

The Evolution and Recession of the “Zhejiang Village” in Beijing

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Abstract: This paper investigates the evolution of Zhejiang village in Beijing, highlighting its rise, transformation, and decline. The paper recollects the origin of the village, organizes and explains the aggregate development of the region since the year 1984. The paper further discusses the prime of the Zhejiang village, and the eventual fall in the mid 2010s. This paper analyzes the reason of the fall from three perspective, explaining the effect of government projects and policies, the advancement of e-commercial and automation of production, and the social dilemmas and challenges faced by its members due to the change in environment from migration. Ultimately, this paper emphasizes the need for inclusive policy-making that supports the sustainable development and integration of migrant communities, drawing valuable lessons from the experience of Zhejiang village.

Keywords: Migration, Zhejiang village, Government policy, social identity, Collective society.

1. Introduction

Beijing, the capital city of China, is one of the biggest cities in the world, occupying over 16410 square kilometers of land, and containing a population of over 21 million of permanent residents in the region. Since the late of the 20st century, the migrant population started to show significant growth, forming up and occupying a large proportion of the city's permanent residents. The “Statistical Communiqué on Beijing's National Economic and Social Development in 2022” showed that until the end of the year 2022, the total permanent residents in Beijing was 21.843 million people, in which the permanent migration population was recorded to be 8.251 million people, standing a proportion of 37.8% of the total permanent population. [1] It is clear, that the migrants in Beijing have already formed an indivisible part in both population and in the economy.

Inside the complex Beijing migration population, there was one group stood out, the migrant group of Zhejiang province, more specifically, migrants from the city of Wenzhou. The Zhejiang migrants formed a collective aggregation group developed starting from the Dahong meng area in Fengtai region of Beijing. [2] In its prime, there was in total, over 110 thousand of Zhejiang migrants living in the same region, constructed a collective economic group and society within. [3] With records, the Zhejiang village first started its development during the mid 1980s, thrived in the 1990s, and started its falling in the early 21st century. Till today, the Zhejiang village have. A comparatively much smaller size as it were in the last century. The significant magnitude and deep effect in local economy of Zhejiang village made it a valuable subject to be researched, but past studies more mainly discuss

the social impact but lack in the research of economical reasoning and explanation, and the newly development was hardly mentioned in all studies, leaving an essential blank in the research of this classic example of community unification.

This paper will discuss the origins of the collective group of Zhejiang village, evaluate how it developed, and explain the reason of the fall of Zhejiang village and its related industries. To illustrate mentioned content, this paper will be divided into 4 parts, in the second part of this paper, the history of Zhejiang village will be showed based on classic past literature, the origin and early-stage development, with the prime stage of the region will be explained and discussed. In the third part of the paper, researcher will focus on the reason of the fall of the region focusing on government policy, social environment and technological development factors, discuss deeply on how these factors influenced the tearing of the region and how the community unification failed to be preserved under such developed society background. In the end, a conclusion will be made based on all topics given in the paper.

2. The Origin of Zhejiang Village

The origin of the Zhejiang village was a historical question that could be traced back to the early 1980s where China just enters the first period of the reform and opening, a policy decision by the Chinese government that states the opening of the previous planned economy towards market economy. In such time, the number of small private businesses rapidly grown to an enormous amount.

It is claimed by the paper from the department of sociology institute of sociology and anthropology of Peking University, that the collective social group was built in the year 1984. It further claims that the collective group was formed due to the loose policy of migrant farmers and businesses in the city of Wenzhou in Zhejiang province, [3] and the reform and transformation of small state-owned commercial enterprise in Beijing, these lead to a large quantity of individual businesses to migrate from the region towards larger cities and regions with the pursuit of profit under the circumstance of privatization of state-owned property. [4] It was first estimated that in the year 1985, there was a total of over 10 thousand Zhejiang migrants living in the south region of Beijing, this is the base of the Zhejiang village, and the starting point of its development. [5]

2.1. Rapid Development of Zhejiang village

The thrive of the Zhejiang migrants in the Dahong men region starts from the late 1980s to the 1990s. Although the Zhejiang village region went through a series of challenges and government governance due to its lack of control and the increase in crime rate and the problematic environmental disorder, the group remains one of the largest migrant groups in Beijing. [6] By the beginning of 1990s, the Chinese government started the reform of socialist market economy system, the opening of business opportunity and the strong support toward private own businesses in the nation triggers the growth of the whole economy, [7] which also triggered the expand of scale development of Zhejiang gathering in the city.

In 1994, the opening of the Jingwen building marks the beginning of the systematic industrial development of the Zhejiang Wenzhou people in the region. The building provided over 10 thousand shop façade and office block to resident and businesses, the building and opening of Dahongmen Clothing Trade Center, Beijing New Century Clothing Trade Center and various large scale trading center and wholesale market follows. In total, over 20 large scale market built up a trading area for 2 kilometer long. [3] In the early 21st century, the government of Changping county decided to use the region of Dahongmen as the basement of a design of global clothing market. The plan was to gather the resources and businesses in the region for the built of Clothing Business Center (CBC), [8] this corporation of market and resources leads to the prime of the private own Zhejiang businesses in

Beijing. In the mid 2000, data recorded an average of 1,600 tons of daily cargo throughput, and an annual transaction of 30 billion yuan in total, accounting 54.5% of the total transaction in the whole Beijing city. [3] The united corporation of resources, material, production, delivery, domestic trade and export stated the importance of the region, making it one of the economic pillars in the city.

