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MIGRATION AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

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Demographic trends in the USSR'S southern tier republics have attracted considerable attention in the West. The root couse of the changing demographic situation is the large natural population increase in the Moslem republics. Closely related to this trend is a growing labor "surplus" of unskilled workers in Central Asia. This surplus, in turn, contributes to pressures for migration out of Central Asia. Despite this surplus of unskilled workers, there is a shortage of trained workers and managerial personnel within Central Asia. In addition, public policy officials in Central Asia complain of persistent labor turnover among trained workers of the indigenous nationalities in Central Asia. All of these trends take place within the context of an ethnicly segmented society giving them the character, as some Soviet writers put it, of "ethnodemographic" trends.[1]

Western literature has explored the magnitude and direction of these trends,[2] political and economic implications that might be associated with them,[3] and, to a lesser extent, public policies that are associated with them.[4] Gradual reductions in the amount of data provided by the Central Statistical Administration (TsSU) over the past decade have tended to obscure a more localized trend that in the long run could be equally important as those listed above. This is the trend toward very low if not negative rural-to-urban migration in some parts of Soviet Central Asia.

The Problem of Reverse Migration

Precise measures of intraregional migration in Central Asia are unavailable. The 1959 census provided some reliable figures, but the 1970 census afforded inadequate material for longitudinal analysis, and the 1979 census figures have been printed only in elliptic form. Soviet sources

frequently refer to periodic intercensal surveys. There is thus good reason to believe that although data on current migration trends are not publicly available, public officials in the USSR have access to reliable data. However, the exact magnitude and direction of internal migration trends in Soviet Central Asia are not certain given the publicly available sources.

Despite the absence of official data describing migration trends within Central Asia, there is a good deal of imprecise but reliable commentary to the effect that migration trends within the indigenous Asian communities suggest exceptionally low movement from village to city. There is some indication indeed that the net trend may be in the other direction. In other words, there is considerable "reverse migration" in many areas of Central Asia.

Intraregional migration within Central Asia first became a subject of public discussion in connection with the population problems of new towns. Expanding hydro-electric and natural resource enterprises grew rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s. Some labor economists monitoring these developments noticed an early segmentation in the work force. In a 1968 article the Soviet economists K. Bedrintsev and A. Kozlov observed that settlement patterns indicated three principal groupings. These groupings consisted of large, older cities; new, small primary commodity and extractive industry towns; and older, mainly agriculturally based towns.[5] The new towns tended to be populated predominantly by non-native migrants. Bedrintsev and Kozlov noted that in the new, small towns only 20 percent of the population consisted of natives. The fact that the local populations did not move to the new towns was understandable given the high level of technological skills required by facilities in the new towns and the low skill levels of the native labor force.

The tendency for Asians to remain in the village rather than move to the cities proved to be more deeply rooted than experience with the new towns suggested. By 1983 a Soviet sociologist studying the low geographical mobility of the Asians wrote that:

> Recently both the urban and rural population [in Central Asia] has stabilized. This is first of all a result of a decrease in the immigration to the cities of Central Asia from other regions of the country. Secondly, the village has practically ceased to be a source of replenishment for the cities. On the whole, about as many people leave the city as migrate to it.[6]

The flow of migrants from city to village is unusual because, with the exception of Moldavia and Azerbaidzhan, migration for several decades in the USSR has been overwhelmingly directed toward the cities. Perhaps more important, in other areas of the world where socioeconomic levels and cultural patterns and values approximate those of Central Asia, migration has led to serious problems of rapid urbanization. Low rural-to-urban migration can be accounted for by the tendency of many young people in Central Asia to remain in their native villages, and if they should leave, to return to the village. Not all return to their native village. Some relocate not to the city, however, but to another rural area.

The tendency of young people to remain in the rural areas gathered momentum during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1968, 35 percent of all working age youths remained in the village after completing schooling, according to one Soviet economist. By the mid-1970s this figure had risen to almost 45 percent. The appeal of rural life for many young Central Asians seems to have won out over the "bright lights" of the cities.

