

# ***The Impact of Urbanization on Rural Population Structure in China***

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**Abstract:** Urbanization has been speeding up in China since reform and opening up policies were promoted, which promotes the progression of rural economy, but furthermore provides a certain degree of negative impact on the rural population structure. On the basis of summarizing the concept of urbanization, this study provides a thorough analysis of China's recent rural population structure and urbanization trend, and finally concludes that the quickening pace of urbanization in China makes the rural population structure face some problems and challenges. This study also offers some thoughts and recommendations in this area. At the same time, when analyzing the trend and population structure, by comparing and summarizing the secondary data and relevant literature, this paper concludes that China's urbanization has caused problems such as talent shortage in rural areas, rural aging and gender structure imbalance of the left-behind population. To solve these problems, China should establish a sound and perfect social security system and encourage the integration of rural and urban development. China ought to also establish a sound pension system and optimize the population structure; in rural areas, the promotion of respect for women has been strengthened and relevant laws have been introduced to gradually eliminate gender discrimination. It is beneficial to promote the national economy, cultural development.

**Keywords:** Urbanization, Rural population structure, China

## **1. Introduction**

With China's economy growing quickly, urbanization has gradually become an important development trend in contemporary China. The Chinese government has been dedicated to constructing urbanization since the reform and opening up. With the promotion of urbanization, China's urban population is gradually increasing. At the same time, a substantial amount of rural people have relocated to urban areas. This phenomena affects the rural population structure significantly, at least in part. Under the process of urbanization, due to the continuous expansion of urban scale and the acceleration of the process of urbanization, some areas have faced problems such as shortage of rural talents, aging, and gender structure imbalance of the left-behind population. These problems have attracted extensive attention from the state and society, and also prompted scholars from every sphere of existence to conduct thorough investigation regarding how China's urbanization on rural populace structure. According to the analysis of secondary data and related literature, this article does a comparative examination of China's rural population structure and

urbanization trend, calculates the effect of China's urbanization on the population structure of rural areas, and then puts forward relevant solutions to some problems.

This paper studies the influence of China's urbanization on rural populace structure. On the other hand, it provides scientific solutions to the related problems caused by urbanization and scientific foundation on which the government can create pertinent regulations, helping the government to better solve the problems such as rural talent shortage, aging, and gender structure imbalance of the left-behind population. In addition, People from all walks of life are becoming more and more aware of the growing disparity and divide between urban and rural areas as China's economic and social development continues to progress.

## **2. Urbanization Analysis**

### **2.1. Concept of Urbanization and Urbanization Rate**

Urbanization is marked by the large-scale transfer migration of people from rural to urban places, accompanied by the transformation of industrial structure and spatial aggregation of economic activities driven by technological progress, the change of residents' lifestyle and values, and the substitution of urban landscape characterized by dense commercial, residential and production areas for rural landscape characterized by farmland and villages. Therefore, the concept of urbanization is generally believed to include urbanization of population, urbanization of economy (non-agricultural industry), urbanization of life style and urbanization of space (landscape and land). Industrial change, lifestyle change and landscape change are all centered on people's migration, which can be reflected through population urbanization to some extent [1]. One crucial metric for assessing a nation's or region's development is urbanization, which can reflect the economic development level and living standard of a country or region.

Global urbanization rose gradually between 1950 and 2014; throughout that time, the share of people living in cities climbed from 29.6% in 1950 to 54.0% in 2015. The growth curve of urbanization in China was considerably different, not just during Mao's reign but also following the country's reform and opening up, in contrast to the global trend of urbanization growing steadily. In 1949, just 57.6 million people, or one in ten, in China resided in an urban area [2].

Urbanization rate refers to the proportion of a country's urban population in the national population, which is usually stated as a percentage. One crucial metric for assessing the degree of economic progress is the rate of urbanization, city size and population concentration of a country or region. High urbanization rate has both advantages and disadvantages, which can promote the development of urban economy and increase the employment opportunities of the population, but also bring some problems, such as excessive pressure on environmental resources, employment competition pressure and the aging of rural population.

