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## Characteristics and development path of elderly education in China in the new era

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### **Abstract**

Elderly education is related to the development of the national aging cause, which is a clear requirement and hope put forward by the national level for the grass-roots open university to do a good job in elderly education. As an important part of the lifelong education system, the vigorous development of high-quality education for the elderly and the guarantee of the right of the elderly to enjoy the same level of education are important paths for the development and improvement of the lifelong education system, and an important measure for actively coping with the aging of society. Ideally, an “education system that serves lifelong learning for all” should be an organic whole with a clear hierarchy, an appropriate structure, and an orderly articulation, integrating family education, school education, and social education. Internally, various forms of education are integrated and linked, and all kinds of educational resources are openly shared, which not only meets the learning needs of groups of different ages, but also forms a strong educational synergy to serve society; externally, this system can interact and coordinate with the development of the times, adjusting its internal structure in accordance with the changes in social needs, and thus maintaining a constant momentum of development and forming a virtuous circle. With the deepening of aging and the continuous promotion of market education, elderly education has emerged as a new industry. The university for the elderly is used as a handhold to reform the traditional way of education for the elderly, realise multi-dimensional and diversified teaching, establish effective and reliable long-term connections, and create a friendly atmosphere of love, respect and care for the elderly by all people. Forming a new business pattern of linkage and collaborative innovation of various departments, realising a sense of joy, a sense of security and a sense of worthiness for the elderly, while extending the service development of the elderly education industry, and enhancing the sustained, effective and healthy development of China’s elderly care industry.

**Keywords:** *New Era, Elderly Education, Characteristics, Path of Development*

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Научная статья

## Характеристика и пути развития образования пожилых людей в Китае в новую эпоху

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### **Аннотация**

Образование пожилых людей связано с развитием национальной проблемы старения, что является четким требованием и надеждой, выдвинутой на национальном уровне для низового открытого университета, чтобы сделать работу в области образования пожилых людей. Как важная часть системы пожизненного образования, энергичное развитие высококачественного образования для пожилых людей и гарантия права пожилых людей на получение образования на том же уровне являются важными путями к развитию и совершенствованию системы образования на протяжении всей жизни, а также важной мерой по активному преодолению старения общества. В идеале система образования, которая служит пожизненному обучению для всех, должна

представлять собой органическое целое с четкой иерархией, соответствующей структурой и упорядоченной связью, объединяющей семейное, школьное и социальное образование. Внутри системы различные формы образования интегрированы и связаны между собой, а все виды образовательных ресурсов находятся в открытом доступе, что не только удовлетворяет образовательные потребности групп разных возрастов, но и формирует сильную образовательную синергию на службе обществу; внешне эта система может взаимодействовать и координировать свои действия с развитием времени, корректируя свою внутреннюю структуру в соответствии с изменениями социальных потребностей и тем самым поддерживая постоянный импульс развития и образуя благотворный круг. Внешне эта система может взаимодействовать и координировать свои действия с развитием времени, корректируя свою внутреннюю структуру в соответствии с изменениями общественных потребностей, тем самым поддерживая постоянный импульс развития и формируя добродетельный круг. С углублением процесса старения и непрерывным продвижением рыночного образования образование для пожилых людей превратилось в новую отрасль. Университет для пожилых людей используется как опора для реформирования традиционного способа обучения пожилых людей, реализации многомерного и разностороннего обучения, установления эффективных и надежных долгосрочных связей, создания дружественной атмосферы любви, уважения и заботы о пожилых людях со стороны всех людей. Формирование новой бизнес-модели взаимосвязи и совместных инноваций различных отделов, реализация чувства радости, чувства безопасности и чувства достоинства для пожилых людей, одновременно расширяя развитие услуг в индустрии образования для пожилых людей и повышая устойчивое, эффективное и здоровое развитие индустрии ухода за пожилыми людьми в Китае.

**Ключевые слова:** *новая эпоха, образование пожилых людей, характеристика, путь развития*

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The idea of lifelong education in China has existed since ancient times, and traditional Chinese cultural thought contains an extremely wide range of lifelong education concepts, among which the lifelong education thought of Confucius can be said to be the source of China's lifelong education concepts, which has important academic value. The Master said: "I for my part not one of those who have innate knowledge." [1] To make good character is a lifelong goal.