The magnitude of reverse migration in absolute terms is not clear, but it is substantial enough to cause concern in official circles. Soviet policy makers are interested in the "proletarianization" of rural Central Asians for

sociopolitical reasons. They are more concerned, however, about the problem of labor utilization in the southern republics. A joint resolution of the Central Committee, the Council of Ministers, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and the Komsomol was issued in 1979 in order to bring to the attention of local policy makers the problem of labor turnover.[7] A series of resolutions on the subject from lesser policy making institutions followed. Yet the problem of labor turnover among young workers in Central Asia remains among the most frequently discussed economic problems. When young workers are enticed off the farms to the cities, they do not appear to be sufficiently motivated to stay there. Sociological studies of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (CPUz) showed that many young laborers left work after only three or four months on the job.[8]

Local officials appear to view the labor turnover problem seriously. A number of studies have been commissioned to determine the reasons for the reluctance of Central Asians to stay in the cities. The reasons most frequently given are that working conditions are dangerous and unhygienic, the work is routine and tedious, or it does not offer possibilities for advancement. Often young workers have come to the city to participate in work study programs sponsored jointly by a factory and a vocational-technical school. When the benefits of this arrangement expire, the city loses its fascination for the young people. The chairman of the State Committee of the Turkmen SSR for Vocational-Technical Training, E. Khodzhaev, explained that the students do not think highly of their trades. "By far the majority of the young men and women go to the combines and courses because of the large stipends, but upon finishing the course they barely show up at the plant before quitting the job," Khodzhaev complained.[9]

An Explanation for Reverse Migration

Soviet sources acknowledge that the substantial differences between rural and urban living in Central Asia are reflected in the rapid growth of the rural population. As the Soviet social demographer M. Kh. Kharakhanov wrote:

> Until the [recent] period there was equivalence between the labor-aged population involved in industry and agriculture. As a result of the increase in the productivity of agricultural work and the high level of natural increase of the population, the equivalence was transformed into the current demographic situation. This is now reflected in a labor surplus in a majority of the densely populated regions [*raiony*] of Central Asia. The growth in the numbers entering the work force has begun to exceed the annual growth in the number of work positions in the economy.[10]

The existence of such a "labor surplus" in the presence of low and in some areas reverse migration should seem disturbing. Since the collectivization campaigns of the 1930s, local farm managers and farm officials throughout the USSR have struggled to retain skilled workers. But the lure of the city has proven too great. Nor is the USSR exceptional in this respect. Similar migrations have occurred in modernizing areas of advanced industrial countries and in developing countries. Why should migration in Central Asia be a special case?

A variety of models have been constructed to explain migratory behavior.[11] One of the best general models for investigation of the anomalous case of Central Asia is the generalized model adopted by E. S. Lee.[12] This model conceives of migration in terms of three basic components. The first is the sum of factors both pushing and pulling an individual at the point of departure. The second component is the sum of factors both pushing and pulling a potential migrant at the point of destination. The third comprises intervening obstacles to migration. These obstacles could include physical as

well as socio-cultural distances to be traversed in a migration.

One of the most frequently encountered explanations for low Central Asian migration is that cultural factors act as an obstacle to migration. Proponents of this view point expecially to the resilience of Islam and associated cultural traditions, and to various antireligious campaigns of the Soviet party and government. The role of the extended family, deference to parental authority, distrust of outsiders, more traditional expectations of women, and so on, are pointed to as evidence that Islamic traditions and values hold Central Asians on the traditional village, the *kishlaq*.

While it should be admitted that cultural values play a role in all decision making of Central Asians, it is also clear that this is not an adequate basis for explaining migration behavior. Throughout the Islamic world the pull of tradition, the family, and the ancestral homeland, has fared poorly against the various attractions of Islamabad, Teheran, Cairo, Baghdad, and Ankara. Central Asian society is neither more backward nor more Islamic than these other societies.

