

CHINESE MIGRATION IN KAZAKHSTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

Svetlana Kozhirova (Doctor of Political Science, Professor)

Bakyt Ospanova (PhD candidate)

L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan

Abstract

This paper intensively discusses Chinese migration to Kazakhstan as possible threat to national security. Authors argue that Chinese demographic expansion is regarded as threat in public discourse of the country. This could be explained by several factors: general influx of foreigners into country since independence; incoming Chinese labor as a part of Chinese FDI into Kazakh economy; and general trend of export of Chinese labor force surplus, which Central Asian countries expect to receive at least partially. However, the analysis of empirics reveals that the number of Chinese migrants in Kazakhstan is marginal. Moreover, they do not intent to stay in Kazakhstan for long or acquire citizenship.

Keywords: Chinese migration, security threat, Kazakhstan

Introduction

The modernization and economic growth in China led to the changing status of Chinese state in world politics affecting the whole structure of international relations. The Chinese rise has impact on interests of many countries, however it has greater influence on bordering countries. In this regard China becomes significant actor influencing relations in Central Asia generally, and in Kazakhstan in particular. Chinese rise is usually regarded as potential security threat to Central Asian countries, both in terms of economic and political development of the states. In this regard the Chinese demographic expansion to Central Asia is evaluated as potential threat to the national security and sovereignty of regional states.

This paper traces situation in Kazakhstan in order to analyse the potential of Chinese demographic threat to the national security of the state. Paper uses migration statistics and interviews with Chinese migrants as empirics of the research.

Chinese Migration as a Problem

The Chinese demographic expansion is present in public discourse of Kazakhstan for last ten years and it is usually perceived as a threat to national security and sovereignty. This position is explained by several factors. First, the opening of borders after Kazakhstan became independent state led to influx of foreigners, including Chinese, into the country. According to the national statistics, in 1997 forty thousand foreigners entered Kazakhstan, in 2004 their number increased up to eight hundred forty thousand people, and after three years in 2007 number of foreigners reached one million people [1]. Second, the economic expansion of China into Kazakhstan through growing volume of investments brought Chinese labour to the country as part of FDI. And last, but not least, the labour market situation in China itself with high number of unemployed people creates situation when labour is exported, and Central Asian countries expect to receive this export, at least partially.

The Chinese economists calculate that the population growth maximum of China will be achieved in 2035-2040 and will reach 1,6 billion people. Then, the population growth will be decreased provided that birth rate continues to be controlled. This population growth naturally affects labour supply, which expected to increase up to 50 million people in 2010-2030. This

situation leads to over-supply of labour and unemployment; the estimated unemployment in China in 2005 was around 150-200 million people [2].

Chinese government employs two strategies to fight unemployment. The first one is to encourage internal migration to the depressed regions, and the second one is to employ “surplus labour force” outside China in the framework of legal or illegal labour migration. During last years Chinese government supports internal migration to the Northern and Northwest regions of the country through development of infrastructure and support of business. The internal migration in 2005 was recorded at one hundred forty seven thousand people [3].

Chinese government also supports the second solution of unemployment problem through allowing labour force export. Thus, the official export of labour force from China between 1978 and 2001 was recorded at 2,4 million people. According to International Organization of Migration estimations, in 2001 alone four hundred sixty thousand Chinese citizens officially worked outside the country [4]. The analysis of official records shows the steady growth of labour export from China; thus in 1993 one hundred fifty seven thousand Chinese citizens worked abroad in the framework of official contracts, and after ten years, in 2003 this number reached seven hundred thousand people [5].

The combination of both strategies – support of internal migration and labour force export – brings Chinese labour migration closer to Kazakhstan borders. The Chinese program of development of Western land foresees investments in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, which borders East and Southeast Kazakhstan.

Chinese Migration to Kazakhstan: Empirical Analysis

Kazakhstan experiences the growing number of Chinese migrants; according to the data of Department of Migration Police of the Internal Affairs Ministry of Kazakhstan in 2005 thirty four thousand one hundred and eight Chinese citizens was registered as temporary residents in Kazakhstan. In 2006 this number was recorded at twenty nine thousand one hundred and eighty three people, and in 2007 at thirty three thousand one hundred and seventy four persons [6].

