

# The Learning Needs of Community Elderly in the Context of Population Aging

——A Case Study of Shenzhen

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According to the data of the seventh population census, there are 264 million people aged 60 and above in China, accounting for 18.7% of the total population. According to the United Nations' definition of an elderly country, China's population aged 60 and above accounts for more than 10% of the total population and has entered the ranks of elderly countries. China has become one of the countries with the largest elderly population and the fastest growing aging rate in the world. It is expected that by the middle of this century, China's population aged 60 and above will reach 500 million. The rapid increase in the number and proportion of the elderly population will not only cause major changes in the population structure and consumption structure, but also generate major social problems such as health, education, medical care and insurance for the aging population. The prominent feature of "getting old before getting rich" has a comprehensive and far-reaching impact on the process of socialist modernization in China. Especially the spiritual culture and learning needs of the elderly are growing faster, so the situation and task of developing senior citizen education is more serious and urgent.

In 2016, the General Office of the State Council issued the "Development Plan for Senior Citizen Education (2016-2020)", proposing that "senior citizen education is an important part of China's education and aging career. The development of senior citizen education is an important initiative to actively cope with the aging population, modernize education and build a learning society. It is an inevitable requirement to meet the diversified learning needs of the elderly, improve their quality of life and promote social harmony." In the same year, the Ministry of Education and nine other departments issued the "Opinions of the Ministry of Education and Nine Other Departments on Further Promoting the Development of Community Education" (Education Vocational Training [2016]No. 4), emphasizing that "senior citizen education will be a key task of community education. Combined with the construction of a multi-level elderly service system, we should improve the learning environment for the elderly in grassroots communities and perfect the community learning network for the elderly. We should build a number of townships (subdistricts) in the region to play a model role in the elderly learning places and senior citizen university. We should strive to improve the participation rate and satisfaction rate of senior citizen education." In November 2021, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "Opinions on Strengthening the Work of the Elderly in the New Era", which proposed to "integrate senior citizen education into the lifelong education system and expand the supply of resources for senior citizen education."

At present, there are more than 10 million elderly people participating in various types of universities for the elderly at all levels in China, and the development pattern of senior citizen education promoted by multiple departments and run by multiple forms has been formed initially. However, in terms of the overall construction quality, community education for the elderly still has many problems such as insufficient

supply of resources, unbalanced development and inadequate guarantee mechanism, so promoting the sustainable and healthy development of community education for the elderly is an urgent task for the current and future period to actively cope with the aging of the population and vigorously develop the cause and industry of aging services.

## 1. The Characteristics and Development Trend of Population Aging in Shenzhen

Shenzhen is a young immigrant city, but the problem of aging is gradually emerging. The issue of senior citizen education has become the top priority in Shenzhen to deal with the aging problem. The elderly population in Shenzhen presents the following characteristics. First, the overall population is in the pre-aging stage. According to the data of the seventh population census, the resident elderly population in Shenzhen aged 60 and above is 940,700, accounting for 5.36%, and the resident elderly population aged 65 and above is 565,200, accounting for 3.22%, which does not reach the standard of aging society (the proportion of the elderly population aged 60 and above to the total population reaches 10%, or the proportion of the elderly population aged 65 and above to the total population reaches 7%), and has not yet entered the aging stage. From the analysis of the distribution of each district, the size of the elderly population in each district varies greatly, only Longgang District has a resident elderly population aged 60 and above of more than 200,000, Baoan District, Futian District, Nanshan District and Longhua District have a resident elderly population aged 60 and above of more than 100,000 and below 200,000, Bright District, Pingshan District, Yantian District and Dapeng New District have a resident elderly population of more than 10,000 and below 40,000. The population of elderly people aged 60 and above in Shenzhen-Shantou Cooperation Zone is less than 0.9 million. Second, the elderly of low age and vitality accounts for 70%. According to the data of the seventh population census, from the age structure analysis, Shenzhen 60-69 years old resident low-age elderly population accounts for about 69.7% of the resident elderly population, compared with the national average proportion of low-age elderly population 55.8% higher than about 14 percentage points. The overall structure of the elderly population is "young" and there is a strong demand for social participation of the elderly of low age and vitality. Third, the high density of elderly population distribution. According to the data of the seventh population census, Shenzhen's resident elderly population per square kilometer is 471 people / square kilometer, second only to Shanghai (917 people / square kilometer), more than Guangzhou (287 people / square kilometer) and Beijing (262 people / square kilometer). The high density of elderly population distribution has put forward higher requirements on the layout of elderly service facilities and space land security in Shenzhen. Fourth, the inverse structure of household and non-household population is obvious. Shenzhen's resident elderly population is about 2.6 times of the household elderly population, while Beijing is 1.1 times, Shanghai is 1.1 times, and Guangzhou is 1.2 times. The structure of household and non-

