

“Chinese Immigration to Russia in the Context of the Demographic Situation”

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Introduction

Demographers are unanimous when it comes to the future of Russia's population growth. Both demographers at the United Nations and Russia's Goskomstat, as well as domestic and foreign researchers, predict a sharp decline. This fact will dictate Russia's strategic migration policy, especially with regards to *immigration*.

China is Russia's neighbor and has incredible potential for migration. Thus it is natural to view China as one of Russia's most important migration partners.

This presentation examines the predicted indicators for Russia's population growth, the long-term dynamics for labor resource potential, evaluations of the current presence of Chinese in Russia, the situation in Siberia and the Far East, and changes in migration policy.

Predicted Growth Rates for Russia

The most optimistic prognosis has been made by the United Nations. According to their most moderate estimates, the population of Russian will shrink to 137 million people by 2025. By mid-century, the number will be 121 million.

Goskomstat's prediction in 2000 is even more pessimistic. They estimate that the population of Russia in 2016 will already be 126 million. This is 19 million (or 13.3%) less than in 2002. Over the past three years (1999-2001) Russia's population has decreased by a million a year.

In order to preserve current population levels in Russia for the next fifty years, total immigration over that period must bring in 35 million (about 700,000 per year) to 70 million people (1.4 million per year) depending on the various parameters for birth and death rates.

The immigration numbers given above significantly differ from figures reached in the past. Even during the 1990s, when Russia saw an unprecedented increase in migration, the migration rate was 330,000 people per year on average. During the 1980s, it was about 200,000 people per year.

Predictions for population levels lead to the following conclusions:

- A sudden and very sharp demographic collapse awaits Russia. In this sense, Russia is comparable to Japan, Italy, and Germany.
- If it relies solely on internal demographic resources, Russia can guarantee neither the stability of its population nor, more importantly, its growth.
- There is significant promise for immigration opening up in Russia, especially considering the sparse settlement of the country.
- The demographic situation will dictate the immigration policy; it is a strategic direction for Russia's long-term migration policy. Russia might very well become the leading country for immigration in the world.

Possible Donors

Without a doubt, Russia's first priority is to migrants from the former Soviet republics and, above all else, Russians. During the 1990s, 3.1 million out of 25.3 million ethnic Russians came to

Russia from the former Soviet republics. The remaining potential for repatriation in post-Soviet nations can be estimated at about 4 million people.

Aside from Russians, Russia can count on an in-flow by residents of CIS countries of about the same size as the Russian in-flow. However, calculations show that even taking into account this stream, its former partners can satisfy only half of Russia's future demand for immigrants.

As for the other half of the demand, the Chinese have no serious competitors. Russia's neighbor, China has a significant surplus labor force, including workers in the provinces directly bordering Russia. The Chinese are quite mobile, adapt easily to life in other countries, and Russia's severe climate does not frighten them. Of course, immigration to Russia, just as it is now, will be variegated. Nonetheless, we will see a predominantly Asian element, which in turn will be dominated by the Chinese.

Consequently, there objectively exists a precondition in Russia for large-scale Chinese immigration in the future, especially beyond this decade.

The Presence of Chinese in Russia

As soon as it opened its doors in 1992, the Chinese immediately started heading for Russia. They established a lively trade of consumer goods throughout the territories of Russia, especially in Siberia and the Far East, all along the Russian-Chinese border. There was a genuine immigration explosion.

The national and regional media have aggressively created the impression of millions of Chinese living in Russia. Most often, they talk of two million Chinese in Primorsky Krai.

So how many Chinese are there really in Russia?

Statistics allow us to answer this question rather accurately. Let us compare the counter-current flow of Chinese over the border. The number of Chinese entering Russia has been approximately the same over the past few years: in the area of 450,000–500,000 people. The number of Chinese leaving Russia has been just about the same. There are very few who stay behind in Russia. The balance is in Russia's favor, but the "remainder" is not that large: 31,500 people or 2.2% of incoming over the past three years.

Research data on the Chinese presence in Russia are also quite moderate and tend to coincide. Numbers range from 300,000 to 400,000 people. For the most part, these are temporary migrant workers and merchants. No more than 1,000 Chinese have permanent residency throughout the entire border area. The Chinese are the second largest group of foreign laborers officially attracted to Russia—about 30,000-50,000 people a year. Without a doubt, there is also a flow of illegal Chinese immigrants. Illegal migrants from China usually come to Russia through Kazakhstan. Then they go on to the western part of the country.

The migration flow across the border is by no means in one direction. Rather, the movement into China is far more intense. Russian citizens cross the border 1.5-2 times more frequently than Chinese. As we can see, the size of the Chinese presence in Russia is quite modest and is heavily exaggerated.

The Situation in Siberia and the Far East

At the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Eastern Russia had a population of 32 million, of which 5 million lived in the North. Because of the current reduction in its demographic potential, Russia has lost the ability to continue settling these regions with people from the European part of the country.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the political and economic transformations brought about sharp changes in the migration of the Russian population. The sudden change to a market economy

immediately exposed the relative overpopulation of the northern regions, from which the population started to quickly leave. The situation in the Far East changed radically. For the first time since the Russians began settling the Far East, the population of the region began to decrease. The Chukotsky Autonomous Region leads in terms of population loss. More than half of its population has left over the course of the 1990s. The population of Magadan decreased 40%. Losses of 18% were observed in Kamchatskaya Oblast; 16% in Sakhalinskaya Oblast; and 10% in Sakha. And the population is decreasing in the southern regions of the Far East. Currently 10% fewer people are living in the entire Far East than in 1989. During the 1990s, the region lost 870,000 people to migration, which is almost the same amount as it gained over the thirty years from 1961 to 1990 (976,000).