The empirics of this paper is based on statistics of Departments of Migration Police of Almaty and Astana and the survey of Chinese citizens residing in these two cities.

According to the data of Department of Migration Police of Almaty in 2004 around seven thousand Chinese citizens was registered as temporary residents of Almaty, and half of them were ethnic Kazakhs from China, so-called ‘oralmans’ (repatriate). In 2005 Chinese citizens concluded 4 marriages in Almaty, and 5 persons got permanent residence permit. In the same year 703 Chinese citizens were brought to administrative responsibility and 120 persons were expelled from the country for violation of migration legislation [6].

The following table* summarizes the data on Chinese migrants in Almaty:

Years	Registered, total	On business purposes	To work	On private purposes	Tourism	Expelled
2004	8796 (among them Kazakhs - 7359)	622	815	7359	0	56
2005	9437 (among them Kazakhs - 8305)	461	631	8305	40	260
2006	8841 (among them Kazakhs - 7679)	750	409	7670	12	520
10 months of 2007	9139 (among them Kazakhs - 7956)	678	503	7956	2	143

*table is created by S. Kozhirova based on data of Department of Migration Police of Almaty

The survey hold by authors in Almaty in November and December in 2006 determines the characteristics of Chinese migrants. According to the results of this survey, Chinese

migrants in Almaty are well educated and wealthy; they own private houses (26%) or rent it (39%). More than half of them (57%) had been living in financially sustainable situation in China, and 46% of the respondents continue to have average or high income in Kazakhstan.

Around half of the respondents in Almaty have higher or incomplete higher education (41%) and 33% of the Chinese migrants in the city have at least secondary education. Only 3% of the respondents are illiterate and 11% have only primary education. Most of the Chinese migrants work for Chinese companies operating in various areas of economy, including petroleum and trade companies, banks, restaurants and café; some of them teach Chinese or work as doctors. Most of Chinese citizens have leaved in Kazakhstan from 1 to 4 years (47%), and 22% of them reside in Almaty for less than a year. Marginal number of migrants (17%) knows Russian.

The Chinese migrants are concentrated in trade, and 36% of the respondents, including doctors and teachers of Chinese, indicate that they have own business in Kazakhstan. Around one fifth of the migrants (21%) point out that their income in Kazakhstan is higher than in China and it is easier to find a job in Kazakhstan than in their home country [7].

Astana attracts less Chinese migrants in comparison with Almaty. According to the Department of Migration Police of Astana only 120 Chinese citizens were registered as temporary residents in Astana in 2004.

The following table* summarises the data on temporary visitors from China to Astana:

Years	Registered, total	On business purposes	To work	On private purposes	Tourism	Expelled
2004	361 (among them Kazakhs - 155)	189	21	151	0	-
2005	607 (among them Kazakhs - 299)	267	70	269	1	-
2006	1392(among them Kazakhs - 354)	465	536	388	3	-
9 months of 2007	1858(among them Kazakhs - 656)	358	873	626	1	-

*table is created by S. Kozhirova based on data of Department of Migration Police of Astana

The survey of Chinese migrants in Astana hold by authors in December 2006 reveals that their educational level is lower than those residing in Almaty: only 6% of them have higher education and 4% have incomplete higher education. 9% of the Chinese migrants residing in Astana are illiterate and 27% of them have primary education, and only 22% of the migrants have secondary education.

Most of the Chinese migrants coming to Astana work for construction industry. They also work in trade (usually in construction markets) and as employees of Chinese companies. According to the survey results main goal of the Chinese migrants in Astana is to accumulate the capital in order to start own business in China (78%), some of the respondents aim to obtain commercial visa in Kazakhstan (14%) and only 8% of the Chinese migrants consider Astana as intermediate place in their way to third countries (8%) [8].

