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The Chinese Muslim Internal Migrant Population Reasons for Urban Migration and Historical Investigation

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Abstract

The majority of Uyghur Muslim internal migrant workers and business people migrating to mainland cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Wuhan originate from traditional Uyghur settlements like Kashgar, Hotan, Aksu, Ili, and Turpan. Most Internal migrant come from rural areas in southern Uyghur Autonomous Regions, a trend influenced by the area's resource distribution, industrial structure, and labor dynamics. the papers research, the reasons why Muslims go out and the channels through which they enter the city, Historical Investigation, the current situation of the internal migrant Muslim population and other basic issues related to the Uyghur Muslim internal migrant population in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Wuhan are studied.

Keywords: Chinese, Muslim, internal migrant population, reasons, history

1. Source areas of the Chinese Muslim Internal Migrant Population Geographical Characteristics of the Source Area

The Uyghur Autonomous Region[1] has a rich history. In 1884, during the tenth year of the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty, the Qing government officially established a province within Uyghur territory, renaming the Western Regions as "Xinjiang," meaning "new frontier" or "returning to old land." On October 1, 1955, the Uyghur Autonomous Region

[1] Simply "the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region"

was formally established.

The region is home to 47 ethnic groups, 13 of which have long-standing ties to the area. By the end of 2022, the permanent population of the autonomous region was 25.87 million. Geographically, the Uyghur Autonomous Region is characterized by "three mountains sandwiched between two basins": the Kunlun Mountains to the south, the Tianshan Mountains (Bogda Mountains) running through the middle, and the Altai Mountains to the north. These geographical features divide the region into two parts: northern and southern Uyghur.

The southern region, enclosed by mountains and dominated by the Taklimakan Desert—the largest shifting desert in the world—has a dry climate and less water vapor due to limited atmospheric moisture. In contrast, the northern region benefits from Siberian winds carrying moisture, resulting in greater rain fall and earlier economic development. Consequently, the northern region is economically more advanced than the south.

The Uyghur Autonomous Region is located in the heart of the Eurasian continent, with a land border stretching over 5,600 kilometers. It shares borders with eight countries: Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Mongolia, India, and Afghanistan. Historically, the region was a crucial passage of the ancient Silk Road and an essential route for the second Eurasian land bridge, underscoring its strategic importance.

The Uyghur Autonomous Region's population is predominantly Uyghur, concentrated in areas like Hotan, Kashgar, and Aksu. Islam is the most widely practiced religion, encompassing 10 ethnic groups, including Uyghur, Kazakh, Hui, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Tatar, Uzbek, Dongxiang, Salar, and Baoan. Followers of Islam account for 58.3% of the region's total population.

1.1 Natural Conditions in the Uyghur Autonomous Region

According to the Announcement of the Seventh Chinese Population Census of the Uyghur Autonomous Region (No. 5) (2021), 14,613,622 people (56.53%) reside in urban areas, while 11,238,723 people (43.47%) live in rural areas. The total internal migrant population is 8,051,404, comprising 3,390,712 individuals from across provinces and 4,660,692 from within the province. However, these figures are not entirely reliable, and it is estimated that 70–80% of the Uyghur population resides in rural areas.

Low economic development in many regions has exacerbated poverty and increased surplus rural labor. Most farmers rely heavily on agriculture and animal husbandry as their primary sources of income, with few alternative revenue streams. This dependence on the primary industry leaves rural populations vulnerable to income instability caused by environmental changes or natural disasters. The lack of diversification in the industrial structure of rural Uyghur areas is a key factor in this economic fragility.

The internal migrant population in the Uyghur Autonomous Region consists of two main groups:

1. Local Migrant Workers: These are surplus laborers from agricultural and pastoral areas in

northern and southern Uyghur Autonomous Regions who migrate to cities in search of employment.

2. Migrant Workers from Mainland China: These workers come to cities within the region to fill labor shortages caused by the high population density of Uyghurs.

Despite their significant contributions to urban development, internal migrant workers often face cultural and social marginalization. Economically and socially, they are essential builders in rapidly growing cities. However, culturally, they are perceived as "inferior," a bias reflected in their lack of rights to labor protections and healthcare. This underscores their disadvantaged position in China's industrialization and urbanization processes.