A slightly different form of the cultural argument emphasizes the political or nationalist sentiment involved. This argument holds that in Islamic countries, migration to the large cities is considered acceptable because no substantial cultural barriers are crossed. In Central Asia, according to this line of reasoning, large cities are viewed as bastions of the Slavic colonizer. The native population's avoidance of large cities is thus a form of nationalist protest--a voluntary cultural segregation which is sustained through Islamic beliefs and values.

This interpretation also must deal with a large number of counterexamples. Islamic traditions have not prevented substantial migrations

from the Moslem Balkans, Turkey, and Northern Africa to Western Europe. Thus the cultural barrier is not impassible in other areas. Why should one assume it so in Central Asia? Morever, there is evidence that the Central Asian populations are not only not moving to the large cities of Central Asia, they are also not moving to the middle-sized cities of Central Asia. The large cities, it can be argued, are under Slavic control and cultural dominance. But in the middle-sized cities the language of commerce and public affairs is the native language, not Russian. Hence few cultural barriers would be encountered by the migrant.

The cultural and nationalist arguments both draw attention to the role of obstacles to migration. Neither argument seems satisfactory. A third argument, the "economic" argument, draws attention to the "pull" features of the *kishlaq*. A recent article in the CPUz monthly, *Kommunist Uzbekistana*, noted that "while the country in general is experiencing a labor shortage, in our areas the current growth in labor resources exceeds the growth in work positions. This situation is explained by the improvement in the living conditions of the workers."[13] There is a great deal of support for the view that living standards, evaluated by subjective criteria, in some rural areas exceed those of the urban areas. The sociologist D. I. Ziuzin wrote that research data testifies to the fact that the standard of living in rural areas and small towns now is higher than in cities (except in the capitals).[14] In a recent volume on Central Asian labor resources, Nancy Lubin, an analyst at the Office of Technology Assessment, explained that entrepreneurial spirit finds easier expression in the rural areas of Central Asia than in the cities.[15]

The economic argument as an explanation for migration behavior has certain shortcomings also. The argument assumes that desire for material gain

is closely correlated with the propensity to relocate. There are several objections to this assumption. First, the experience the world over has been that the poorest of the poor do not move; the richest of the poor do. The "expected value" of a move does not, therefore, explain why people move if those who do move can expect less of a change in their situations than those who do not. Second, if the standard of living in rural Central Asia exceeds that of the urban areas, primarily through gray market activities, would not this also encourage similar activities in some of the middle-sized towns?

The cultural, nationalist, and economic issues admittedly all play a role in the tendency for people to remain on the *kishlaq*. Singly, none of them is determinative, however. The reason they play these roles is a result of the agricultural development program pursued in Central Asia.

Agricultural Development in Central Asia

The main reason that people have not moved off the Central Asian *kishlaq* is the agricultrual development program in Central Asia. The agricultural production complex (APK) is the primary employer, especially of natives. In Uzbekistan, for instance, about 60 percent of the work force is directly involved in agriculture. The proportion has been growing, not diminishing. Over 60 percent of the young people completing school went to work in agriculture in 1981.[16] In 1968, only 35 percent of all youths aged 15-19 worked in agriculture.[17] Seven years later this number had risen to almost 45 percent.[18] Even these figures showing high participation may underrepresent actual native participation in the APK. Not all of the rural work force is classified as agricultural in Soviet sources. Rural construction laborers and rural service personnel, for instance, are not considered in the agricultural

category. This "non-agricultural" work force is also growing. In 1960, seven percent of the "workers" of the republic were located in rural areas.[19] By 1980 this figure had risen to 13 percent.[20]

Much of the rural work force was involved in construction directly related to agricultural expansion. The government budget and plan fulfillment reports published every January in the republic newspapers suggest that the rural construction programs have been extremely labor intensive. In Uzbekistan, successive chairman of the Council of Ministers have noted that the annual goal of increasing the sown area by 100,000 hectares has been consistently fulfilled. Such 100,000 increments are not, however, reflected in the aggregate data published in *Narodnoe khoziaistvo v UzSSR*, the republic statistical data handbook. Therefore, barring some misrepresentation, much of the land claimed under the category of "newly improved" is simply land that had previously been in production but was lost to soil exhaustion or salinization and later reclaimed. Central Asia's complex irrigation system requires a substantial labor cost in maintenance alone.