### **2.2. Analysis of Urbanization Trend**

From 2013 to 2022, the proportion of urban population in all regions of China and the whole country has gradually increased (see Table 1) from 54.49% to 65.22%. In other words, China's population is divided between urban and rural areas, with over half living in cities. The reason for the increase of urban population is that the speed of urban development is accelerating.

According to the interpretation of the bulletin of China's seventh national census of population. From the perspective of population distribution, the urbanization rate of China's permanent resident population has maintained a rapid growth trend after exceeding 50% in the past 10 years, and China will continue to carry out large-scale rural-urban migration. In 2020, the mainland's permanent urbanization rate is 63.9 percent of the population, up 14.2 percentage points from 49.7 percent in 2010, when the "six-person population" was introduced. The primary factor causing the urbanization

rate to transcend 50% and 60% consecutively is population movement in the seventh national population census in 2020 from 2010 to 2020, and Guangdong province continues to become the province with the biggest population. China is still in the growth opportunity period, when the rate of urbanization has the potential to increase at a rapid rate, according to the general law of urbanization in industrialized countries. Over the course of the 14th Five-Year Plan, the rate of urbanization is expected to surpass 65%, so there will be a basic pattern of great migration and flow between townships and cities [3].

Table 1: Proportion of urban population at the end of the year by region Unit: % [4]

Year Province	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Nation	54.49	55.75	57.33	58.84	60.24	61.50	62.71	63.89	64.72	65.22
Beijing	86.39	86.50	86.71	86.76	86.93	87.09	87.35	87.55	87.50	87.57
Tianjin	82.29	82.55	82.88	83.27	83.57	83.95	84.31	84.70	84.88	85.11
Hebei	48.02	49.36	51.67	53.87	55.74	57.33	58.77	60.07	61.14	61.65
Shanxi	52.88	54.30	55.87	57.27	58.59	59.85	61.29	62.53	63.42	63.96
Inner Mongolia	59.82	60.97	62.09	63.40	64.60	65.51	66.46	67.48	68.21	68.60
Liaoning	66.45	67.05	68.05	68.87	69.49	70.26	71.21	72.14	72.81	73.00
Jilin	55.74	56.81	57.64	58.75	59.71	60.85	61.63	62.64	63.36	63.72
Heilongjiang	58.04	59.22	60.47	61.09	61.90	63.46	64.62	65.61	65.69	66.21
Shanghai	89.60	89.30	88.53	89.00	89.10	89.13	89.22	89.30	89.30	89.33
Jiangsu	64.39	65.70	67.49	68.93	70.18	71.19	72.47	73.44	73.94	74.42
Zhejiang	63.94	64.96	66.32	67.72	68.91	70.02	71.58	72.17	72.66	73.38
Anhui	47.87	49.31	50.97	52.62	54.29	55.65	57.02	58.33	59.39	60.15
Fujian	60.80	61.99	63.22	64.39	65.78	66.98	67.87	68.75	69.70	70.11
Jiangxi	49.04	50.55	52.30	53.99	55.70	57.34	59.07	60.44	61.46	62.07
Shandong	53.46	54.77	56.97	59.13	60.79	61.46	61.86	63.05	63.94	64.54
Henan	43.60	45.05	47.02	48.78	50.56	52.24	54.01	55.43	56.45	57.07
Hubei	54.51	55.73	57.18	58.57	59.88	61.00	61.83	62.89	64.09	64.67
Hunan	47.63	48.98	50.79	52.70	54.62	56.09	57.45	58.76	59.71	60.31
Guangdong	68.09	68.62	69.51	70.15	70.74	71.81	72.65	74.15	74.63	74.79
Guangxi	45.11	46.54	47.99	49.24	50.59	51.82	52.98	54.20	55.08	55.65
Hainan	52.28	53.30	54.91	56.70	58.04	59.13	59.37	60.27	60.97	61.49
Chongqing	58.29	59.74	61.47	63.33	65.00	66.61	68.24	69.46	70.32	70.96
Sichuan	44.96	46.51	48.27	50.00	51.78	53.50	55.36	56.73	57.82	58.35
Guizhou	37.89	40.24	42.96	45.56	47.76	49.54	51.48	53.15	54.33	54.81
Yunnan	39.99	41.21	42.93	44.64	46.29	47.44	48.67	50.05	51.05	51.72
Xizang	23.93	26.23	28.87	31.57	33.38	33.80	34.51	35.73	36.61	37.39
Shanxi	51.57	53.01	54.74	56.39	58.07	59.65	61.28	62.66	63.63	64.02
Gansu	40.50	42.28	44.24	46.07	48.12	49.69	50.70	52.23	53.33	54.19
Qinghai	49.29	50.84	51.67	53.55	55.45	57.27	58.78	60.08	61.02	61.43
Ningxia	52.84	54.82	56.98	58.74	60.95	62.15	63.63	64.96	66.04	66.34
Xinjiang	44.94	46.79	48.78	50.42	51.90	54.01	55.51	56.53	57.26	57.89

