

Ageing in China:

Present situation and Strategies

VIEILLISSEMENT DE LA POPULATION EN CHINE:

STATU QUO ET CONTRE-MESURE

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Abstract: Population Ageing is the main feature of humankind development in the 21st century. It has become the hot problem concerned by the world's governments and societies. This paper summarizes the basic present situation, the developmental trends and the basic features of population ageing in China. It also analyzes the responsibilities of national system, community construction and family providing for the aged and professional social workers in ageing trends. It intends to make suggestions about our social ageing trends.

Key words: Ageing, Present situation, Strategy

Résumé: Le vieillissement de la population, caractéristique principale du développement de l'humanité au 21^e siècle, constitue le point chaud auquel tous les gouvernements et toutes les sociétés accordent beaucoup d'attention. Cet article, en faisant le bilan du statu quo, de la tendance de développement et des caractéristiques du vieillissement de la population chinoise, analyse les responsabilités du régime d'Etat, de la construction du quartier, de l'entretien de la vie des parents dans la famille ainsi que des bénévoles professionnels dans la tendance de vieillissement, et ainsi étudie les contre-mesures.

Mots-Clés: vieillissement, statu quo, contre-mesure

According to UNESCO's definition, if the percentage of population in the 60-and-over age group accounts for 10% or above of the total population of the country or region, or if the percentage of population in the 65-and-over age group accounts for 7% or above of the total population of the country or region, the country or the region has entered the ageing society. The ageing of population is the main feature of human development in the 21st century, which has become a hot issue of concern by the world's governments and societies. With the economic development and the improvement of health care conditions, people's life expectancy is growing longer and longer, and old people will account for a higher percentage in the total population in society. An ageing society is an inevitable trend of social development process.

China is the most populous country in the world, which also boasts the largest number of old people. The result of the 5th Population Census showed that, on October 31st 2000, the number of old people over 60 years old has reached 130 million, accounting for 10.45% of the total population, among which the number of old people over 65 years old was 88.11 million, 7.09%² of the total population. According to

the UN, China has become a country with an ageing population. This paper summarizes the basic present situation, the developmental trends and the basic features of population ageing in China. It also analyzes the responsibilities of national system, community construction and family providing for the aged and professional social workers in ageing trends. It intends to make suggestions about our social ageing trends.

1. THE DEVELOPMENTAL TRENDS OF POPULATION AGEING IN CHINA

The phenomenon of ageing of population is not unique to China. Many developed countries such as France, Sweden, UK and Germany have entered ageing society long ago. The ageing of population is the inevitable result of the economic and social development of humankind. This is mainly attributed to the fall of birth rate and mortality rate. A region with a more developed social economy will have a longer life expectancy, and

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the ageing of its population will be more obvious. The ageing of population is as an inevitable result of social and economic development, which will in turn have an important impact on the social, economic and cultural development as well. The ageing of population and social economic development restrict each other. The advancement of social productive force, while raising people's living standards and improving medical conditions, will make people's life expectancy much longer. Ever since reform and opening-up, China's society and economy develop very rapidly, and people's living standard has generally jumped from poverty to well-off, with certain regions catch up with or even surpass the Western developed countries. The life expectancy of Chinese has increased from less than 60 in 1980 to over 70 in 2000, and the trend towards population ageing is accelerating. Therefore, it can be said that the population of ageing is an important indication of social progress. However, it will certainly cause huge social, political, economic, cultural, especially social material wealth burdens. How to cope with negative impact brought by the ageing of society has become an important issue of concern for the international community

Some population experts estimate that, by 2010, the proportion of people of 60-and-over age group and 65-and-over age group will account for 12.18% and 8.12% respectively, 16.23% and 11.30% in 2020, 22.34% and 15.21% in 2030, 25% and 20% in 2040. In 2030, China will enter the "super-ageing" society. By 2050, the population above 60 years old will reach 400 million, accounting for over 25% of the total population. In this case, there will be one old person out of four, and China will become a highly-ageing country.³ Due to its large population base, the ageing of population in China will bring about even greater problems than those met by the international society. As a result, how to cope with the series of problems caused by the ageing of society has become an important issue facing China in the 21st century.

2. BASIC FEATURES OF POPULATION AGEING IN CHINA

China is a populous country. Over the past decade, it has made rapid achievement in economic development and social progress, with people's living standards raised greatly and the mortality reduced; in the meantime, thanks to the compulsory policy of family planning, the birth rate has dropped substantially. The characteristics of the population ageing in China are different from those of other countries, which are as follows:

First, China has the largest number of old people in the world. China is the most populous country in the

world. On January 6th 2005, the total population of China exceeded 1.3 billion, making up for 1/4 of the world population. In the meantime, China has the largest number of old people in the world. In 2005, the number of old people reached 145 million, accounting for 1/5 of the world's total.⁴

Second, the pace of ageing is accelerating. China is not the first to enter the ageing society, but it's faster in ageing than the world average speed. It only took China about 18 years to transform from "adult type" into "old-age type" society. It took France 115 years, Sweden 85 years, U.S. 60 years, UK 45 years to finish this process, and Japan the shortest for 25 years.⁵

Third, it is unbalanced in ageing in terms of time and space. Imbalance in time: there are three stages to demonstrate this: the first stage was 1990—2000, during which the absolute number and proportion of old people are increasing, and the number of old people over 60 years old increased from 98 million in 1990 to 130 million in 2000, and the percentage from 8.59% to 10.41%. The Chinese society was transforming from "adult type" into "old-age type". The second stage was 2000—2025, during which the ageing of population in China accelerated, the proportion of old people in the 60-and-over age group will rise to 18.51%, and 14% for the 65-and-over age group, and China will enter the highly-ageing society. The third stage is 2025—2050, when the ageing of population in China will be very serious, and the proportion of old people in the 60-and-over age group will rise to 29%. Imbalance in space: It means that there exist disparities between rural and urban areas, coastal and inland regions, as well as mid and western regions.