The APK is specialized around cotton production. Cotton production requires large numbers of laborers for short periods of time. The seasonality of cotton production has made it particularly susceptible to the development of a plantation economy. With the advent of machine cotton harvesters in the 1950s, the Soviets expected to solve this peak season labor problem. In the 1950s it was projected that by the 1960s, 80 percent of the cotton would be machine harvested. For a variety of reasons, cotton mechanization has been very slow to take root in Central Asia. In the 1984 season about 55 percent of the cotton was mechanically harvested. Since the early 1960s, the absolute size of the cotton harvest has doubled. The irony of the situation is that in

recent years more people were picking cotton by hand in Central Asia than 25 years earlier.

Some Soviet economists and policy makers in the 1960s clearly anticipated a migration problem when agricultural mechanization began releasing Central Asian farm labor. To date, the large expansion of land under cultivation and the slow pace of agricultural mechanization have combined to retain people on the *kishlaq*. But in the mid-1980s that era is coming to an end with the increasingly severe constraints on high value farmland and on the availability of water for irrigation purposes. In order to see how these constraints can affect migration it is important to note the relationship between migration and agricultural development.

Agricultural Development and Migration

It was once widely assumed that rural development programs had the effect of inhibiting rural-to-rural migration. Many Western foreign aid programs were premised upon this belief. Twenty-five years of assistance programming, however, suggests that the relationship between rural development and migration is more complex; while some development programs discourage migration, others encourage it.[21] The relevance of comparative research on migration to Central Asia can be seen in terms of technological dispersion, agricultural mechanization, and phases of rural development.

As mentioned earlier, migrants tend not to be the poorest of the poor, but rather the richest of the poor. Refugee migrants are of course the exception. Migrants tend to be better educated than many poor people. Most migrants are between 15 and 30 years of age. In Asia and Africa, migrants tend to be male; in Latin America and the Phillippines migrants are

predominantly female. D. I. Ziuzin reported that young females in Central Asia "in comparison with young males value (both absolutely and relatively) a city life style considerably higher than the rural life style."[22] In addition, the greatest pool of potential migrants, those who perform manual labor on the farm, is predominantly female. Musaeva reported that females involved in primary agricultural tasks outnumbered males in Uzbekistan, for instance, by about 50 percent.[23] Other Central Asian republics have similar proportions.

One main reason that agricultural development in many countries has been accompanied by substantial rural outmigration is the effect of the green revolution. The introduction of new farming technologies, hybrid seeds, and new crop varieties in many cases acted to the detriment of the rural poor. Large farms gained the most from these new technologies because of their greater political power, access to information through extension services, and ability to take risks. As farm production increased, prices often fell, forcing small, marginal producers out of the market. Central Asian farming was more slowly affected by technological change than were farms in countries with market economies. Moreover, disruptive social consequences did not occur in Central Asia.

Mechanization is a second major reason why agricultural development has often been accompanied by farm outmigration. In general it is assumed that there is a trade-off between mechanization and demand for farm labor; as mechanization increases, demand falls. This is often true regarding the introduction of tractors. In contrast, the introduction of irrigation machinery can often even increase farm labor demand. In Central Asia the number of workers eliminated by the tractor has been compensated for by the

expansion of farm land. Mechanized cotton harvesters have displaced workers, but the resulting increase in output has also required an increase in farm hands. Moreover, machinery is inefficiently used in Central Asia. In difficult periods, farm managers would prefer to dispense with machinery altogether in order to ensure that quotas are met and bonuses gained.

