

Rural-urban China and the Changing Older Population

Authors: Mark W. Rosenberg,¹ Yang Cheng² and Jie Yu¹

1. Queen's University, Department of Geography and Planning, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, K7L 3N6
2. Beijing Normal University, School of Geography, Beijing, China

Since 1978 when the central government chose to implement economic reforms, momentous economic, social and geographic changes have affected the growth, trajectories and everyday lives of the older population in China. Particularly, the massive movement of working age people to the cities, the "One Child Policy" and enormous growth in personal wealth in China meant among other things that by 2010, for the first time in China's history, more people now live in urban than rural China; the fertility rate has now fallen below the replacement rate; and the older population is now growing at an unprecedented rate and will be approximately one quarter of the total population by 2050. How these and other changes since 1978 have affected the older population in rural and urban China are the foci of this chapter. Particular attention is paid to the evolving dual rural-urban health care, pension and social service systems for the older population and the challenges the future older population will face as values such as filial piety are questioned, children no longer live in the same cities as their aging parents, the number of children and relatives to look after older parents decline, life expectancy continues to increase, and the roles of the government, for profit and not-for-profit sectors change.