household elderly population in Shenzhen is obviously inverted, and the elderly service faces greater challenges in the context of equalization of public services. When developed countries enter the aging society, the GDP per capita is about 10,000 USD; when they enter the deep aging society, the GDP per capita is about 20,000 USD; and when they enter the super aging society, the GDP per capita is about 40,000 USD. By the end of 2020, Shenzhen's per capita disposable income is 64,878 yuan; GDP reaches 2.77 trillion yuan, GDP per capita reaches 157,600 yuan, which is about 22,800 yuan according to the average exchange rate of the previous year. It can be seen that the characteristic of "getting gradually richer and gradually older" is prominent.

The development trend of population aging in Shenzhen is mainly manifested in the following aspects. First, the process of population aging is accelerating, and the size of the elderly population is growing rapidly. According to the data of the seventh population census, by November 1, 2020, the population of Shenzhen aged 55 and above is 1625929 people, aged 56 and above 1462936 people, aged 57 and above 1299942 people, aged 58 and above 1132963 people, aged 59 and above 1006350 people, 60 years old and above 940716 people. According to the age-progression method (without considering the population flow and death factor), by the end of 2021-2025, people aged 55-59 years old in the the seventh population census will enter the old age, and it is expected that by 2025, the size of the resident elderly population in Shenzhen will increase from 940,700 at the end of 2020 to 1,625,900. The size of the elderly population is growing rapidly. Second, the "only-child generation" parents are entering the old age period, intensifying the trend of empty nesting. According to the data of the seventh population census, the average household size in Shenzhen is 2.25 persons, which is lower than the national size of 2.62 persons, and the family elderly function is weakening, and the demand for social care continues to expand. According to statistics, the proportion of empty nest elderly people (elderly couple households and elderly people living alone) is over 50%. During the "14th Five-Year Plan" period, as the first generation of only-child parents enter the ranks of the elderly, the problem of empty nest will be further exacerbated, especially in Shenzhen as an immigrant city, the "only-child generation" of the empty nest problem will be more prominent, the elderly will have more spiritual needs. According to a sample survey on the quality of elderly services in Shenzhen conducted by the Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau in 2015, 56.82% of the elderly population in Shenzhen have senior high school (including secondary school) education or above, and 64% of the elderly population have a stable monthly income of more than 2,000 RMB, which provides the necessary conditions for the elderly in Shenzhen to pursue better education resources and spiritual satisfaction, and also puts forward higher requirements for cultural entertainment, community education and social participation.

According to a set of data in 2016, the city has 647 community associations for the elderly, with a community coverage rate of 96.5%, more than 980 social organizations for the elderly, 1,689 cultural and sports programs for the elderly, nearly 300,000 elderly people participating in social organizations, more than 30,000 elderly volunteers participating in community services, and more than 700 old cadres (elderly) universities in the city with more than 100,000 students by 2022. Shenzhen has initially formed a certain organization, a certain scale, and a certain effect of community participation and education of the elderly development model. However, with Shenzhen's spurt of aging population growth, Shenzhen's community education for the elderly will experience a huge supply pressure.