If we exclude the labor-displacing effects of the green revolution and the introduction of mechanization because neither applies to Soviet Central Asia, the relationship between rural development and migration is more simple. Rural development tends to follow phases. During the first phase rural employment is increased through rural construction projects for infrastructural improvements such as roads and transportation, storage facilities, communication, and services. These projects in turn contribute to improved communication between city and village. As commercial ties develop between producer and processor, so do personal and informal ties. In the second phase the expansion in cultivated land, rural construction projects, and rural social services comes to an end. The pull of the countryside diminishes. Migration follows.

Public Policy in Central Asia

About a decade ago, Western researchers became concerned with what Grey Hodnett called a "potential migration wave" from Central Asia.[24] This spurred a great deal of research on migration out of Central Asia. The consensus among researchers was that substantial migration would be unlikely because of its unpopularity among Central Asians as well as among other national groups, including Russians, in the USSR. The predictions proved to be well-founded, in part because of the unpopularity of outmigration, but also because the

migration wave never gained momentum for reasons discussed earlier. The option usually considered for dispensing the migration were: outmigration, the movement of rural dwellers to Central Asian towns and cities, and the movement of facilities to rural areas in Central Asia.

Some pilot outmigration programs have been conducted. Rural construction crews from Central Asia, for instance, have undertaken projects in the RSFSR Non-Black Earth zone, but these experiments have been limited. Efforts have been made to move some low-technology industrial and manufacturing enterprises to the rural areas of Central Asia. These efforts have also been limited. Most public policy dealing with migration in Central Asia focuses on efforts to "urbanize" by encouraging movement to medium-sized cities.

Educational opportunity and improved housing are two pull factors on which Central Asian policy makers have focused. In 1984, the USSR adopted a major educational reform. The reform concentrated on efforts to expand work-related training in order to encourage better work habits and attitudes among youth. In Central Asian circles, the reform was met with some approval because it provides greater incentives to draw the young people off the farms.[25] The basic push factor on the farm will continue to be agricultural mechanization, which will increase slowly but inevitably.

Within the specialist community in Central Asia, a lobby has developed to promote urbanizing policies.[26] It is interesting to note that members of this lobby provide strong support for policies that promote rural-to-urban migration, but are also strongly opposed to policies that promote outmigration programs. These writers argue against "differential population policies"--anti-natal and outmigration programs--on the basis of their suggested inconsistency with Leninist nationality principles.

Conclusion

This paper has presented evidence of reverse migration in Soviet Central Asia. The aversion to migration from village to city increased throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s. The reasons for the special features of Central Asian migration involve cultural, nationalist, and economic factors. But none of these factors alone, for reasons discussed above, provides a satisfactory explanation for the peculiar migration behavior in Central Asia.

The best explanation for reverse migration concerns the relationship between rural development and migration. This relationship involves two stages; the first stage inhibits migration, and the second one promotes it. In the first stage, during the 1960s through the early 1980s, agricultural mechanization did not release workers, the land under cultivation expanded, and off-farm employment increased. During the second, current phase, delayed migration is combining with higher female fertility in rural areas to increase the size of the potential migrant wave. Land and water resources are no longer available for further expansion. Rural infrastructural improvements and social services are in place. Young women in Central Asia, unlike those in other parts of the Islamic world, tend to value city life more highly than their male counterparts. Young women outnumber males in primary agricultural employment by 50 percent. Because of these factors, young women can be expected to lead the Central Asian migration that will occur in the next decade.

Notes

1. Victor Ivanovich Kozlov was one of the first Soviet demographers to discuss demographic trends in terms of ethnicity--a practice that has now become fashionable. See his *Nationsional'nosti SSR: Etnodemograficheskii obzor* (Moscow: Statistika, 1975).

