

Migration on the Ancient Silk Road and its Value——Take Three Different Forms of Migration as Examples

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Abstract: The ancient Silk Road promotes the communication between Chinese and Western civilizations as well as business exchanges. On the Silk Road, migration plays a significant role in cultural exchange as well as the spread of religion, science and technology. This article focuses on the phenomenon of migration on the ancient Silk Road and its importance from three dimensions: active migration, mixed migration and passive migration. The migration for frontier consolidation, the national migration of Hun as well as Prisoner-of-war migration after the defeat of the Battle of Talas will be respectively taken as examples of the three categories.

Introduction

Although Chinese and foreign scholars gave their different understandings and definitions to the Silk Road from various perspectives, they invariably pointed out the inherent essence and external characteristics of the ancient Silk Road. In general, the ancient Silk Road is a general term for the East and West roads that have connected Asia, most importantly China, and Europe for thousands of years. It is essentially a network of channels running between East and West. Branch and trunk roads in the network work together to build an entire East-West communication platform. The network was meant to serve business and commerce, but its value was far beyond commerce and trade. It also promoted cultural exchanges, religious dissemination, and population migration, having a huge impact upon the entire world. Today, Silk Road has evolved from a real platform to a symbolic icon.

Migration is a universal phenomenon in human society. Human history is actually a history of migration. For thousands of years, continuous migration has changed the outlook of human society and the entire world. In this process, there are active and passive migration, voluntary and forced migration, government-led migration, spontaneous migration, large-scale organized migration and sporadic unorganized migration. Compared with other communicative activities on the Silk Road, migration has permanent, continuous and all-round influence on the spread of culture, religion, art and technology.

Active Migration--the Process and Value of “Migration for Frontier Consolidation” Policy

As long as feudal dynasties can achieve administrative jurisdiction and military management in Western Regions, emperors resorted to the policy of “migration for frontier consolidation” as a strategy to managing the Western frontiers. In powerful feudal dynasties in Chinese history such as Han, Tang, Yuan, and Qing dynasties, this migration policy was put forward and promoted in order to consolidate and develop the Western Regions. In Han Dynasty, people were migrated to the west so as to solve the supply problem, including military supplies and the supply to the envoy from surrounding states. The number of migrants to the western border of the Han dynasty was huge, amounting to tens of thousands in total. Most of the migrants are soldiers guarding the border, and there are also a small number of prisoners exiled to the border. During the Tang dynasty, the migration policy remains to be efficient in giving supply as in the Han Dynasty. Moreover, as the strategic significance of the Western

Regions to the northwestern region of the Tang Dynasty and even to the stability of the entire regime has been highlighted, common people was migrated to the border (which is called Mintun Policy) in order to expand and strengthen the management of the Western Regions in the middle and late Tang Dynasty. As being explained, civilians are a third type of people in wave of migration. In the Yuan dynasty, the ruling group had a deeper understanding of the value of migration on frontier consolidation. Therefore, apart from providing military supply and strategic depth, people were migrated to exploit and develop the western region. In addition to land cultivation, the court also recruited technicians and artisans in order to set up weaving bureaus, which promoted the handicraft industry in the border area. In Qing dynasty, rulers elevated the importance of the Western Regions in the overall strategic layout. Both the scale of cultivated land and the number of households in Qing Dynasty has reached the peak ever since the migration policy was adopted in Han Dynasty. Moreover, there was also a fourth form of land cultivation: Shangtun, that is, merchants reclaiming large amounts of land and hired workers to cultivate them.

Through policy of migration for frontier consolidation, the central government of the feudal dynasties realized the maintenance and strengthening of military power in Western Regions, directly accelerated the process of the unification of the Western Regions and guaranteed social stability in Western Regions. This practice of migration promoted technical and cultural exchanges between the Mainland and Western Regions and boosted the economic and social development of Western Regions. Not only did it strengthen the protection of border area but highlighted the development and operation of the Western Regions, which ultimately enhanced the centralization of authority. Through the migration policy, immigrant groups and local people have achieved full interaction, which contributed to the economic and social development of the frontiers. To upgrade the agricultural technology in the frontier areas, the handicraft technology in the hinterland was introduced to the frontier, which brought cultural interaction between multi-ethnic cultures in the frontier and Han civilization.