## 2. The Learning Needs for Community Education for the Elderly in Shenzhen

Regarding the willingness to participate in senior citizen education, the survey data shows that, in general, the majority of the elderly want to participate in senior citizen education, and the percentage of the elderly who do not want to participate is only 8.8%, which indicates that the elderly have a high degree of recognition for community education for the elderly and are more enthusiastic about participation. Regarding the purpose of participating in senior citizen education, the survey data shows that there are various purposes for seniors to participate in senior citizen education. The first one is for physical and mental health and cultivation, accounting for 83.53%, followed by meeting personal interests and enriching senior life, accounting for 78.91%, followed by meeting and making new friends (58.15%) and enhancing learning ability and actively participating in society (49.35%). Regarding the expectation of course content of senior citizen education, the survey results show that the highest expectation of senior citizens for courses offered in community senior citizen education is culture and art (photography, Chinese painting, calligraphy, western painting, etc.), followed by physical fitness (modeling, sports dance, dance, etc.) and medical health (health and wellness, health care, etc.). The proportion of seniors interested in music and music arts (opera, vocal music, music theory, etc.) and instrumental music (piano, erhu, guzheng, etc.) also reached more than 40%. Thus, the cultural and art courses reflect the elderly's aspiration and pursuit of spiritual life, while the physical and medical health courses reflect the elderly's concern for their physical health. Regarding the frequency of classes in senior citizen education, from the survey data, 38.5% of seniors want to attend classes once a week, 38.9% can accept classes twice a week, and 14.7% want to attend classes three times a week or more. Most seniors need to take care of their grandchildren and daily household work, for the frequency of classes, 1-2 times a week is appropriate, too often will make seniors have no time to care.

## 3. Problems in the Development of Community Education for the Elderly in Shenzhen

### 3.1 A Good Atmosphere Of Lifelong Learning Has Not Yet Been Formed

The first is that the characteristics of community education for the elderly are unknown. The current curriculum carried out by community senior citizen education is also mainly focused on hobbies, similar to other community cultural activities and lectures, and does not reflect the characteristics of senior citizen education, which needs to pay more attention to hierarchy and professionalism in curriculum design. The second is the lack of personal awareness of lifelong learning. Influenced by traditional culture, the elderly gradually retreat to their families and disengage from society in their later years, and their self-awareness decreases, and they do not pay enough attention to self-satisfaction and self-improvement. Thirdly, the publicity of senior citizen education is not enough. The public's understanding of senior college is limited to "education for retired old cadres", which is easily turned into a small self-reservation area and not widely publicized, and "senior citizen education" has not penetrated deeply into the elderly population. In addition, at the grassroots level in subdistricts and communities, the teaching capacity of senior citizen education is different and weak, and the infrastructure conditions are not guaranteed and there is a lack of a unified grip. Although diversified participation in senior citizen education has been advocated in recent years, the current situation shows that the support from social forces is still insufficient, and there is no effective linkage in the basic guarantee conditions such as resources, funding and venues for senior citizen education.

3.2 The teaching system with diversified contents has not yet been established

The first is the contradiction between supply and demand, and the disconnect between the reality base and demand. Shenzhen's elderly population has a complex structure and diverse needs. The number of elderly people who are willing to participate in senior citizen education is mainly in the lower age group of 60-70 years old, among which, most of them are with high school education or above, and were in enterprises or administrative institutions before retirement, and it can be found from the data sample that the current target of senior citizen education is mainly concentrated in the above group. As a migrant city, Shenzhen has a large number of migrant elderly, migratory elderly and partially disabled and semi-disabled elderly who have personalized education demands, but the current teaching content is not sufficient to meet such demands. On the other hand, many universities for the elderly are limited by the lack of space and facilities. The elderly population is special, and there are clear standards for places to provide services for the elderly, but at present, the subdistricts and communities have limited venues that meet the teaching requirements, and most of them rely on other functional places to set up, and there are phenomena such as insufficient area and time conflicts with other activities in the service facilities, which affect the normal development of teaching.