China's industrialization and urbanization development has been accelerating since the reform and opening up, and the current urbanization rate has reached about 65.22%. The development of

urbanization has attracted a large number of rural labor to transfer to cities, which has resulted in significant alterations to the demographic composition of rural areas and the problem of rural populace shrinkage [5].

Zhou Zhouping summarized the characteristics of this phenomenon as many young and middle-aged laborers in remote areas flowing into cities, resulting in a decline in the rural population and young and middle-aged rural population, and most of the remaining rural residents are the elderly, women and children [6].

### 3. Rural Population Structure

#### 3.1. Basic Characteristics of Rural Population Structure

Since 1997, the number of rural deception in China has been decreasing year by year. Based on data from the National Bureau of Statistics (Table 2), China's rural population was estimated to be 491.04 million by the end of 2022, 7.31 million fewer compared to the prior year. The ratio of rural population has been decreasing since 1974. From 1974 to 2022, the proportion of rural population directly decreased by 48.06 percentage points, and the reduction in rural population was huge.

The transfer of rural labor force has accelerated. Urbanization is advancing rapidly. Sichuan Province, for example, had a rural population of 48.11 million in 2010. Accounting for 59.82% of the total population, the urban population was 32.31 million, and the urbanization rate was 40.18%. This is 13.49 percentage points higher than 26.69 percent in the 2000 census. The average annual increase was 1.35 percentage points. However, from 1990 to 2000, the urbanization rate of Sichuan increased from 21.29% to 26.69%, only increasing by 5.4 percentage points, with a 0.54 percentage point yearly rise on average. It shows that Sichuan has accomplished a tremendous deal in urban and rural growth within the last ten years. Labor force migration from rural to urban areas has accelerated, and the urbanization rate has been increasing, but there is still a certain gap compared with the national average level (49.68%) in the same period [7].

Table 2: Population and Composition Unit: ten thousand people [4]

Year	Total population	By gender				By urban and rural			
		Male		Female		Urban		Rural	
		Population	Proportion (%)	Population	Proportion (%)	Population	Proportion (%)	Population	Proportion (%)
2002	128453	66115	51.47	62338	48.53	50212	39.09	78241	60.91
2003	129227	66556	51.50	62671	48.50	52376	40.53	76851	59.47
2004	129988	66976	51.52	63012	48.48	54283	41.76	75705	58.24
2005	130756	67375	51.53	63381	48.47	56212	42.99	74544	57.01
2006	131448	67728	51.52	63720	48.48	58288	44.34	73160	55.66
2007	132129	68048	51.50	64081	48.50	60633	45.89	71496	54.11
2008	132802	68357	51.47	64445	48.53	62403	46.99	70399	53.01
2009	133450	68647	51.44	64803	48.56	64512	48.34	68938	51.66
2010	134091	68748	51.27	65343	48.73	66978	49.95	67113	50.05
2011	134916	69161	51.26	65755	48.74	69927	51.83	64989	48.17
2012	135922	69660	51.25	66262	48.75	72175	53.10	63747	46.90
2013	136726	70063	51.24	66663	48.76	74502	54.49	62224	45.51
2014	137646	70522	51.23	67124	48.77	76738	55.75	60908	44.25
2015	138326	70857	51.22	67469	48.78	79302	57.33	59024	42.67
2016	139232	71307	51.21	67925	48.79	81924	58.84	57308	41.16