<The "14th Five-Year Plan" for the Development of the National Ageing Programme and the Aged Care Service System> clearly stated that "Relying on the National Open University to prepare for the establishment of the National University for the Elderly, and build a national platform for the sharing of resources and public services for elderly education." [2] Elderly education is related to the development of the national aging cause, which is a clear requirement and hope put forward by the state level for the grassroots open university to do a good job in elderly education. As an important part of the lifelong education system, the development of high-quality education for the elderly and the guarantee of the right of the elderly to enjoy the same level of education are important paths to the development and improvement of the lifelong education system. [3]

### **Background and development of the construction of elderly education**

In its long history, China has experienced special periods of hardship, struggle and socialist construction. The State has always emphasised that young people are the future of the motherland, but the needs of the elderly for education and study groups should not be underestimated. Since ancient times, every older person has had the need to receive education and knowledge, and older persons cannot be implicitly deprived of them just because they have gradually become disconnected from society. It is essential for the State to formulate policies to guarantee the right of the elderly to education and to care for their desire for knowledge, and respect for the thirst for knowledge of every elderly person is a very

effective and efficient shortcut to promote the building of a more sustainable spiritual civilisation in our country.

As people who once fought for their country, the standard of living of the elderly represents the degree of development of a country. The supply of universities for the elderly in China exceeds the demand. Older people can study different kinds of courses in the university, the course structure is in various forms, and the content is set more in line with the interests of older people and more practical. As the problem of ageing deepens, universities for the elderly are developing rapidly all over the world. On 17 September 1983, China's first university for the growth of the elderly, the Shandong Red Cross University for the Elderly, was founded by the Shandong Provincial Party Committee's Organisation Department and the Shandong Provincial Red Cross Society in the city of Jinan, Shandong Province; the next year, the Government re-established the Association for the Education of the Elderly (AEE) as a collective; In the late 1980s, the National Association of Universities for the Elderly, the first private education organisation for elderly services, was established; since then, the national education system for elderly services has been formally established.

After the founding of New China, retired cadres were the main members of the University of the Elderly, which was actually more like a centre for senior activities for retired employees than a university. With the gradual aggravation of an ageing society and the strengthening of the awareness of educational equity, the enrolment of universities for the elderly has mainly focused on ordinary elderly people. "The National Starlight Programme of Community Welfare Services for the Elderly", launched by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2001, enables the elderly to enjoy education and service benefits without having to leave their homes, and elderly education has thus formally stepped into the Internet era. In 2010, the Outline of the National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) proposed the "extensive development of urban and rural community education", and education for the elderly began to be implemented on the ground and subsequently developed rapidly. [4]

### **Elderly education is an important initiative to improve the lifelong education system and actively respond to the ageing of society**

The latest population data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in February 2023 showed that by the end of 2022, there were more than 200 million people aged 65 years and over, and more than 280 million aged 60 years and over, accounting for 19.8 per cent of the total population. [5] According to relevant forecasts, the number of elderly people in China will reach 300 million in 2025 and 483 million around 2050. [6] Population ageing will be a fundamental national condition throughout the 21st century.

Along with the arrival of the ageing population society, our government has successively issued relevant policies to encourage universities to actively carry out education for the elderly, and the combination of education and parenting has become an important concept and practical action. China has twice amended <Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly>, to make it clear that continuing education is a basic right of the elderly, and on that basis, to encourage society as a whole to raise awareness of the elderly, to propose a series of measures such as the orderly opening of various types of schools for the elderly and the promotion of the healthy development of the elderly. In July 2016, Nine departments including the Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Further Promoting the Development of Community Education, stressing that the elderly population should be given education policy care as a key population group, that the construction of community education resources should be strengthened, that a number of exemplary activity venues for the elderly and universities for the elderly should be set up in townships and streets, and that a sound system of support services for elderly education should be established. [7]

In November 2021, the Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Strengthening the Work of the Elderly in the New Era was issued, proposing to increase investment in the education of the elderly in China, to support colleges and universities and vocational colleges in setting up specialisations and courses related to the elderly, and to strengthen the construction of disciplines and the cultivation of talents for elderly education in China. [8] In February 2022, the State Council issued the “14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Aging Programme and Pension Service System”, which explicitly proposed the innovative development of gerontological education and encouraged the innovative practice of combining education with nourishment. [9] Thus, education for the elderly has moved from the margins to the centre.