2. Reasons for Uyghur Muslim Internal Migrant Population

Based on my investigation, the primary reasons for the migration of the Uyghur internal migrant population are as follows:

2.1 The Push of the Uyghur Autonomous Region's Natural and Geographical Environment

The majority of Uyghur Muslims migrating to cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Wuhan originate from impoverished areas in southern Uyghur. The region's challenging human and natural environment severely restricts opportunities for survival and development. Poverty alleviation is the primary driver behind their migration to mainland cities, with this motivation accounting for most of the Uyghur population moving to urban areas. As one interviewee explained:

> Q: What is the reason why you are now far away from your loved ones, children, and relatives, giving up the opportunity to live with your family and coming to the mainland?
>
> Answer: In short, it's for the sake of money. We are all farmers, and their lives are not easy now, with no income opportunities. Having children and elderly parents at home, we need to take care of them. My family has several acres of land to grow wheat, and I spend a lot of money on buying wheat seeds, water bills, and fertilizers. However, due to water shortage, the wheat harvest is not good, and expenses greatly exceed income. The food is not even enough for oneself to eat. I really had no other way to come out and work. It's difficult to earn a household registration by farming in my hometown. Our area is short of water, and if the situation in my hometown were better, I wouldn't have come here. Life is forcing me to come.

The majority of Uyghur Muslims migrate to mainland cities for economic reasons, a motivation similar to that of many Han migrant workers moving from rural areas to urban centers. However, the economic conditions in the Uyghur Autonomous Region are significantly less developed than in mainland China, making Uyghur Muslims particularly driven to escape poverty by seeking livelihoods in cities.

2.2 Limited Channels for the Local Transfer of Surplus Rural Labor

As of the end of 2023, the Uyghur Autonomous Region has tens of thousands of surplus agricultural laborers, with ethnic minorities constituting over half. In southern Uyghur areas,

including Kashgar, Hotan, and Aksu, the situation is particularly dire: tens of thousands of unemployed ethnic college graduates remain concentrated in southern Uyghur prefectures, while hundreds of thousands of urban residents and millions of surplus rural laborers seek employment or transfer opportunities.

However, local avenues for transferring surplus rural labor are severely constrained. The underdeveloped secondary and tertiary industries in the southern Uyghur Autonomous Region fail to generate sufficient employment opportunities. Since the reform and opening-up period, non-agricultural industries in southern Uyghur have experienced limited growth. Many state-owned and collective enterprises have shut down, while private enterprises have shown minimal expansion, further reducing their capacity to absorb surplus rural labor.

By the mid to late 1990s, the collapse of local industries, such as textile and silk mills, exacerbated the region's employment crisis. These conditions have made it increasingly difficult to provide jobs for the growing number of unemployed rural workers. As one interviewee noted:

> Q: Is it difficult to find a job in your hometown?
>
> A: It's already great for young people like us who are young and have no education to find opportunities for self-reliance. Every year, a large number of college graduates come home without a job, and we cannot have formal employment opportunities. Many young people in my hometown who are several years older than me have left home to come to the mainland. I heard from them that there are many opportunities to make money in the mainland, and I also came with them. It feels quite good. There are indeed many free opportunities to make money when coming to the mainland. Han people like to eat lamb skewers, and we can also earn some money.
>
> Q: What is the reason why you didn't go to school? Isn't tuition free in rural countries?
>
> A: Tuition fees have been waived, but now in our hometown, there are many college graduates who spend a lot of money on college, but after graduation, they cannot find a job. Therefore, many people in my family would rather drop out their children from elementary school and junior high school, and let them learn some handicrafts. I am the same, I did not continue my studies after entering junior high school.
>
> B said: I am the same.

For many, there is virtually no work or income available in their hometowns for nearly six months of the year. Consequently, migrating to cities has become a primary means for rural laborers to find employment and earn a livelihood.