Fourth, the trend of ageing of population is quite obvious. In the first half of the 21st century, another feature of the ageing of population in China is the rapid increase of the senior population. According to demographic sociology, 60—69 years old is low age, 70—79 years as middle age, and 80 years and above the senior age population. In China, the fastest growing population group is the 80 years or above. From 1990 to 2000, the number of population of 80 and above increased from 7.68 million to 11.99 million, an average growth rate of 4.56%, faster than the world average of 3.0% and the average growth rate of 2.0% in developed countries. It is estimated that by 2025, the number of senior age population will increase from the current 1.3 million to 25.74 million, and 100 million in 2050. By that time, one out of every 10 or even 4 people will be senior age person.⁶ Clearly, the ageing of population in

⁴ Guo Aidi. "The 1.3 billion th citizen on the mainland was born", "Chinese population will exceed the limit". Beijing: *Beijing Times*. 2005. 01. 06.

⁵ United Nations Secretariat, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. "The Ageing of Population" (2002) data form. 2002.

⁶ United Nations Secretariat, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population

³ The same as ²

China is moving towards senior ageing. The proportion of senior age population is rising, implying a heavier burden for the medical and health care responsibilities, and greater demand for the medical staff and nurses, as well as more cost for medical treatment and health care. It will become more and more urgent to use the social resource to provide for the aged.

Fifth, "to become old before becoming rich" lies ahead of social and economic development. Normally, economic development, the fall of birth rate and the ageing of population are almost synchronous. However, the ageing of population in China happened when its economy was not very developed, the comprehensive national strength not strong, and people's living standard not very high. The ageing of population came before the economic and social development. In developed countries, before it entered the ageing stage, it already possessed relatively strong economic strength, with the per capita GDP ranging from 5000 to 10,000 U.S. dollars, covering a period of several decades to a hundred years. China, however, has an average per capita GDP of only 856 U.S. dollars in 2000. Growing old before becoming rich exceeded the bearing capacity of its society and economy, adding to the difficulty of solving the ageing problem. By the mid of the 21st century, when the ageing level in China comes close to that of developed countries, its economic strength will also be equivalent to that of the modestly-developed countries. Therefore, a very important social problem is that the economic development lags behind the ageing of population process.

3. STRATEGIC MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO POPULATION AGEING IN CHINA

The elderly, as the citizens of society and elders of family, become old after accomplishing their responsibilities of production and generation imposed by the society and family. According to the concept of generational change, the thought of "The aged are cared for until death, adults are employed in jobs that make full use of their abilities, and children are nourished, educated, and fostered", as well as the moral and ethical concept of "the old to live in peace and comfort, friends to trust each other and the young to be taken good care of", the Government, society and family should attach importance to elder's interests by formulating favorable policies and providing assistance and service[6] to them. Strategic measures in response to population ageing in China include:

3.1 The government should play a leading role in the development on ageing

In the 21st century, the problem of ageing will become more prominent. The government must formulate strategic measures and integrate the development on ageing into national development plan, strengthening the function of government in the development on ageing, and guiding actions in ageing on the macro level.

3.2 The responsibility of family

To care for the elder in family is the traditional way of Chinese. Ever since the Plan of Action of the first World Conference on Old People, the international community has always stressed the importance of putting the care for the elderly on top of the reform agenda. Family is the main avenue for the elderly, and the basis for the material guarantee and daily care. Parents have the obligation to raise children, and adults have the obligation to take care of their parents. This kind of "pay-back" relationship has long been the basis for securing the late years of elderly of the Chinese people. Currently, family remains the main avenue for the elderly to spend their late years, and family members have the legal obligation to take care of the elderly. The major responsibilities of family members are: economic support, spiritual consolation and care during illness, etc.

3.3 The responsibility of community

With the economic development and social progress, the so called "Solitary Old Men's Family" and core family are on the rise, and the function for taking care of the elderly of the family is weakened. This change called for the community support, for community is the place through which the elderly join the society, stepping out of the family. The construction of community and providing the elderly with all kinds of service are a prerequisite for enriching their spiritual life and improving their living standards. Service provided by the community to the elderly is an undertaking of public welfare, which should give play to the function of community of caring for the elderly, with no purpose of profiting; however, it should also comply with the principle of the market economy by charging reasonably and maintaining a good cycle. On one hand, it should carry out mutual support activities for the elderly to participate in the community service work and mobilize all actors of society to serve the elderly; on the other hand, there can also be charging service with small profits.

Many developed countries attach importance to the community in its function of serving the elderly. They propose the construction style of "solar system", that is, establishing medical, recreational, learning and exercising facilities. Some countries even created "Day

Prospects, (The 2000 Revision). United Nations, New York, 2001.

Center". In the daytime, the elderly spend time there, and come home to join the family. This not only solve the problem of having no time to take care of the elderly in the daytime, but also meeting the elder's spiritual need of spending time with their children. The advantage of community in caring for the elderly not only meet the requirement of the market economy, but also making up for the shortcomings of the family in caring for the elderly.

Social workers for the elderly should comply with the principles of independence, engagement, care, dignity and self-realization of the Elderly Principles of the UN in an effort to achieve the goal of successfully growing old.

People will live longer in the 21st century. In order for the elderly to live a better and healthier life, let's join hands to contribute to the building of a society shared by all, regardless of their ages!

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