Passive Migration--the Process and Value of Prisoner-of-war Migration

Prisoners captured in defeat were relocated to the sphere of influence of the victorious country, which is typical form of passive immigration. As the soldiers are denied freedom, this form of immigration is compulsory. In 751 AD, there was a military engagement between the Abbasid Caliphate and the Chinese Tang dynasty, which was historically known as the Battle of Talas (or Battle of Artlakh). The war ended with the defeat of Tang and a large number of Tang soldiers were captured and placed in Samarkand. Among these prisoners, there were Chinese artisans, especially paper craftsmen. It followed that the Arabs founded the first paper mill outside of China in Samarkand. The technology was taught by Chinese craftsmen and the equipment was also Chinese. Papermaking, one of China's four great inventions, began to spread around the world.

China's papermaking, a cutting-edge technology at that time, was initially exported to the Arab world and then to Europe through this passive form of immigration, and made a significant contribution to cultural communication and technological progress of all mankind. The price of materials used for disseminating ideas dropped precipitously, which has immensely promoted the spread of human ideological fruit and enlightened the general public.

Mixed Form of Migration--the Process and Value of National Migration

The mixed form of migration has both external pressure and internal motivation. Historically, emigration of the northern Huns and immigration of southern Huns is a very typical example of the mix form of migration. Therefore, this section will deal with the value of the national migration of the Hun.

In the 3rd century BC, the Huns (Xiongnu) as a well-known ancient nomadic people flourished in the vast northern prairie. The development and migration of this nomadic nation have led to the national migration in Eurasia for centuries and has profoundly changed the pattern of political power and the trend of western civilization. During the period of Emperor Hanwu of Hun Dynasty, a

large-scale military counterattack against the Huns was launched, which severely damaged the Hun people. As a consequence, the Hun nation was gradually divided into two parts: the southern Hun and the northern Hun. The former became a part of the Han Dynasty and its people assimilated into the Han community. On the contrary, Northern Hun's migration for over 300 years has triggered a major national migration in European history. The centuries-old westward movement of the northern Hun partly resulted from incessant blows from the Han and Xianbei, which prompted it to move westward to Central Asia and Europe. Meanwhile, the mobile characteristic rooted in nomadic people drove them to wage war as well as to plunder slaves and wealth. The continuous westward migration of the northern Hun accelerated the collapse of the entire Roman Empire, prompting the migration of the Germans, Goths, Gauls, and Slavs, and turning the entire Western world upside down.

For one thing, during Hun's inland migration, they began to trade with the Han, learning farming techniques and Han culture, promoting the social and cultural development as well as the living standard of the Huns. The migration of the Hun is a typical example of ancient ethnic minorities' national migration in China. National migration connects various nationalities and promotes national integration. Meanwhile, it also boosts the ethnic, cultural, economic, and political localization of ethnic groups. For another, the migration of northern Hun has drawn many nomadic peoples and tribes in the Eurasian continent into the wave of ethnic migration. In destroying the ancient Roman Empire, the migration of northern Huns has accelerated the transition of Europe from slavery to feudalism, paving the way for the progress of Western European civilization and society. Moreover, it has radically changed the racial, cultural and political system, the historical pattern of farming civilization and nomadic civilization in Europe, and transformed historical pattern of civilizations in Asia and Europe. The process of national migration has promoted cultural exchanges between the East and the West, and hastened national integration. Western and eastern worlds have closely interconnected and contributed to the overall evolution of human civilization.

Conclusion

As Chinese writer Lu Xun said, "Originally there is no path in this world, but when there are those who have walked upon it, then a path came into being". The ancient Silk Road is such a road that is created by the inherent need of Chinese and Western communication. The demand promoted officials and folks to walk on it, and then the Silk Road came into being. Silk Road is not one path but consists of numerous paths, either thick or thin, which interwove with each other to form a network of channels, maintaining the communication between the East and the West for thousands of years. Silk Road was originally made for the convenience of trade and commerce. With the high frequency of economic and trade exchanges, however, various spiritual and ideological exchanges followed. In this process, the practice of migration played an enormous role. As a group of people or even an ethnic group moved and settled in another place for a long time, they will definitely carry with them their ways of production, lifestyle, religion, culture and art. The dramatic change brought about by migration is unparalleled.

There are various forms of migration on the ancient Silk Road. This article attempts to categorize them from decision-making level and chooses the practice of migration for frontier consolidation policy, prisoner-of-war migration as well as national migration that ran throughout the ancient Western Region history as typical examples. Undoubtedly, since the history of the ancient Silk Road can trace back to thousands of years ago, this paper has deficiencies in discussing the migration on the Silk Road and its value. Welcome and thanks for criticism.

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