2.3 Slow Income Growth and Widening Income Gap

In recent years, income growth for farmers in the southern Uyghur Autonomous Region has stagnated, further widening the income disparity with mainland cities. Rural laborers face opportunity cost considerations when deciding whether to migrate. If the costs of migration outweigh the benefits, or if staying in their hometown yields comparable income, they may

opt to remain. However, for many, staying in their hometown during the six-month period offers little to no profit, making migration the only viable option.

The income earned by migrant farmers and workers significantly exceeds the per capita net income of those who remain in rural areas. As one interviewee explained:

> Q: What is your monthly economic income now?[2]
>
> A: The maximum is around 1000 yuan, and it can be said that there was no economic income before.
>
> B said: My brother hires around 20 people, and their salaries are as low as 800 yuan, up to 1000 yuan at most. I have 1000 yuan, and I used to have no income at home.

I recorded interviews with Uyghur youths selling raisins on the streets of Nanjing. Raisins purchased from wholesalers for over ten yuan per kilogram are sold at a markup of 2–3 yuan per kilogram, yielding a profit of the same amount per kilogram. After covering daily expenses, successful sellers can earn 2,000–3,000 yuan per month. Over five to six months, they can return home with several thousand yuan in cash. For Uyghur farmers in southern Uyghur, where annual per capita net income is only a few thousand yuan, this additional income underscores the city's powerful economic pull-on rural laborers.

2.4 Dissatisfaction with Local Government Behavior

An important reason for leaving farming to seek work elsewhere is dissatisfaction with local governance. During interviews, participants cited limited arable land, water shortages, and a lack of employment opportunities as key factors for migrating. However, they also highlighted grievances such as corruption among rural cadres, arbitrary fees, fines, and unfair allocation of resources. Many expressed confusion and frustration over local policies that differ significantly from those in mainland regions, further motivating their decision to abandon farming and mi grate to cities.

> C said: (dissatisfaction with the behavior of the Uyghur local government), the Uyghur local government has various un fair charges in Uyghur rural areas, regardless of whether farmers have money in their hands. Rural officials charge fees, and when farmers have no money, they force their cattle, sheep, and livestock to be taken away by government officials. There are many corrupt incidents in Uyghur rural areas.

I interviewed a Uyghur youth who had resigned from his position as a rural primary school teacher to work in Beijing. He explained that his salary was low, often delayed, and frequently deducted for activities such as road construction and celebrations. Farmers faced even harsher conditions. Although the central government announced the removal of rural taxes, local officials continued to impose arbitrary fees, and farmers were burdened with "voluntary" labor demands. Corruption within local government departments has negatively impacted not only farmers but also individuals working in schools and other institutions. This widespread dissatisfaction with local governance has been a significant factor driving people

[2] According to my understanding of the survey data from 2007, the increase in income has not been high so far.

to abandon farming and seek opportunities elsewhere.

2.5 Personal Reasons

Some individuals leave their hometowns to pursue better development opportunities, even when they have relatively stable or well-regarded jobs locally. They often make the difficult decision to give up these positions to venture into unfamiliar cities. For example, E, who worked in the Shanghai office, shared their experience during interviews:

> E works as an office translator. Born in Xinjiang to a Han mother and a Uyghur father, E's mother moved to Urumqi during the Cultural Revolution to marry his father. Originally from Shanghai, E's maternal family held prominent social positions and were eager to bring her back to Shanghai. Eventually, the family relocated to Shanghai and purchased a home there.
>
> E moved to Shanghai in his teens and is now in his thirties. He is married to a Uyghur restaurant owner, and together they have purchased several properties in Shanghai, establishing themselves as residents of the city.

The proportion of Uyghur internal migrant workers who migrate for reasons other than economic necessity is relatively low. This group often has higher levels of education and seeks opportunities in big cities out of personal preference. For instance, during my time at Nanjing University, EK, who worked in the university's ethnic kitchens, shared his story. Despite having a stable job and a good income in the Uyghur Autonomous Region, EK chose to leave and work in Nanjing simply because he enjoyed living in the main land.

It is important to note that the motivations for migration are not static. For some, the initial goal of alleviating poverty evolves over time. Once their basic needs are met, these individuals may seek better development opportunities or learn new skills to improve their livelihoods.