The assumption of responsibility for geriatric education by universities in the era of lifelong education is not only an important element of the idea of “active ageing”, but also an important measure to effectively deal with the problem of social ageing. On the one hand, through the provision of opportunities for older persons to learn and participate in activities, older persons can enjoy a healthy quality of life and quality of life, while at the same time guiding society to establish a new culture in which older persons are an important spiritual asset and human capital of society. On the other hand, it promotes the re-socialisation of older persons, enabling them to adapt to changes in their environment and themselves through the experience of role expectations, role responsibilities and obligations, so that they can meaningfully and happily achieve the peak of the “third age” of their lives through social participation and interaction. [10]

#### **Current situation and basic features of education for the elderly**

Ideally, an “education system that serves lifelong learning for all” should be an organic whole with a clear hierarchy, an appropriate structure, and an orderly articulation, integrating family education, school education, and social education. Internally, various forms of education are integrated and linked, and all kinds of educational resources are openly shared, which not only meets the learning needs of groups of different ages, but also forms a strong educational synergy to serve society; externally, this system can interact and coordinate with the development of the times, adjusting its internal structure in accordance with the changes in social needs, and thus maintaining a constant momentum of development and forming a virtuous circle.

In the current situation in China, the level of construction of the lifelong education system depends on its shortest point, namely, the part of the non-formal education system such as community education for the elderly. Since the reform and opening up, along with the growing demand for education, not only formal school education, but also community education, elderly education, vocational training and other forms of out-of-school education have made great progress. However, due to the lack of top-level policy framework design for lifelong education and the lagging behind of theoretical research on community-based education for the elderly.[11] Community-based education for the elderly is at a disadvantage in the lifelong education system.

First, the bias in the overall planning of lifelong education has resulted in the uneven development of community-based education for the elderly, with insufficient coverage of community-based education for the elderly, and the phenomenon of the eastern region outperforming the central and western regions, and of the city outperforming the countryside, is widespread at the level of community-based education services. The 2019 Report on the Development of the Quality of Life of the Elderly in China shows that, in terms of social participation and cultural life, the majority of the elderly are concerned about community affairs, and the elderly generally participate in various types of leisure and recreational activities, but the majority of the elderly lack the opportunity to continue their studies. [12]

Secondly, the current structure of community education resources for the elderly is irrational; limited by the popularity of the concept of lifelong education, the community education system for the elderly has yet to take shape, with an uncoordinated internal ratio of types of resources, educational content, modes of

delivery, and composition of faculty; the quality of on-line resources varies, and it is difficult to ensure that off-line learning venues are available; there is a dearth of full-time teaching staff, and there is little vocational skills and re-employment training for the elderly, or education on life or death.

Thirdly, the education of older persons in the community has not been adequately safeguarded; diverse and flexible modes of learning and teaching need to be further established; and there is a need for further integration of Internet information technology and the development of education for older persons; Because the national education system is not yet sound, the State has not made clear, systematic and comprehensive plans for such key issues as the development goals, management system, curriculum standards, resource construction, teaching staff and safeguards for community-based education for the elderly, resulting in the development of community-based education for the elderly being superficial and form-focused, with a lack of attention paid to the status of the elderly as the subject of its education. [13]

Fourthly, community-based education for the elderly, which lacks norms and standards, is making slow progress in such areas as project management and typical promotion, and the sustainability of its development has become an urgent challenge to be overcome. In accordance with internationally accepted practices, it is the disadvantaged elderly groups that the Government should really help and provide more public services for, while China's universities for the elderly are all located at higher levels of power, making it difficult for ordinary elderly people to really enjoy. [14] Therefore, if lifelong education for older persons is to achieve equitable and sustainable development, the focus must be on community-based education for older persons. Community-based education for the elderly is designed to enable older persons to live happier and more dignified lives; in a sense, its essence is the conscious, autonomous and free learning activities that older persons in the community undertake in order to improve and enhance the quality of their lives. [15]

### **Trends in the development of gerontological education**

#### ***1. Reform of education methods to match policy implementation.***

Firstly, all regions and departments throughout the country have attached great importance to the integration of gerontological education into lifelong education, and have paid great attention to the real-time follow-up of the implementation process, regularly reporting on the status of the follow-up to higher-level departments, placing the implementation of gerontological education and the enhancement of participation in lifelong learning in an important developmental position, and improving coordination and cooperation with grass-roots departments, so as to maximise cooperation with the planning and construction of elderly colleges and universities.

