

# Impact of Migration on Aging --A Case Study of Shihezi City, China

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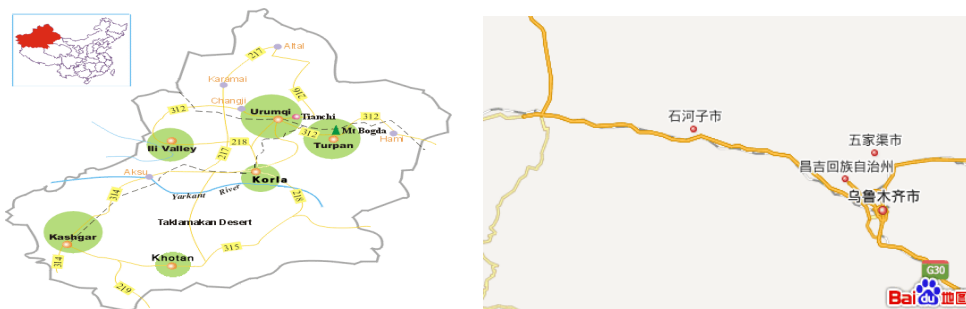
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## Abstract:

Migration and aging may influence each other in several ways. To the destination area of migration, the flow-in of young people may contribute to a young population structure, and an existing older population structure is balanced a little by the young migrants. A flow-in of older population (e.g. sun-belt region of the United States) may make a regular population structure of the destination area of migration older.

For the area of origin of the migration stream, the effect may be opposite, or the leaving of young people may make the local population structure older and old age care becomes a problem. Older people leaving will make the local population younger and more old-age care resources remains in the area of migration origin. Looking at the migrant population internationally and internally, however, we have to say that in most areas, the young population is generally the major force of migration. The migration of the young population, especially a larger volume of the young population, will have a serious impact on population structure at the origin and destination of migration, making the population structure of the origin older and the destination younger. If migration is not continuous and concentrates only during a certain period, then we will see the impact of the surge of young population in earlier time on population aging in the area many years later. The population of Shihezi city is one example of this special migration experience. This paper discusses the impact of 1950s migration in the region on aging today.

Shihezi is a region 150 kilometer west of Urumqi of Xinjiang, and has developed since 1774. Recent development of the region was closely related to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). The region was the center of XPCC and was selected, designed, and build by military soldiers on nothing as a frontier region (Xu, 2008). Shihezi City was officially recognized as a county city in 1974. The military background of the city reminds us of the in-flow and sudden concentration of young males

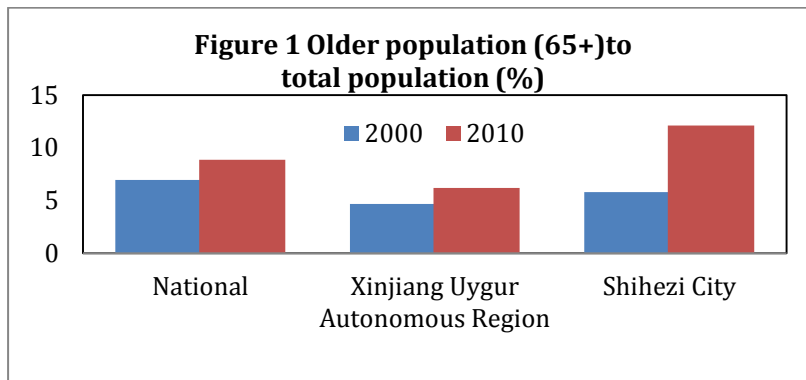


<http://www.chinatourmap.com/maps/xinjiang-map.php> for the general map;

In 1950, there were only 10,200 people in the region. In 1950s and 1960s, young people or builders of the region came from all over China. They were demobilized soldiers, supporting frontier young people, young urban intellectuals, graduates of

universities or vocational schools, and even released prisoners (Wang, ed. 1999). In 2009 the population of the city reached to about 635,000. These people are the accumulation of earlier migrants, their children and some newcomers. We can imagine that the population structure of Shihezi in 1950s was very special, without too many children and older people, but only young people who were “dropped” in from other parts of China and who were mostly males resulting in a gender imbalance. These characteristics of the early settled population have some impact on the aging issues of the city today.

First, the population did not have a normal age distribution. The sudden appearance of young people in the region made a sudden change in the aging society of the population later. Population aging in Shihezi is such a case (Figure 1). Percentage of older population of Shihezi was more than that of Xinjiang in 2000 and even much more in 2010. Degree of aging of Shihezi population was more severe than that of the national population in 2010. The structure of population of Shihezi in 2000 and 2010 was a (or partial) reflection of the early migration experience of the population.



Second, according to our research on old-age care in the city in 2013, we find that the experience of earlier migrants influenced the expectation of old-age care of the older people. For example, many people we interviewed did not expect their children to be the only resource of care for their old age. They emphasized more on financial needs and preparation of their old age. We suspect that these earlier migrants or their children had less experience in taking care of their parents while their parents were mostly taken cared by their siblings back home. Because they (the first generation) are far away from their natal home and living environment of early years of life, they were less influenced by traditional believes of old age care (e.g., “son(s) for old age”).

And third, related to the characteristics of early migrants of Shihezi (e.g. educated, idealistic, or even rebellious), they are more open to new ideas including new type of old-age care and considering social institutions for the elderly as a choice for their old age. During our interview, they made many positive suggestions on the development of the institutions and even mentioned the acceptance of euthanasia.

In general, Shihezi City of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in West China was built by young migrants in 1950s. Today, the first generation of the migrants is in their 70s and 80s and their children are also ready to be considered as the elderly. Because of the background of the earlier migrants, we find the population structure of Shihezi City is old. The older population there today is less likely to be influenced by traditional culture. They are more open to the new style of old-age care and children

are not considered as the only support for their old age. Thus, migration has a negative impact on population structure but a positive influence on attitude and practice of old-age care in Shihezi City, a special city in China.