For example, DB in Beijing, proficient in several languages, works at a company and has a solid educational and cultural background. Although DB had opportunities for development in her hometown, she chose to stay in Beijing to provide a better educational environment for her children. However, cases like DB's are rare among Uyghur internal migrant workers in Beijing, representing a small proportion of the overall population.

3. Channels for Uyghur Muslims to Internal migrant to Cities

Uyghur Muslims migrate to mainland cities through the following channels:

1.Voluntary Migration: Individuals or families voluntarily move to other provinces or cities in search of better living conditions, education, and employment opportunities. Migration procedures are typically handled independently or through relevant departments.

2. Learning or Work Arrangements: Opportunities such as university enrollment or job placements allow individuals to relocate to universities, colleges, enterprises, or institutions in mainland China.

3. Government-Organized Dispatch: Local government departments, after conducting research, organize and dis patch workers. Labor service companies also recruit and facilitate labor migration, providing employment opportunities for various ethnic groups. These efforts often aim to support mainland economic development and labor export initiatives.

While the Uyghur Autonomous Region has implemented labor export policies, their effectiveness remains limited. Most Uyghur Muslims migrate to cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Wuhan through personal networks, such as friends, relatives, or fellow villagers acting as intermediaries. As one interviewee ex planed:

> B said: I have been in mainland China for three years now. The owner who sells lamb skewers is my brother, and we came to mainland together. I am currently in charge of a lamb skewer shop.
>
> A said: Many young people in my hometown who are several years older than me have left home and come to the main land. I heard from them that there are many opportunities to make money in the mainland, and I also came with them. It feels good. There are indeed many opportunities to earn money when coming to the mainland. Han people like to eat lamb skewers, and we can also earn some money.

Survey results indicate that most Uyghur Muslims rely on friends, rather than relatives, to find jobs. Social connections are the primary means of securing employment, a trend consistent with other ethnic migrant workers. However, interviews reveal that Uyghur Muslims depend more heavily on relatives, friends, and fellow villagers than other groups. For Uyghur Internal migrant unfamiliar with urban life in mainland China, moving to inland cities is a significant challenge. Without existing connections in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, or Wuhan, relocation is nearly impossible. Early movers provide critical support, offering assistance with work, accommodation, and setting up businesses, enabling later Internal migrant to adapt more quickly to urban life.

It was clear to me that Uyghur Internal migrant is limited by the resources and networks they possess, with their primary social relationships confined to the Uyghur community. This reliance reflects the strong ethnic identity of Uyghurs.

4. Historical Investigation of the Uyghur Muslin Internal Migrant Population

Since the 1980s, increasing numbers of Uyghur Muslims have migrated to mainland cities like Beijing and Shanghai. Initially, most Uyghur Internal migrant engaged in the catering industry, leading to the widespread establishment of Uyghur-operated restaurants and lamb skewer stalls across mainland provinces. Over time, Uyghur merchants expanded into other trades, including fruit, fabric, fur, and cotton businesses.

Today, an increasing number of Uyghurs are establishing their own businesses in mainland China. These ventures pre dominantly focus on catering, Xinjiang specialty products, fur, and international and domestic trade, reflecting their growing entrepreneurial presence in the region.

4.1 A Historical Study on the Internal Migrant Population of Uyghur Muslims in Beijing

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the ethnic population in Beijing has steadily grown due to migration for work, study, and residence. Uyghur migration to Beijing began increasing in the 1950s. According to national census data, the Uyghur population in Beijing was 678 in 1964 and 757 in 1982, reflecting minimal growth during that period. However, after the reform and opening-up period, the Uyghur population grew rapidly, reaching 2,022 by 1990 and 3,129 by 2000, according to the fourth and fifth national censuses.[3]

As of 2018, relevant Beijing authorities reported over 5,000 Uyghur residents, but the actual number is likely much higher. These figures are primarily based on temporary residence permits, yet many Uyghurs Internal migrant lack such permits due to various barriers, which likely reduces the reported figures by at least half. Based on this observation, I estimate the current Uyghur internal migrant population in Beijing to be around 10,000.[4] How ever, limitations in data collection and investigation make precise estimates challenging.