Secondly, building bridges of cooperation to consolidate the fruitfulness of education. Vigorously exerting the government to build colleges and universities to create a cooperation mechanism for elderly university alliances. Actively promote cooperation between colleges and universities, grass-roots organisations and organisations and senior citizen associations, to raise funds and plan resources, and to jointly solve the intractable problems and obstacles encountered in the construction of senior citizen universities. It also promotes cooperation between China's adult education and third-age education unions, builds bridges of communication, and consolidates the fruitful results of the development of older people's education that have been achieved in recent years through the joint efforts of university unions and third-age organisations.

Finally, in order to ensure the perfect implementation of the policy, a certain incentive mechanism can be established to thicken the soil for lifelong education for the elderly. Colleges and universities across the country have plans to incorporate geriatric education into their basic subject work, and allocate college teachers or college volunteers to devote themselves to this work, create all available conditions, recruit interested and voluntary talents from the whole society, and formulate practical incentive and reward mechanisms for talents, so as to enrich the actual landing conditions of the university for the elderly.



Innovative education modes, integration of educational resources, giving priority to the cultivation of elderly talents and development strategies.

**2. Innovative learning modes to build an efficient situation together.**

Regularly carry out government visits, school visits, community visits, multi-party intervention and cooperation mode, to create their own cooperation platform and service mode, timely adjustments to create a more conducive to the elderly learning, acceptance of the learning mode, the team moderately carry out the group competition, community civilisation and other effective forms of mutual promotion. Give full play to the initiative, creativity and innovation of the elderly in life. Increase the fun at the same time, so that the elderly body and mind to get the maximum degree of satisfaction, to give full play to their own advantages. Especially in the context of the new era, it is necessary to continuously explore the development potential, and continuously promote the application of digital and networked technology and Internet technology in senior universities. A series of computer application courses are carried out in senior universities to teach the elderly how to survive in the environment of the Internet of everything, maximise “zero generation gap” communication with their children, reduce the gap, and maximise their sense of belonging. In addition, we will increase the interaction between remote education counselling and AI education counselling, and set up a network learning and education platform, so that the elderly can also use QQ, WeChat, Taobao and other rejuvenation software proficiently, and achieve the effect of simultaneous leisure and recreation as well as learning and education to the greatest extent possible.

**3. Building a service platform to meet the needs of the elderly.**

Innovative reform of the pension system, adjusting the idea of community services, realising home care while achieving the trinity of education, culture, recreation and pension in an intelligent way. Community staff have brainstormed and regularly carried out useful activities such as group-building activities for the elderly, neighbourhood support activities and recreational exchanges. Attracting capable, patient, talented and intelligent aspiring young people to actively participate in the construction of elderly service-oriented work, to meet the practical life and psychological needs of the elderly to the greatest extent possible.

**4. Incubate quality talents and build a service platform.**

State and government agencies as well as university education practitioners further enrich the three major connotations of health, digitalisation and participation. In order to make the learning needs of the elderly more diversified, the life of the elderly more qualitative, and the later life of the elderly more energetic and colourful. With the most favourable measures, the most effective initiatives, the most intimate guardianship and the warmest embrace, we are actively building a social service environment for the elderly with a healthy life, a healthy mentality and a healthy ecology, and creating an atmosphere of solidarity, harmony and congeniality in social support. The government should maximise the encouragement and support to guide the payment and dedication of small and micro-enterprises in the elderly education service, lower the relevant threshold, and strongly support the admission and development of relevant enterprises. Colleges and universities should make efforts to tap the elderly knowledge-based talents of school students, stimulate the students’ initiative and motivation in the elderly career, further divert the realisation of talents to the elderly service talents, give full play to the strong advantages of the education platform to incubate talents, continue to push forward the integrated mode of teaching + nourishment + medicine + learning, and promote the long-term development of the elderly education career. [16]

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