a rough idea.

1.1.1 From the liberation of Xinjiang to the late 1950s

It is in this period that Xinjiang witnessed the first migration peak after the foundation of PRC, which covered cadres transferred to civilian jobs, young people devoted to the frontier's development, voluntary migratory population and organized people coming to Xinjiang. Some CPLA armies and uprising armies were transferred to civilian jobs on the

spot in 1954 to form Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. The migration in this period was mainly caused by policies issued by the Chinese government. First come the transferred cadres. Second come those young people coming from inland China to Xinjiang to build and develop this region in 1958 to 1961 and 1964 to 1966, which added 1,763,700 people to the total migratory population. For example, in 1959, 820,500 people came to Xinjiang, which resulted in an increase of 511,200 people to its total migratory population (1994). Third are some experienced technicians and college graduates called for to come to Xinjiang in the process of economic construction, such as those permanent residents who once came here to be devoted to the construction of Lanzhou-Xinjiang Railroad, Karamay Oilfield, July 1st Textile Factory, August 1st Steal and Iron Company. (Li, 2005)

1.1.2 From the early 1960s to the end of 1970s

In spite of the constant growth in Xinjiang's population, some left Xinjiang for other regions in early 1960s because of some natural and historical reasons. The most prominent negative increase in Xinjiang's population migration history happened in 1962 caused by USSR's breaking of promise. The record of -194,600 people sets the lowest gross migratory population in Xinjiang since the foundation of PRC. (http//www.xjbt.cei.gov.cn)

1.1.3 From the early 1980s to the middle and late 1990s

During this period, with the sound development of China's economic system reform as well as the opening up policy, people in Xinjiang began to flow to different parts of China. On one hand, the gap in the per capita income between the coastal regions and the middle and west part of China has been wider due to the rapid economic development in East China. It is this wider gap that resulted in the flow from the middle and west part of China to the east as well as from the country to cities. Against such a national background, the population migration and mobility in Xinjiang followed the general rule towards the southeast coastal area. On the other hand, due to the changes in the age structure of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, an increasing number of people came to the northwest frontier of China as new workforce.

1.1.4 From the end of 1990s to now

This period has witnessed another rapid growth of ingoing population in Xinjiang. With the convening of the Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, our nation has entered the period to construct a well-off society in an all-round way, especially in West China. People coming to Xinjiang during this time have been mostly occupied in agricultural production, petrol exploitation, mining, trade, architecture, arts and crafts, peddlery and so on. A considerable number among the ingoing population in Xinjiang are rural workers coming here to contract for lands and a special kind of floating population who are mainly occupied in picking cotton. In addition, with deeper economic and cultural communications between Xinjiang and inland, more people have come to Xinjiang for study or travelling.

1.2 An analysis on the outgoing population

After the reform and opening up, influenced by the ingoing people's culture and values, some minority races began to leave Xinjiang to pursue a new lifestyle. They usually form business groups with their relatives or friends to flow to urban areas which are often chosen randomly in certain seasons to sell some specialties from their native place. Gradually, the forms of population mobility to urban areas have got diversified, covering working, dealing with business, studying, travelling, marriage and so on.

2. The influence of population migration and mobility on culture changes in Xinjiang

Generally speaking, population migration and mobility promote the constant cultural exchanges among different races, hence the diversification of their interior cultures, which makes it likely for each race to inherit their traditions as well as to learn from others. Taking the irreversible trend of different racial cultures getting mixed into account, any race who wants to be among the top on the cultural development list has to develop and innovate its culture besides inheriting those traditional things. Only by absorbing foreign culture and inputting new things into its own one can it achieve the integration of its own racial culture.