Table 2: (continued).

2017	140011	71650	51.17	68361	48.83	84343	60.24	55668	39.76
2018	140541	71864	51.13	68677	48.87	86433	61.50	54108	38.50
2019	141008	72039	51.09	68969	48.91	88426	62.71	52582	37.29
2020	141212	72357	51.24	68855	48.76	90220	63.89	50992	36.11
2021	141260	72311	51.19	68949	48.81	91425	64.72	49835	35.28
2022	141175	72206	51.15	68969	48.85	92071	65.22	49104	34.78

The regional mobility of migrant workers is frequent, and the mobility within the province increases (Table 3). Among migrant workers out of the province, there were 95.1 million migrant workers floating in the province, a 2.6% or 2.42 million increase over the prior year, representing 55.3% of the province's migrant workers, up 0.6 percentage points from the year before, and since 2014, the percentage has been rising annually. Most recently arrived migrant laborers come from within the province, and the increase of migrant workers within the province accounts for 96.4% of the rise in migrant labor. 82.5% of migrant laborers moved to the eastern region, an increase of 0.3 percentage points over the prior year; Migrant workers in central China accounted for 38.7 percent, 0.7 percentage points higher than the previous year; Migrant workers in the western region accounted for 49%, 1.2 percentage points more than the previous year; The floating migrant workers in northeast China account for 76.4%, 0.7 percentage points lower than last year [8].

Table 3: Regional distribution and composition of migrant workers in 2017 Unit: ten thousand people, % [8]

	Total number of migrant workers			Constitution		
	Migrant workers			Migrant workers		
		Cross provincial mobility	Flow within the province		Cross provincial mobility	Flow within the province
Total	17185	7675	9510	100.0	44.7	55.3
East	4714	826	3888	100.0	17.5	82.5
Midland	6392	3918	2474	100.0	61.3	38.7
West	5470	2787	2683	100.0	51.0	49.0
North East	609	144	465	100.0	23.6	76.4

According to Table 4, among migrant workers, 1% have no schooling, 13% have elementary school education, 10.3% have completed junior college or higher, 17.1% have completed senior high school, and 58.6% have completed junior high school. Over the previous year, there was a 0.9 percentage point increase in the percentage of migrant workers having a college degree or higher. Among those who migrate for work, those with college education or above accounted for 13.5%, greater by 1.6% points than before; Among migratory laborers from the area, those with college education or above account for 7.4 percent, up 0.3 percentage points over the previous year [8].

Education and training for migrant workers have achieved remarkable results, and the educational level of the rural population has been constantly improved. Due in part to the growth of contemporary agriculture and the need for labor in the labor market, and with the goal of realizing the innovation of agricultural production mode, China's rural areas have carried out farmer education and training at multiple levels, channels and forms through the guidance of major training projects, in order to raise

farmers' educational attainment and cultivate a group of new agricultural workers with professional knowledge and skills.