2. See, for instance, Murray Feshbach, "The Soviet Union: Population Trends and Dilemmas," *Population Bulletin*, no. 37 (1982); "Trends in the Soviet Muslim Population: Demographic Aspects," in *The Soviet Economy in the 1980s: Problems and Prospects* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983).

3. The most influential exposition of the political and economic implications is in Helene Carrare d'Encausse, *Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt* (Newsweek Books, 1979).

4. Examples are Jeff Chin, *Manipulating Soviet Population Resources* (London: MacMillan, 1977); Helen Desfosses, *Soviet Population Policy: Conflicts and Constraints* (New York: Pergamon, 1981).

5. K. Bedrintsev and A. Kozlov, "Territorial'nye promyshlennye kompleksy Uzbekistana," *Kommunist Uzbekistana*, no. 12 (1968), pp. 26-31.

6. D. I. Ziuzin, "Prichiny nizkoi mobil'nosti korennogo naseleniia respublik Srednei Azii," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 1 (1983), p. 110.

7. The title of the resolution is "O dal'neishem ukreplenii trudovoi distsipliny i sokrashchenii tekuchesti kadrov v narodnom khoziaistve." For a discussion, see Kh. Umarov, "Ratsional'no ispol'zovat' trudovye resursy," *Kommunist Uzbekistana*, no. 9 (1985), pp. 12-22.

8. See *Partinaia zhizn'* (Tashkent), August 1979, p. 77.

9. E. Khodzhaev, "Srednee obrazovanie i rabochaia kvalifikatsiia," *Turkmenskoi SSR: Seriia obshchestvennykh nauk*, no. 3 (1983), pp. 11-15; I. P. Gurshumov, "Motivy potentsial'noi tekuchesti kadrov," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 1 (1984), pp. 76-78.

10. M. Kh. Kharakhanov, "Regional'nye problemy razvitiia narodonaseleniia na sovremennom etape," *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistana*, no. 9 (1983), p. 35.

11. See, for instance, Michael P. Todoro, *Internal Migration in Developing Countries* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1976).

12. E. S. Lee, "A Theory of Migration," *Demography*, no. 1 (1966), pp. 47-57.

13. Kh. Umarov, "Ratsional'no ispol'zovat' trudovye resursy," p. 20.

14. D. I. Ziuzin, "Prichiny nizkoi mobil'nosti," p. 111.

15. Nancy Lubin, *Labor and Nationality in Soviet Central Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

16. Georgii Shister, "Vazhnyi faktor rosta i sovershenstvovaniia struktury rabochego klassa Uzbekistana," *Kommunist Uzbekistana*, no. 2 (1983), p. 39.

17. Shister, "Vazhnyi faktor," p. 39.

18. Shister, "Vazhnyi faktor," p. 39.

19. Shister, "Vazhnyi faktor," p. 37.

20. Shister, "Vazhnyi faktor," p. 37.

21. For a discussion, see Richard Rhoda, "Rural Development and Urban Migration: Can We Keep Them Down on the Farm?" *International Migration Review* 17 (1984), pp. 34-68.

22. D. I. Ziuzin, "Prichiny nizkoi mobil'nosti," p. 110.

23. T. B. Musaeva and R. T. Khasanova, "K voprosu ratsional'nogo ispol'zovaniia trudovykh resursov molodezhi," *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane*, no. 10 (1977), p. 31.

24. See Grey Hodnet, "Technology and Social Change in Soviet Central Asia: The Politics of Cotton Growing," in Henry Morton and Rudolf Tokes, ed., *Soviet Politics and Society in the 1970s* (New York: Free Press, 1974), pp. 60-117.

25. See Gregory Gleason, "Educating for Underdevelopment: The Soviet Vocational Education System and its Central Asian Critics," *Central Asian Survey* (Spring 1985), pp. 39-61.

26. See, for instance, M. Kh. Kharakhanov, "Regional'nye problemy," pp. 31-37.