Generally, Chinese migrants coming to Kazakhstan are single males, staying in the country for more than 4 years. Most of them have close ties with their compatriots, keep their identity and plan to return to China. Respondents do not plan to acquire citizenship of Kazakhstan or apply for permanent residence permit [7,8]. This survey results is supported by statistics of the Department of Migration Police of the Internal Affairs Ministry of Kazakhstan; according to Department's data 21 012 people obtained Kazakhstan's citizenship between 1992 and 2007; among these people 20 968 were ethnic Kazakhs, 5 were Chinese, 35 were Uyghur, 2 were Russian and 2 were Dungan.

Most of the Chinese migrants surveyed in Almaty and Astana note that the idea of coming to Kazakhstan was originated from their business partners. They also point out that

the number of Chinese residing in Almaty and Astana is insignificant and it decreased in comparison with 2000.

The Chinese migrants working in Kazakhstan tend to settle close to each other and keep their national identity. During the twenty years of Kazakhstan's independence the Chinese migrants became culturally and educationally diverse. In the framework of active Chinese business expansion Kazakhstan experienced the changes in the structure of Chinese migrants; the number of managers and qualified workers of oil and gas industry has grown recently. Their close relation to Chinese investments characterizes the migration processes from China to Kazakhstan; most of the Chinese migrants in Kazakhstan work for Chinese business or operate as intermediates between Chinese and Kazakhstani business communities.

The involvement of Kazakhstan into processes of globalization and participation in global economy will lead to the growing number of migration and immigration. This increase in general migration might lead to the increase of Chinese migration to Kazakhstan and to the acceleration of fears of Chinese demographic expansion to the country. However, the empirical research and analysis of migration statistics indicate that ethnic Kazakhs, who have decided to move to the country from China, mainly represent the Chinese migration to Kazakhstan. The ethnic Chinese residing in Kazakhstan does not plan to obtain citizenship or permanent residence permit, and considers Kazakhstan as a place favourable for business and capital accumulation. Moreover, they tend to keep their identity and settle close to each other.

Therefore, the consideration of Chinese demographic expansion as a threat to national security represents rather myth than the reflection of reality.

Conclusion

The permanent existence of Chinese demographic expansion as a threat to national security in public discourse of Kazakhstan could be explained by different factors. Obviously, the general perception of neighboring big country like China as a threat frames Chinese migration in negative terms. The awareness of labor force surplus in China adds another argument for those who frame Chinese migration as a threat. Nevertheless, the empirical survey of available statistical data and results of interviews hold with Chinese migrants in two biggest cities of Kazakhstan - Almaty and Astana – reveals that the number of Chinese coming to Kazakhstan is marginal. Moreover, they do not perceive Kazakhstan as their final destination. They also do not intend to stay for long-term in Kazakhstan or acquire citizenship. Rather Chinese migrants consider Kazakhstan as a temporary workplace. Additionally, statistics reveals that the great number Chinese migrants are actually ethnic Kazakhs, who either come to visit their relatives or seek the citizenship under repatriation program.

References:

- Kazakhstan in Numbers: 1991-2008. The Statistical Digest, Astana, 2009 [original in Russian: Казахстан в цифрах 1991-2008 Статистический сборник Астана, 2009]
- Mikheyev, Vasilyi (ed.) China: Threats, Risks and Challenges to Development: Moscow: Carnegie Center, 2005 [Original in Russian: Китай: угрозы, риски, вызовы развитию (под ред. В.Михеева). М.: Центр Карнеги, 2005]
- World Migration Report 2003: Managing Migration - Challenges and Responses for People on the Move. IOM Publication, 2003, available online http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/WMR_2003.pdf (last access February 25, 2014)
- Krasinets, Ye.S. "Wan Goes to Ivan. Chinese Migrants are in Focus of Migration Policy". *Migration and Citizenship*, 2003, no2, pp. 8-11 [original in Russian: Красинец Е.С. Ван едет к Ивану. В фокусе миграционной политики — пришельцы из Китая//Миграция и гражданство, 2003, № 2(5), с. 8-11]

Ma Yongtang. Recent Trends and Data of Economy, Labor Market and Migration in China for 2004 - A Country paper for the Workshop on International Migration and Labor Market in Asia. Feb.5-6, 2004

Bulletin of Department of Migration Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2008

Interview with Chinese migrants in Almaty, November-December 2006

Interview with Chinese migrants in Astana, December 2006