With the implementation of China's reform and opening-up pol icy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many Uyghurs Muslims left their hometowns to work in the catering industry and trade Uyghur fruit specialties across the country. Beijing, as the nation's capital, was a preferred destination.

The business activities of Uyghur Muslims in Beijing began in the early 1980s. Hundreds of Uyghurs purchased scarves and fabrics from markets like Dong'an Market in Wangfujing, which they sent back to Uyghur Autonomous Regions for wholesale and retail. Items were typically shipped through the Bamiancao Post Office, while meals were obtained at Donglaishun Halal Restaurant. Uyghur traders also exchanged business information with other cities, such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Tianjin, through evening phone calls. Despite being labeled "speculative behavior" by Beijing authorities, these activities faced little interference. The goods were primarily sold in Uyghur capital cities, including Urumqi, Yining, Kashgar, and Atush.

The comprehensive opening of Beijing's market in 1985 marked a significant shift, with many Uyghurs Internal migrant entering the city for commercial activities. As market conditions improved, the scope of Uyghur businesses expanded. Some shifted from selling scarves and cloth to introducing Uyghur specialties like mutton skewers, raisins, Hami melons, and dried apricots for wholesale and retail. This transition marked a turning point from a one-way trade to a dynamic two-way flow of goods.

According to staff from the Uyghur Office in Beijing, Uyghur flavors were introduced to the

[3] Beijing Census Office, Chinese Population at the Turn of the Century (Beijing Volume), China Statistical Publishing House, 2005. (北京市人口普查办公室，《世纪之交的中国人口（北京卷）》，中国统计出版社，2005 年。) 2016 年 7 月央广网等多家媒体报道，北京市相关部门统计显示，当时有 1 万余名新疆籍少数民族群众在京活动，涵盖经商、求学及日常生活。

[4] In July 2016, multiple media outlets including China National Radio reported that according to statistics from relevant departments in Beijing, there were over 10000 Uyghur Muslim residents active in the city, covering business, education, and daily life. （2016 年 7 月央广网等多家媒体报道，北京市相关部门统计显示，当时有 1 万余名维吾尔穆斯林群众在京活动，涵盖经商、求学及日常生活。）

city in 1982 when Beijing officials invited 18 vendors from Urumqi to sell lamb skewers. This initiative gained popularity, encouraging more Uyghur traders to follow. By 1986, government policies facilitated the setup of at least 30 Uyghur-operated stalls in designated city areas.

ST, a Uyghur mutton skewer vendor in the 1980s and 1990s, recalled that Uyghur-operated stalls were widespread in areas such as Donghuamen, Beijing Railway Station, Baizhifang, the Zoo, Ganjiakou, Weigong Village, Renmin University, and Haidian Town. These stalls thrived at night, with lamb skewer vendors far outnumbering Uyghur-operated restaurants in Beijing.

4.2 Uyghur Settlements in Ganjiakou and Weigong Village

In the mid-1980s, Beijing's market fully opened, attracting a surge of internal migrant workers, including Uyghur Muslims, who formed settlements in Ganjiakou and Weigong Village.

4.2.1 Ganjiakou Settlement

The Uyghur settlement in Ganjiakou originated near the Xiyuan Hotel, built in the 1950s to serve Muslim communities. The Uy ghur Office in Beijing was also established nearby. To support the hotel's function, the government recruited Uyghur chefs to Beijing. Initially, these chefs lived at the hotel, but as their numbers grew, dormitories were built in Ganjiakou during the 1970s. Over time, these chefs brought their families and fellow villagers, forming the Uyghur community in Ganjiakou.[5]

By the early 1980s, some Uyghur Internal migrant who had initially worked as mutton skewer vendors shifted to operating restaurants. In 1984, the first Uyghur-run restaurant, Wonton Restaurant, was opened in Ganjiakou by a group from Kashgar. More Uyghur restaurateurs followed, and by 1987, the number of Uyghur restaurants had increased to 15, marking the beginnings of a distinct Uyghur settlement. These restaurants gained popularity for their quality food, reasonable prices, and unique ethnic flavors, attracting not only Uyghur patrons but also Beijing residents, business travelers, and even international tourists and diplomats.