Secondly, the quality is low, and the curriculum is homogeneous and lacks diversity. At present, the courses of senior colleges mainly focus on culture and art, music and music, sports and dance, and health care are mostly carried out in the form of lectures, but less on local culture, new technology, psychology of the elderly, law and other courses, and the "aging-friendly" courses to adjust the mentality of the elderly in their old age and promote their better integration into society are generally missing. In addition, the schools are mainly based on traditional offline teaching methods, and online learning resources are not enough, so it is difficult to take care of the learning progress of each elderly person, and it is difficult to carry out online education. In addition, the teachers are not professional enough. In addition, most part-time teachers lack professional understanding of the psychology and cognition of the elderly, making it difficult to adopt targeted teaching methods and models.

3.3 The guarantee mechanism for sustainable development is still unclear

In view of the current practice of old cadres (senior citizens) education in our city, the qualification of the main school of district, subdistrict and community old cadres (senior citizens) universities is not clear, and the old cadres (senior citizens) universities that have been listed in the subdistricts and communities do not have the qualification and education teaching function. While the funds of district-level old cadres (senior citizens) universities are mostly allocated by the financial budget to the old cadres activity center at this level for operation, the subdistrict and community old cadres (senior citizens) universities are mostly funded by the subdistrict welfare fund and the people's livelihood micro-project funds, lacking sustainable financial support.

#### 4. Suggestions for the Supply of Community Education for the Elderly in Shenzhen

4.1 Strengthening the integration of top-level policy design and community engagement projects

We should actively strengthen the top-level design of community education for the elderly, and create a sustainable education mechanism for the elderly by "combining education and teaching". The system is designed to guide the elderly to participate in community education, and the system of "learning card of community education for the elderly" is constructed to effectively link community education with the enjoyment of social welfare for the elderly, the supply of convenient services for the elderly, and mutual assistance and support for the elderly, so as to promote

the active participation of the elderly in community education.

4.2 Strengthening the integration of lifelong learning concept and community education curriculum

We should actively use public service resources and open services, such as libraries, playgrounds and other educational and training activities and fellowship activities, establish senior citizen colleges in communities, senior citizen institutions and other places where the elderly live and study in close proximity, promote the convenience and accessibility of senior citizen education and promote the establishment of lifelong learning awareness. We should combine the characteristics of the needs of the elderly, emphasize the concept of "lifelong education", "active aging" and "healthy and happy aging", and highlight the "awareness cultivation + demand-oriented + skill practice" concept of community education. For the curriculum, we should pay attention to the characteristics of the elderly groups, their work and rest time, physiological and psychological development rules, etc. We also suggest a combination of courses for the elderly groups to choose from, which can be freely combined, and increase recreational and practical skills experience courses.

4.3 Strengthening the integration of faculty development and community service teams

We should actively expand community education activities and project carriers, and build a system of practical projects for the elderly by interest, type and direction. We should take the elderly people's own organizations as project carriers, and form community projects with relatively fixed instructors who have relevant professional backgrounds. Instructors can be generated from universities, social volunteers, enterprises, social organizations or senior groups, or in the form of government purchased services. Community demonstrations or community competitions are used as a means to promote the vitality of community education for the elderly. A project team composed of "community experts for the elderly + community volunteers + community members" can also be formed to take advantage of the elderly groups and promote the sustainable development of community education for the elderly.

4.4 Strengthening the integration of dialogue and exchange platforms with community education resources

With the help of schools, private education groups and other forces, we should give full play to the resources of communities and enterprises to build a platform conducive to the integration of community education for the elderly into professional education, and make reasonable resource allocation. In response to the characteristics of the needs of the elderly, we should increase the investment in community psychological education resources and professional education resources, guide and encourage the elderly to strengthen education other than recreation and health education, and strengthen the allocation of more quality education resources such as skills learning, modern information means learning, psychological education learning and professional theory learning for the elderly, so as to improve the quality of community education for the elderly.

4.5 Strengthening the integration of career development forms with the local culture of the community

We should integrate the organizational, teaching, institutional and spatial layout forms with the culture of community education for the elderly. We should promote the typical learning examples in the community to create an atmosphere of "lifelong learning"; carry out various educational activities in the form of activities that are popular among the elderly groups; build a cultural ecology suitable for the characteristics of the elderly based on the situation of the community, combined with professional characteristics, so as to highlight the role of the cultural soft environment in senior citizen education.