Table 4: Composition of education level of rural migrant workers Unit:% [8]

	Total number of migrant workers		Migrant workers		Local migrant workers	
	The year 2016	The year 2017	The year 2016	The year 2017	The year 2016	The year 2017
Illiteracy	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.7	1.3	1.3
Primary school	13.2	13.0	10.0	9.7	16.2	16.0
Middle school	59.4	58.6	60.2	58.8	58.6	58.5
High school	17.0	17.1	17.2	17.3	16.8	16.8
Junior college or above	9.4	10.3	11.9	13.5	7.1	7.4

### 3.2. Age Structure of Rural Labor Force

The share of migrant workers over 50 has increased significantly, and the average age of migrant workers has been rising, due to changes population pattern in rural areas, the rise in rural workers' involvement in non-agricultural work across all age groups, particularly for individuals older than fifty, and the rise in migratory labor transfers within and across localities. In 2017, the mean age of migrant laborers was 39.7 years old, 0.7 years more than the year before. Regarding the age distribution, table 5 shows that migrant workers under 40 made up 52.4 percent, which is 1.5 percentage points less than the previous year; migrant workers over 50 made up 21.3 percent, which is 2.2 percentage points more than the previous year and has been rising since 2014. When it comes to their place of employment, migrant workers from the local area have an average age of 44.8 years, with 33.6% of them being 40 years of age or younger and 32.7% being over 50, an increase of 3 percentage points over the previous year. The mean age of migrant laborers is 34.3 years, with 72.3% of them being 40 years of age or younger and 9.2% being older than 50, one and a half percentage points higher than last year [8]. The rural labor force is aging, the urbanization process is accelerating, and the many job opportunities and generous treatment in cities attract most young people to flock to cities.

Table 5: Age composition of migrant workers Unit:% [8]

	The year 2013	The year 2014	The year 2015	The year 2016	The year 2017
16 to 20 years old	4.7	3.5	3.7	3.3	2.6
21 to 30 years old	30.8	30.2	29.2	28.6	27.3
31 to 40 years old	22.9	22.8	22.3	22.0	22.5
41 to 50 years old	26.4	26.4	26.9	27.0	26.3
50 years old or above	15.2	17.1	17.9	19.1	21.3

## 4. Analyze the Impact of Urbanization on Rural Population Structure

### 4.1. Positive Impact

With the development of the urbanization process, on the one hand, urbanization, is conducive to rural talents cultivation so as to promote rural economic development. Cities implement the policy of "one-to-one" assistance to rural areas to improve migrant workers' labor production skills and education level, so as to promote rural economic development. For example, senior technicians in cities carry out agricultural skills training activities for rural labor, and cities provide educational resources support for rural areas, including sending senior teachers or establishing adult universities to achieve the goal of improving the educational level of rural population. With the cultivation of talents, they will engage in various economic activities in the countryside, including agriculture, handicraft industry, service industry, etc., thus increasing the rural consumption demand. At the same time, the advanced business philosophy and technical means brought by these talents will also promote the growth of rural economy. In this case, the increase of rural talents will directly promote the consumption level of rural residents and further promote the development of rural economy [9].

On the other hand, the accelerated development of urbanization has reduced the pressure of surplus labor in rural areas. Due to the acceleration of urbanization, the urban economy is developing well, and the transportation, life and medical treatment are very convenient. A large number of enterprises and factories choose to set up here, and these enterprises need a large number of labor, thus attracting a large number of rural labor to the city. The city's convenient life, medical and educational conditions also make many rural people yearn for. Therefore, the alleviation of rural surplus labor force further encourages the development of rural and urban areas together.

### 4.2. Negative Impact

First of all, the development of urbanization has aggravated the problem of aging rural population. With the continuous progress of urbanization, a large number of young people from rural areas are flooding into cities in pursuit of more employment opportunities and lucrative salaries. While the number of young people is decreasing, the proportion of the population that is elderly is rising. Table 5 shows that particularly for individuals older than fifty, and the rise in migratory labor transfers within and across localities, while the proportion of young and strong workers between 21 and 30 years old declines annually, which indicates that most of the elderly in the rural population causes the problem of rural population aging. According to the research of relevant scholars, the proportion of elderly China's rural population is increasing year by year, which has brought many problems to social development.