By the end of 1993, there were 33 Uyghur restaurants in Ganjiakou, creating a street dedicated to Uyghur cuisine within the residential area. On January 1, 1992, the Haidian District People's Political Bureau officially designated Ganjiakouas a Uyghur settlement area. At its peak, 500–600 Uyghur people were engaged in the catering industry, with the total Uyghur population, including long-term residents and families, exceeding 1,000.

4.2.2 Weigong Village Settlement

Simultaneously, another Uyghur settlement formed in Weigong Village, near the Central University for Nationalities. In addition to Uyghur-operated restaurants, this area featured local flavor catering businesses run by other ethnic groups, including Kore ans, Hui, Dongxiang, and Han Chinese.

In 1996, students from the Department of Ethnology at the Central University for

[5] In 1993, Ren Yifei and Yasen Wushouer from the Institute of Ethnic Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences conducted an inves tigation into the "Xinjiang Village" in Ganjiakou.

Nationalities, under the guidance of Professor Yang Shengmin, conducted a survey of the Uyghur settlement in Weigong Village.[6]5 According to their findings, the first Uyghur restaurant in the area was established in 1983, and by 1996, the number of Uyghur restaurants had grown to 18. These restaurants were concentrated on a 300–meter-long street adjacent to the north wall of the university, commonly referred to as "Uyghur Street" or "Uyghur Village." Due to the presence of restaurants operated by other ethnic groups, such as Hui, Mongolian, Korean, and Tibetan, the street was also known as "Ethnic Food Street."

Before coming to Beijing, most restaurant owners in "Uyghur Village" had worked as small vendors, farmers, teachers, workers, or government officials in towns like Urumqi, Kashgar, and Yining. Economic hardship in their hometowns had often forced them to take on multiple jobs. Few had experience running a restaurant due to financial constraints. Many arrived in Beijing with only a few hundred to several thousand yuan, while some had just a few yuan when stepping off the train.

A respected leader in "Uyghur Village" serves as the unofficial "village chief," mediating competition and cooperation among Uyghur restaurant owners. This role involves tasks such as standardizing meal prices, resolving disputes, negotiating with neighborhood committees and police, and relaying notices and regulations to the restaurants.

The customer base at "Uyghur Village" differs significantly from typical Beijing eateries. In addition to Beijing residents, the restaurants attract a diverse clientele, including ethnic minorities, foreign visitors, and Muslim embassy personnel from countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Ethnic teachers and students from the Central University for Nationalities are regular patrons, while some customers travel from distant places like Tianjin specifically to dine there. Foreign students and embassy personnel from various countries also frequent the area, drawn by its authentic ethnic cuisine.

Uyghur restaurants in the "Uyghur Village" exhibit strong cohesion in their business activities and daily lives. Due to cultural differences, language barriers, and distinct religious beliefs, they have limited interaction with local Han and other ethnic groups, forming a close-knit community. Restaurant in gradient procurement—such as beef, mutton, and vegetables— relies on separate networks. Religious holidays, like Eid al-Adha and Mah Day, are celebrated collectively at mosques, while lei sure time is spent socializing within the Uyghur community. Most restaurant owners and employees save their earnings to send back to their hometowns, and love and marriage are typically confined to within the Uyghur ethnic group, with many returning to the Uyghur Autonomous Region to find spouses.