3. Government policy

The most significant change of the Zhejiang village was due to the “Reduction of non-core functions of the capital city” of Beijing that was first ordered in 2012, just 7 years after the opening of the CBC project. [9] In which in total of over 3000 small medium size businesses was reallocated to marginal regions and surrounding areas of Beijing with the distance of at least 100 kilometers from the original site, [10] with the majority being Zhejiang migrant’s businesses. [11] At the same time, the continuous and harder control and reform of old living areas and massive living blocks and excessive migrant workforce from the Beijing government and since the 2000s leads to more reduction of low-cost houses on the market and reasons to reallocate or migrate again. [2] With the accompany of the newly development projects and targets of further reduction of non-necessary function of Beijing, and the reduction of job opportunities and more, the series of government actions, policies and projects leads to a reduction in both the population, and businesses originally from the Zhejiang village.

3.1. The development of E-shopping and technology

The base of the economy and income of the Zhejiang village mainly focused on the industry of cloth and fabric, with more than 90% of the members working in this industry in both the production and selling section. [12] But with the rapid development of E-shopping, the need of off-line shopping plums down, the large quantities of off-line shops are simply not needed, all communication and order can be made online with computer and phones. At the same time, the development and increase in automation in the production of cloths and fabric also leads to the decrease in demand of production labor. The industry was never before, causing the majority of the member to face the fact of structural unemployment, an unemployment type due to the change in industrial need and technological development.

3.2. Change in social needs and identity

As the paper have mentioned, the Zhejiang village was built and developed by the migrants from the Wenzhou area. Within, it can be further claims that most of the migrants are from the Yueqing region or the Yongjia county, two specific regions in the administration area of the Wenzhou city. It is clear, that this collective migration gathering was based on a highly private cultural group with high similarity in language, cultural and family background. Due to the listed similarity and the identity of Yueqing people, in the early days of the development of Zhejiang village, people help each other out by giving direct financial support and by giving business opportunities.

But as the region develops, and larger business complex and small mid businesses growths, the social trend changed, the norm of “fellow help fellow” was challenged with the consistent growth of profit and increasing market competition. At the same time, the long term stays in Beijing also affect one mentally, it can be explained with the psychological theory of acculturation, where one changes one’s identity due to the change in the environment after migration. More specifically, the effect of assimilation claims that one might abandons their original culture and adopts the cultural behaviors and values of their new culture. [13] With the assimilation of migrants was done, the members of the group will leave their old cultural group of Wenzhou and pursuit furthermore based on their achievements in Beijing.

Furthermore, the collapse of the village can be explained with the basic knowledge in the social identity theory, in which it claims a person have both personal identity and social identities. In this case, the main social identity of the group was the Wenzhou background. While the people identify themselves into their in-group of Wenzhou, or more specifically Yueqing people, they hold a natural separation in identity to whom are not a part of their group, their out-group. [12] Although the group were working and living in Beijing, they still hold a natural boundary between them and the locals in the region. This marks the definite fall of the village at the start, as not all members can adopt the living style and the corporation and interaction of their out-groups. The support and opportunity offered by them in group cannot fed all members of the group, thus, those who cannot adapt, can only leave.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the trajectory of the Zhejiang village in Beijing illustrated the dynamic nature of migrant communities, demonstrating both their potential for economic success and the vulnerabilities they face in a rapidly developing environment.

The rise of Zhejiang village during the 80s and 90s of 20th century is a testament to the strong effect of entrepreneurial spirit of its migrants and the supportive policies of the Chinese government at that time. Also, the collective effort to establish a strong economic base showcases the power of community solidarity and cultural identity of the Zhejiang people in the region. The illustration of the ability to build an economic powerhouse from over 1400 kilometers away from their hometown by the Zhejiang, more specifically Wenzhou migrants, exemplifying how a unified community can seize opportunities in a transforming economy.

On the other hand, the decline of Zhejiang village from 2014 onwards highlights the profound effects of governmental regulations aimed at urban management. The relocation of over 3000 small and medium-sized businesses to areas outside Beijing starkly illustrates the sometime unavoidable adverse impacts of urban developmental policies and projects on migrant populations. It emphasized the importance of considering the socio-economic fabric and the livelihoods of established communities in policy and development project making.

Furthermore, the technological advancements, particularly the advent of e-commerce and automation in production, have further complicated the sustainability of traditional industries that Zhejiang village was heavily reliant on. As consumer behavior shifts from old fashion window shopping towards online shopping, the need for physical storefronts diminishes. Also, the reduction in demand for manual labor due to automation in cloth production also signifies a critical need for adaptability among its members. The community must face the fact of the severe structural unemployment risk and truth in the clothing industry that they rely heavily on.

At last, the evolution of social identity among Zhejiang migrants also sheds light on the complexities of cultural assimilation in urban settings, especially in a city as Beijing. As individuals pursue personal advancement in an increasingly competitive environment, the original bonds of community may weaken, leading to fragmentation of the whole community. The erosion of collective identity and support mechanisms within the Wenzhou community signifies a broader trend among migrant populations adapting to new socio-economic landscapes. With all set and done, the once tight-knit Wenzhou community based on shared cultural and regional identity faces pressures from both internal changes and external societal influences, leading them to a very slippery slope to collapse.

The rise and decline of Zhejiang village raises critical questions about how migrant communities can navigate and thrive amidst socio-economic changes. It is suggested by this paper that future research should explore strategies for fostering resilience and adaptability in migrant populations, addressing the essential balance between cultural preservation and the need for integration into

mainstream society. For this, policymakers, researchers, and community leaders must collaborate to develop frameworks that support the socio-economic and cultural stability of migrant communities amidst urban development and technological progress.

In the end, the story of Zhejiang village serves as a significant reflection of broader trends in migration, urbanization, and economic change in large cities such as Beijing, offering valuable lessons for policymakers, researchers, and community leaders committed to the understanding and supporting migrant populations in urban settings across the world, reminding and ensuring the sustained contribution and integration within the evolving urban landscape of all migrant groups in the near future.

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