2.1 The influence of Han culture on minority cultures

2.1.1 Language

As the most important communication tool of our human society, language is closely linked with the development of society as well as that of individual races. In a city mostly occupied by Han people, it is easier for a person from minorities to communicate with members from other races as well as to find a job if he can speak Chinese. As a result, learning Chinese becomes quite popular. Most minority college students choose bilingual teaching. It is essential for minorities to conduct bilingual education in order to strengthen their own quality-oriented education, to promote their prosperous development, to improve their education level and to develop their whole races. Actually, a lot has been achieved in the bilingual education in Xinjiang. In 1999, only 27 middle schools had bilingual test classes with 2629 students. After the issuance of *On Promoting Bilingual Teaching in Xinjiang* in March 2004, 946 bilingual classes with 35948 students had been established in 52 schools by the end of 2004. (http://www.njrc365.com/)

2.1.2 Lifestyle

Here, lifestyle can be divided into material life and spiritual life, the former referring to diet, dress, residence and transportation, work, entertainment, social communication, dealing with people and so on while the latter referring to values, morality, aesthetics as well as the behaviors and habits related to these ideas. Population migration has been changing the material life in Xinjiang. For example, their former traditional characteristics in residence, diet, dress and transportation have been changed a lot due to the influences from those ingoing people, from yurts or adobe houses to brick or wood houses, from milk tea and rice to western dishes and fried dishes, from their traditional costumes to western-style suits and ties, from carts drawn by donkeys or horses to modern means of transport, from a life mainly occupied in social work, housework and religious rituals to one engaged in entertainment, social communication and dealing with others. If you walk in a street in Shihezi, you can hardly come across any Uigur or Kazak in his traditional costumes. At most, you will find a waiter or a waitress in modern dress while with a traditional Uigur hat in a traditional restaurant.

2.1.3 Ideology

Minority people in Xinjiang tend to have laggard ideas due to their former isolated life. Population migration and mobility have definitely integrated cultures from different areas and therefore have offered a drive for the renewal of these minority people's ideas. On one hand, those ingoing Han people have brought here some advanced ideas and opinions; on the other hand, those who had their out-of-date ideas changed when they stayed in the developed areas have brought back a strong desire to change their poor current condition, hence helping to liberate other native people's ideas. These ideological changes are mainly related to the concepts of communist market economy, such as the ideas of profit, competition, cooperation, socialized production and so on.

2.2 The influence of minority cultures on Han culture

The most obvious fact of diversified urban cultures caused by minority migration is the developed snack industry, which is mainly reflected in the increasing number of racial villages, delicious food streets, a variety of Muslim restaurants, Uigur lamb shashlik. These minority snacks have been in coexistence with Han diet such as Beijing Cuisine, Guangzhou Cuisine, Sichuan Cuisine and Shandong Cuisine as well as Mcdonald's and KFC. These snacks have been accepted and popular with Han people and some have even been taken in by Han cuisine culture. These minority restaurants, with their traditional architecture style, traditional dishes, performances with traditional songs and dances, have played a significant role in promoting the urban culture diversification.

3. Xinjiang's culture changes in globalization

No nation or race can become a developed one by isolating itself. Therefore, it is a task that cannot be ignored in Development of the West Regions to modernize the minorities' migration and mobility on a larger scale.

Put against the background of globalization, culture changes are not only manifested in the influence of Han culture on that of minorities but minority cultures on that of Han in some parts in Xinjiang which have more minority people than Han people (such as in south Xinjiang). Those coming to Xinjiang from inland have been greatly influenced by the local culture when living together with the people there. Therefore, when conducting some researches in this aspect, some concepts should be distinguished. For example, "assimilation by Han" is more like modernization now. For Uigur, their daily costumes just refer to modern clothes. Han people's modern clothes today are quite different from their traditional costumes, too. In the current social and economic environment, the culture changes in Xinjiang tend to be more rapid and more modernization-oriented.

To sum up, during the process of modernization, the development of economy and the emphasis of policies have resulted in frequent population mobility in Xinjiang, which consequently has caused increasing communications and culture changes. In spite of some changes influenced by Han and others influenced by minorities, more are modernization-oriented.

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