According to a restaurant owner who served as the village chief of Ganjiakou's "Uyghur

[6] Yang Shengmin and Wang Hansheng, "The Changes of Xinjiang Vil lages in Beijing – One of the Surveys of Xinjiang Cun in Beijing", Northwest Ethnic Studies, Vol. 2, 2008, pp. 1–9. (杨圣敏、王汉生，"北京'新疆村'的变迁——北京'新疆村'调查之一",《西北民族研究》，2008 年第 2 期，第 1–9 页。)；Wang Hansheng and Yang Shengmin, "The Formation and Evolution of Ethnic Minority Floating Population Set tlements in Large Cities: Investigation of Xinjiang Villages in Beijing, Part 2", Northwest Ethnic Studies, Vol. 3, 2008, pp. 6–16. (王汉生、杨圣敏，"大城市中少数民族流动人口聚居区的形成与演变——北京新疆村 调查之二"，《西北民族研究》，2008 年第 3 期，第 6–16 页。)

Village," over 40 Uyghur restaurants were scattered across Beijing at the time, alongside numerous lamb skewer stalls dispersed throughout the city, making accurate statistics difficult to obtain.

Today, the site of the original "Uyghur Village" in Ganjiakou has been replaced by a modern high-rise residential community. Many Uyghurs who once operated businesses there have either relocated to other parts of Beijing to continue their catering ventures or returned to the Uyghur Autonomous Region. The vibrant scene of "Uyghur Village" has largely disappeared, with significantly reduced Uyghur presence in the area.

In summary, cultural, linguistic, and religious factors have led to Uyghurs in Beijing forming tight-knit ethnic communities. Initially concentrated in Weigong Village, Uyghur Muslims gradually relocated to areas like Ganjiakou, West Railway Station, and Daxing due to government interventions and major events like the Beijing Olympics. Their residential patterns have since become increasingly scattered across the city.

4.3 Shanghai

As a megacity, Shanghai's urbanization has accelerated its multicultural development. On April 18, 2001, the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Statistics released the Fifth Population Census Communiqué, reporting that the city's ethnic minority population (excluding Han) was 104,100—a 67.4% increase from 62,200 in 1990. By May 18, 2021, the Seventh Population Census Communiqué reported Shanghai's permanent resident population at 24,870,895, an increase of 1,851,699 from 2010. Of this, 10,479,652 residents (42.1%) were from other provinces and cities, with 8.42 million individuals holding a university education level.[7]

Unlike cities such as Beijing, Shanghai's ethnic minority groups, including Uyghurs, are more geographically dispersed, and there are no prominent Uyghur settlements comparable to Ganjiakou or Weigong Village. Nevertheless, the internal migrant population of ethnic minorities in Shanghai has grown steadily over the years.

Uyghur Muslims in Shanghai: Investigation Findings

The Uyghur population in Shanghai primarily consists of a internal migrant population with few or no local residents. Most Uyghurs hold temporary residence permits, while some have no official status. Legitimate means of livelihood dominate, with a minority relying on illegal activities. For instance, many Uyghur children under 20 engage in street theft. There are approximately 50 Uyghur-run restaurants in Shanghai, alongside a significant number of small businesses, such as lamb skewer vendors and raisin sellers. Uyghur migration to Shanghai is seasonal, with many arriving in November and returning by February. The population typically fluctuates between 10,000 and 20,000.

4.3.1 Ethnic and Occupational Composition

The majority of the Uyghur population in Shanghai are Uyghur Muslims, followed by smaller numbers of Hui, Uzbek, and other Islamic ethnic groups. Occupationally, individuals from

[7] Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Statistics released the Seventh Population Census Bulletin, Shanghai, May 2021.

the same region or family tend to engage in similar professions, such as selling lamb skewers, opening pancake shops, or whole Saling Hami melons and raisins. A small minority, including state cadres, company employees, and college students, represent the Uyghur elite with permanent residency. Most Uyghurs in Shanghai come from economically underdeveloped regions in southern Uyghur, particularly Kashgar and Hotan, with a small er number from Aksu and Turpan. Many have left their hometowns due to low income or difficulty meeting basic needs.

4.3.2 Cultural and Social Adaptation

Before migrating to Shanghai, Uyghur communities in their hometowns preserved their ethnic customs, contrasting significantly with Shanghai's Han-dominated social environment. Differences in ideology, appearance, language, and customs con tribute to adaptation challenges for Uyghurs in the city.