The combination of the migration outflow and the natural decrease is fraught with the possibility of further steady population decline in the future. This situation has given rise to serious concern in Russia. The establishment of a new resettlement into the border regions of Siberia and the Far East has been proffered as a countermeasure. However, there are no grounds to believe this suggestion to be reliable.

The main migration flow in Russia is rigidly directed from the north and the east to the southwest. From all over the country, as well as from all former Soviet republics, the population is converging in the central region. This region has the highest level of natural decline in the country—about three times higher than for Siberia. It is precisely the central part of the country that is expecting the sharpest labor shortage in the future.

Russian Attitudes about Chinese

Small-scale commerce with China literally breathed life into the border regions of Eastern Siberia and the Far East, which had fallen into a particularly difficult state during the economic crisis. Nevertheless, the local population is suspicious of the Chinese.

Several factors have brought about the dismay and confusion of the local population. On the one hand, there is the vigor of the Chinese, their lack of pretension, and the ease with which they have been able to adapt in all Russian cities. On the other hand, there is the Russians' own lack of life experience in a society with a large number of foreigners. These factors have given rise to fear.

Unquestionably, there is an objective foundation for this. China's "demographic press" is cause for alarm. According to various estimates, which essentially depend on the coverage of the Russian territory, the population density on the Chinese side of the border is 15 to 30 times higher than on the Russian side. In Primorsky Krai, which is the most populated region in the Far East, the population density is 13.5 people per square kilometer. In bordering Northeast China, it is 130 people per square kilometer. For most of the Russian-Chinese border, density does not exceed 4-5 people per square kilometer. About 5 million people live in the southern part of the Russian Far East; in the three Chinese provinces on the other side of the border live more than 100 million people.

According to survey data from Far Eastern cities, a quarter of citizens see the Chinese in a favorable light. Between 6 and 13 percent of respondents expressed a negative attitude. The majority were indifferent.

Those who viewed the Chinese favorably noted their diligence, business-like manner, lack of pretension, and the lack of drunkenness. Those who negatively viewed the Chinese felt that they "spread dirt and disease." The negative respondents were put off by the "aggressive behavior" of the immigrants.

However, as soon as we begin to discuss realistic immigrant rights, the tolerance among the population diminishes. Willingness to enter into commercial cooperation, as well as the awareness of its necessity, is combined with a tendency to realize this interaction within a strict migratory framework. Any steps which may lead to Chinese taking root in Russian territory are met with

resistance. The local population is categorically opposed to allowing Chinese to live in Russia permanently or even for an extended period of time. They are also opposed to the long-term lease or sale of land to Chinese. The Russians are afraid that the Chinese want to plant roots in their territory.

The local population extremely negatively views the possibility of marriage between a close relative and a Chinese person. At the end of 1996, 80 percent of those surveyed responded “under no circumstances.” Only 12 percent viewed such marriages as acceptable. The shadow of the “Chinese Threat” prevails over people. In 1996, 71 percent of surveyed residents of the Far East considered this threat entirely realistic for Russia. Later surveys indicate that the attitudes of the population are easing. In 1998, one in three residents of Khabarovsk and Vladivostok believed that China presented a threat to Russia. Only one in ten Muscovites felt the same way. The younger generation demonstrates greater tolerance. Every third respondent among university students viewed marriage with a Chinese person as normal. One in two students would agree to work for a Chinese businessman. Additionally, the majority of respondents had no objection to Chinese selling goods and temporarily working in Russia. (Eighty percent of respondents had purchased Chinese products.)

The Chinese usually view Russian attitudes about them as positive (55%). Two thirds of Chinese have Russian friends. The Chinese value the kindness and warmth of the Russians, their openness, and their high level of culture. The Chinese are turned off by Russian drunkenness and laziness. Two thirds of Chinese would positively view marriage between a close relative and a Russian. Of course, there were significantly fewer respondents who themselves desired to marry a Russian (17%). At the same time, one in four people had had to deal with aggression from the local population and harassment from the local police.

In total, the survey results trace the complex process of the mutual adaptation of the Russians and the Chinese. At the same time, both the Russian population and the Russian authorities understand that they cannot live without the Chinese.

Changes in Migration Policy

To this day Russia does not have systematic migratory legislation that corresponds to the market economy and the new conditions of interaction with the world. Thus, immigrants simultaneously use the legislative inadequacies to their advantage and are compelled to violate other laws. In the early years after the collapse of the USSR, the efforts of various government agencies were focused on solving the problem of receiving compelled migrants from the former Soviet republics. The problem of immigration regulation was entirely new to Russia and for a long time did not attract the necessary attention. Only on November 1, 2002, did a law on the legal status of foreign citizens go into effect. This law was aimed at clearing up the legal status of this group of migrants.

Although the law covers a wide spectrum of questions concerning immigration, it does not simplify the procedure for registering foreigners. And it adds new requirements. There is still no clear mechanism for the legal regulation of the activities of foreign citizens, such as entrepreneurs and individual merchants. Official guidelines also have not been developed fully. Furthermore, Russia does not have at its disposal a properly equipped migration infrastructure which could fully guarantee the efficacy of the law. There is the enormous task of bringing order to the work of the various agencies that deal with issues of immigration. Clearly, there is a need for some refinement to the list and order of stipulated procedures. This refinement should be in the direction of simplification and allowing for greater mobility. Practical experience will reveal all the advantages and disadvantages of the law. Nonetheless, it is obvious that Russia aims to bring its own legislation up to international standards.