Secondly, the development of urbanization leads to the shortage of talents in rural areas. First, due to the acceleration of urbanization, the educational resources in rural areas are insufficient and the educational level is low. Second, due to the development of urbanization, the flow of farmers is mainly non-agricultural employment flow. The urban economy is well developed, higher education institutions are relatively concentrated, and urban enterprises are mainly knowledge-based enterprises. After going out for higher education, most knowledge-based talents choose to stay in cities to meet their production and living needs. At the same time, the generous salary treatment of urban enterprises has also attracted a substantial amount of knowledge-based talents in the countryside. These factors result in less and less rural talents, and finally present the phenomenon of rural talent shortage.

Finally, developments in urbanization have severely thrown off the gender composition of the rural left-behind population. Based on the survey results, the semi-mobile migrant work mode is the preferred mode for most families with migrant workers. Due to factors such as family division of



labor and physical differences between male and female labor, this semi-mobility pattern is mainly reflected by the husband going out to work and the wife staying behind to do farming in the countryside. Rural locations have a higher percentage of women in the population who are left behind as a result. According to this survey (see Table 4), 87.2% of the migrant male laborers in the surveyed rural areas, among whom 62.5% are married male laborers; The left-behind female labor force accounts for 74.3 percent of the actual labor force in agriculture, of which married women account for 45.3 percent. This shows that the migrant labor is mainly married men, while the left-behind labor is mostly married women, resulting in an increase in the proportion of women in the rural left-behind population [10].

## 5. Conclusions

According to the research in this paper, there are two main positive effects of China's urbanization development on rural population structure. First, it is conducive to the cultivation of rural talents and thus stimulate the growth of the rural economy. With this acceleration of urbanization, the government has released a number of directives to help talents and carried out various talents training activities in rural areas. Second, it is conducive to alleviating the pressure of surplus rural labor force. The rapid growth of cities welcomed an influx of workers.

The promotion of urbanization process brings benefits to the rural population structure, but also has some negative effects. First, urbanization has caused the problem of aging rural population. The growing size of cities attracts an influx of young people. Second, urbanization leads to a shortage of talents in rural areas. Rural areas have insufficient educational resources, low levels of education and culture, relatively poor rural economic development, low wages, and a large number of technical talents outflow. Thirdly, the gender structure imbalance of the population in the countryside that falls behind is a result of urbanization. To put it briefly, China's urbanization has a profound impact on the rural population structure, and other impacts need to be deeply considered and studied by scholars.

In view of the problems brought by China's urbanization to the rural population structure, scholars have several suggestions. China government will establish a sound social security system and promote combined development of the rural and urban areas. To ensure that cope with and solve the age structure problem of "aging" in rural areas, it is necessary to establish a perfect pension system and constantly optimize the population structure. At the same time, the state should reasonably plan and orderly implement various social security systems and public infrastructure and other old-age service projects in order to better support the development of rural old-age care. Vigorously support rural industrial activities, provide more employment opportunities for rural labor, so as to change the status quo of a large number of labor outflow. Cities should also appropriately accept rural migrant workers, appropriately relax the household registration transfer policy, and turn part of the rural population into urban residents. This is the most direct, thorough and effective way to solve the problem of left-behind population in rural areas. China's rural areas should strengthen the propaganda and education of respecting women, supporting women's economy and spiritual independence, and providing corresponding employment guarantee for women. China will introduce relevant laws to ensure women's rights and opportunities. The government should encourage relevant enterprises to give women relevant employment benefits, such as nutrition subsidies during pregnancy and childbirth, maternity leave, nursing leave and so on. China will take all measures to gradually eliminate gender discrimination. As long as measures are found to address the issues, it is thought that China's urbanization will promote the coordinated development of urban and rural areas, improve the living standards of farmers, and encourage the country's economy to continue growing.

Using a thorough examination of how China's urbanization has affected the country's rural populace distribution, this paper is conducive to strengthening the feasibility of the Chinese government's decision-making in future development. This paper mainly studies the impact on the



rural population structure, and can also study the rural economy, politics, ideology and culture in the future research.

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