4.3.3 Living Arrangements

Unlike Beijing's concentrated settlements like Ganjiakou and Weigong Village, Uyghurs in Shanghai are dispersed across the city based on their industries. Most live in rented housing, often on the outskirts of urban areas, while individual vendors reside in remote locations. A small number of wealthier Uyghurs have purchased homes in Shanghai, but without local registered residence, they remain temporary residents.

> E Introduction: In fact, we Xinjiang people have no choice. My mother is from Shanghai and our family situation is very good, but there are very few Uyghur families like me. Most people come from impoverished areas in Xinjiang. Shanghai is an international city. What can people from Xinjiang who have not attended school, have a low cultural level, do not speak Chinese, and have no economic foundation do in this city? My wife runs a restaurant. She came to Shanghai in the 1990s. At that time, there were many preferential policies for Xinjiang people, such as tax exemption when opening a restaurant. However, now in Shanghai, you don't have hundreds of thousands of investments, and the restaurant can't operate at all. Even if you have money, it's difficult to operate a restaurant as easily as before. Anyway, there are many restrictions. My lover's friend opened four banquet halls on the Bund (Uyghur) and after losing several million in just a few months, they went bankrupt without any support from the relevant departments. At present, many Xinjiang restaurants in Shanghai are unable to operate and can only be closed. So how do people from impoverished areas in Xin jiang make a living? They don't have money on them; how can they survive through legitimate means? If you don't understand Chinese in Shanghai, you are mute. They can only work in some restaurants. There are currently over 50 Uyghur restaurants operating in Shanghai. If we are more optimistic, a restaurant can work for around 20 people, and only over 1000 people can find jobs. There are also some who are capable of using legitimate means to meet their living needs. So, what should the remaining majority of young people do? They have no legitimate way to go.
>
> Previously, there were many people who relied on drug trafficking for a living. If caught,

they would be sentenced to at least six months in prison, and drugs were also harmful to their own health. Stealing things is different. If you steal less than two thousand yuan, you will not be judged by the law. So, Xinjiang people gave up their “drug business” and instead “pickpocketed”. I heard they all have their own organizations, but I’m not quite sure.

For Muslims from the remote northwest, transitioning from rural areas to bustling cities like Beijing and Shanghai involves a dramatic shift in their environment. For those unaccustomed to urban life, this change can be overwhelming, even shocking, leaving many uncertain about how to navigate their new surroundings. Urban adaptation begins from the first day they arrive in these cities, but the extent and pace of adaptation vary among individuals.

5. Conclusion

Most Uyghur Muslims in these cities come from the economically underdeveloped southern Uyghur Autonomous Region. Uyghurs in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Wuhan live in dispersed communities across urban districts. In Beijing, for instance, Uyghurs are found in all districts and counties, with relatively concentrated settlements in places like the Central University for Nationalities (Haidian District), the China Ethnic Language Translation Center, the Ethnic Song and Dance Troupe, and the Ethnic Publishing House (Chaoyang District).

Before migrating, most Uyghur Muslims were farmers with limited livelihood opportunities. Upon arrival in mainland cities, they predominantly engage in operating ethnic specialty products, with few entering non-ethnic enterprises for employment.

The majority of Uyghur Muslims in mainland cities have educational backgrounds limited to primary or secondary schooling. The proportion of those with college-level education is extremely small. Uyghurs in public institutions or government departments constitute a minority, with about 10% engaged in cultural and educational industries in universities, research institutions, and cultural departments. Some also hold roles in government agencies such as the National Ethnic Affairs Commission and the China Islamic Association.

The Uyghur Muslim internal migrant population in mainland cities is predominantly of working age, with an average age between 20 and 30 years old.

Uyghur Muslims maintain their ethnic customs and lifestyle after migrating to cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing. However, stark differences exist between rural and urban living, as well as between Uyghur and Han populations.

In summary, Uyghur Muslims migrating to cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Wuhan depend on social networks of relatives, friends, and fellow villagers to facilitate their mobility. Early movers play a vital role, assisting new arrivals with cultural acclimation, employment opportunities, and housing. This pattern of migration strengthens intra-community bonds, enabling Uyghur Internal migrant to form cohesive, stable groups often centered around shared professions, such as operating ethnic specialty businesses or restaurants.

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